

Comments for the Ontario Parks and Protected Areas Research Forum

*Gordon Nelson
Heritage Resources Centre
University of Waterloo*

I speak as a geographer and planner who has been involved in many park and protected area issues over three decades and as the chair of the Heritage Resources Centre at the University of Waterloo, a multi-disciplinary research and networking centre which has focused on linking heritage interests within and outside the university.

One general conclusion based on these experiences is that land use studies and planning can provide a focus or link among the geologic and biological sciences and the social sciences and arts. The need is to approach land use in terms of patterns, disturbances, frequencies, magnitudes, stresses, and historic changes. This approach - by use of mapping - can be used to tie the geologic, biologic, and the social, economic, demographic and social sciences together in an applied context.

Another general conclusion is that park and protected area planning and management issues can be approached in terms of how decisions are made:

- What information is used and how?
- Who the actors are?
- And what other factors are involved in decision-making at all levels in regard to land use and ecological and social changes in parks and protected areas?

In this context some of the major processes involved in decision-making have been found to be:

- understanding - generally fair to poor understanding
- communication - not well done or understood
- assessment - generally relatively well done professionally; not well understood by citizens
- planning - again generally well done and understood professionally, but only fair understanding by citizens
- implementation - generally fair to poor understanding
- monitoring - good recent work by national parks, but only fair understanding by citizens
- adaptation - generally fair with more knowledge and use of mediation and negotiation, joint management etc..

Research programs can be developed around the above.

The third general conclusion is that there is generally not good understanding of the context of decision-making and the fact that management and other forms of decision-making change with context; a command and control orientation for example, makes more sense in a park than in the buffer zone around the park.

The final general conclusion is the need based on the above for more sharing among parks and protected areas, more interaction, networking, and mutual learning as a basis for better research and improved decision-making.