

Rapporteur's Comments on the Parks Research Forum of Ontario Annual Meeting February 1998

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I want to start by thanking the organizers for the opportunity to speak at this Annual Forum. I've enjoyed the talks immensely, and I'm delighted to see the high level of interest and commitment demonstrated by the audience's questions and discussion. It's been a great day.

My task is to provide a summary and a reaction to the talks we have heard. But, I'm not going to attempt a summary, because I don't think that's what we need at this moment. Instead, we need to talk about the future of this Forum, and what we will do together, to rise to the challenges that our speakers have given us today. I believe that this Forum, and the network of people involved, can be a powerful way for us to work together on those challenges. I want to talk about four of the many challenges we've been given, and how we can work together under the umbrella of this Forum.

The first challenge, touched on by several of our speakers, is the complexity of the issues we face. Nikita Lapoukhine and Warren Mitchell* in particular pointed out the complexities of scale and values that underlie the public negotiations about parks and protected areas. If we are to inform these public decisions, then we must deal with the complex needs for information and knowledge. None of us can address these needs on our own, but I believe that the diversity of expertise and experience that is required can be marshalled through cooperative action by this network of people.

The second challenge we have identified is that only limited resources are available to deal with these issues. Paul Eagles as well as several panel members and discussion groups pointed out the need for money and the impacts of lack of resources. One example that Jim Cantrill emphasized was the lack of socio-economic expertise and information. I believe that this Forum can help us focus our collective efforts on the most important problems and share resources to address these problems. I also believe this Forum can facilitate more effective efforts to obtain the money we need to work together.

The third challenge presented in today's discussion is that differences in interest and values tend to pull us apart. Jay Leather's remarks about research 'hobby-horses', Nikita Lopoukhine's comments on the differences among partners' mandates, and the diversity of values about parks and protected areas that

* Warren Mitchell, Director of Planning, Land Use Coordination Office, Province of British Columbia, presented the paper prepared by Derek Thompson, Assistant Deputy Minister, Land Use Coordination Office, Province of British Columbia.

people bring to the Forum can be seen as either a wedge between us or a potential strength for the development of an effective network. We need not set aside our differences in deciding to work together. A clear process of frank negotiations can, as suggested by Warren earlier today, result in cooperative action that spans the differing interests and values.

The final challenge that our speakers identified is that the need for action is urgent. The talks by Bart Feilders and the introductory remarks by Gordon Nelson pointed out that the public faces major decisions about parks and protected areas over the next 5 years, and that the science community needs to marshal existing science and develop new knowledge to inform these decisions. The current *Lands for Life* exercise has synthesized existing information and science, but the gaps in our understanding are demonstrated clearly. If we fail to rise to the challenge presented by today's speakers, then we must accept some of the responsibility for the lack of adequate science input into decision-making. The choice for the science community, and for this network, has been given to us by our speakers. We must choose action.

I believe that this Forum is at a crossroads, and that our decisions in the next few months will determine the effectiveness of the network. We can choose to be a mechanism for information sharing and networking, which, while useful, will not deal with the challenges we've heard. I would argue that we must collectively decide what the highest research priorities are for parks and protected areas, and then develop and implement research programs to address those priorities. There is not an easy, objective way to establish priorities, and working together is fraught with all of the obstacles of personality, values and institutions. But, nothing short of collective action will address the urgent need for support of public decision-making. Let's work together to ensure the Forum reaches its potential and find ways to work together.

Rapporteur's Remarks on 1998 Parks Research Forum of Ontario

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So much has been said today, in a fine series of papers, that I cannot possibly be comprehensive. Like the parks system itself I can only seek to be representative and systematic, including a reasonable proportion of the important bits (12%?). I have organized my summary into four broad headings, with a series of points under each. The four main headings are: Why research and science?; What research and science?; What do we do with the results of research and science?; and, How can the process of science and research be improved?

Why Research and Science?

- To develop an understanding of the complex socioeconomic and biophysical systems that park managers can work with, humility in the face of this complexity and our limited ability to understand and control.
- To build bridges and support consensus among stakeholders based on shared understanding.
- To support planning, management, mitigation, restoration, and other activities whether anticipatory and preventative or aimed at issues and problems.
- To pre-empt political, reactive and reactionary management.
- To provide benchmarks, baselines and controls against other more disturbed areas.
- For state-of-the-environment and state-of-the-parks reporting, and generally as a basis for public accountability in parks management.
- To identifying priorities for future research.

What Research And Science?

- To identify what is going on in protected areas, for example, visitor activities, origins, effects; ecological processes and systems; fish and wildlife populations and dynamics.
- To identify what is going on around protected areas, for example, external stresses such as pollution, forestry and hunting.
- To identify cumulative effects of a range of stresses on parks.
- To identify new protected areas needed for representation, biodiversity protection, recreation, and other reasons.
- To identify public needs and demands for protected areas and how parks can better meet them.
- To identify new, and strengthen existing, ways of funding parks and protected areas.
- To avoid re-inventing the wheel; to ensure there is wide knowledge of innovations and what has worked in other places. Parks and park systems tend to address problems independently. We need to know

what has been tried, where, and what were the economic and ecological effects.

- Through it all we should remember: 1) the big picture – the context, whether global tourism trends, climate change, provincial politics or the state of the greater ecosystem; and, 2) the human dimension – socioeconomic factors are not really separate from the biophysical and pervade all other subjects.

What Do We Do With the Results of Research and Science?

- Seek to understand trade-offs, for example, by remembering lessons from environmental philosophy and ethics such as inter- and intra-generational equity, or the trans-specific dimensions of sustainability. Parks and protected areas are for ecosystems and tourists.
- Develop understanding and related humility, and seek a convergence of interests through, for example, adaptive management approaches.
- Build trust through knowledge sharing and agreement.
- Identify the right scales and scope for planning processes.
- Develop adaptive, experimental, mitigative, anticipatory management rather than reactive, issue-based responses to change.
- Insure information and knowledge are maintained, updated, used and shared, and not lost through neglect, aggregation and/or generalization.
- Implement education and communication campaigns based on success stories and environmental opportunities as well as risks and problems.

How Can the Process of Science and Research be Improved?

- Develop more partnerships – academic, local, Aboriginal, government, minorities and women – to gather and interpret qualitative and quantitative information.
- Ensure quality, access, retention and updating of research and data.
- Recognize that science is not deterministic. Good and useful results are often somewhat serendipitous; we cannot plan/manage the research process as a whole any more directly than we can ecological systems themselves.
- Devise a process framework for park science – as is done for landuse planning – that includes policy goals, standards, and strong terms of reference, as well as a vision and understanding of parks as part of a larger, multidisciplinary, sustainability plan and vision.
- Foster political leadership and support for parks research; ‘champions’ are needed!

Final Comments: Challenges and Questions to Ponder

- Will research and science needs change when the parks system is ‘completed’, if that can ever really happen?
- How can more research and science be encouraged in parks other than the biggest, best, highest profile and most complex?
- A huge amount of potential research and science needs to be done, covering the gamut from baseline data to topical, issue-oriented studies. Priorities need to be identified on a park-specific and system-wide basis.

- Research needs must be made more widely known, whether through regularly updated print catalogues or – even better – web sites.
- How can we make better use of existing knowledge on parks and protected areas and their surroundings?
- Remember to distinguish form and content in information and knowledge, especially in the context of new technologies such as geographic information systems and remote sensing.
- It would be useful to pursue consistency of data and research priorities across and within parks systems, for example in terms of the types of information and methods of collection for visitor data across all protected area systems in Canada.
- Can parks get more research done by Memorandums of Understanding with other government agencies, as well as university and other researchers?
- How can we facilitate a greater transfer of research results between different parks and park agencies?

In conclusion, it seems to me that future Parks Research Forums could most readily contribute to these goals by focusing future meetings on specific challenges. For example there might be meetings to foster the process of thinking about research and links between agencies and universities and parks; to strategize on raising the profile of research in and about protected areas; and to help personnel acquire research relevant skills and disseminate lessons of research.