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PEOPLE AND PARKS – ARE WE MORE CONCERNED WITH SCORING POINTS THAN REACHING A SOLUTION?

In the last few years a debate on the pros and cons of protected areas has been raging in the conservation literature and elsewhere. A set of three articles in a recent volume of *Conservation Biology* argue, however, that the pressure to score points in this debate is obscuring the complexity of the issue – and the real strides that are being taken to address this complexity in some quarters.

The editorial, *Parks as Shibboleths*, by Kent Redford, John Robinson and Bill Adams reminds us that while those engaged in the debate continue to focus on parks that exclude people, they overlook the international process to refine the IUCN protected area categories so that people and economic activities, as well as alternative governance regimes, are taken into account. Madagascar is an example of a country that is seeking to significantly expand its protected area coverage – but is using community-conserved areas, cultural sites and so on in order to do so. In this case, protected area expansion does not necessarily compromise human well-being.

Just as there is much diversity amongst parks, so there is huge variation in the impacts they have on local people. David Wilkie and colleagues make a plea for sound science to get to the bottom of the people and parks debate in an article that highlights the problems inherent in current attempts to assess the impacts of protected areas on human welfare. Firstly, it is hard to put a price on the value of natural resources to poor people – and hence the potential implications of lost or reduced access to these resources as a result of a protected area being designated (Wilkie *et al* cite, as an example, a range in average annual household incomes from forest resources of \$0 to \$3458). Secondly, there is rarely any baseline data against which to assess impacts of protected areas, or studies of temporal changes; and, thirdly, there are no comparisons of 'affected' households with those not affected by the protected area designation.

In *Conservation, Human Rights and Poverty Reduction*, Dan Brockington, Jim Igoe and Kai Schmidt-Soltau see the dearth of information as a key problem in moving the debate forward. Dramatic claims and counter-claims have been made, for example, about displacement and forced resettlement from protected areas, and yet the authors could only find documentary evidence for 150 out of the 49,000 or so Category I-IV (the more strictly managed) parks.

Better understanding is critical if we are to move beyond the sound bites and the stereotypes and develop appropriate policy responses that minimise or mitigate the negative effects and maximise the positive. Brockington *et al* note that, to date, a comprehensive assessment of the social impacts of protected areas has been perceived as potentially 'hostile to conservation'. Yet without such an assessment how can appropriate policies be put in place to manage an expanding protected area network?

One clear response will be to better understand the 'ecologies of coexistence' – to make better use of those categories or protected areas that link biodiversity protection with human activity, rather than pursuing ideals of wilderness, and to look beyond protected areas to other biodiversity-rich landscapes in which people are an integral part.

SOURCE

Redford, Kent H., Robinson, John G. & Adams, William, M. (2006) 'Parks as Shibboleths.' *Conservation Biology* 20 (1), 1-2.

Wilkie, David S., Morelli, Gilda A., Demmer, Josefien, Starkey, Malcolm, Telfer, Paul & Steil, Matthew (2006) 'Parks and People: Assessing the Human Welfare Effects of Establishing Protected Areas for Biodiversity

Conservation.' *Conservation Biology* **20** (1), 247-249.

Brockington, Dan, Igoe, Jim & Schmidt-Soltau, Kai (2006) 'Conservation, Human Rights, and Poverty Reduction.' *Conservation Biology* **20** (1), 250-252.

Please direct queries or comments for the authors to Kent Redford: kredford@wcs.org; David Wilkie: david.wilkie@bc.edu; or Dan Brockington: daniel.brockington@manchester.ac.uk

Electronic copies of each article – as well as the full contents of *Conservation Biology* Volume 20: 1 – can be freely downloaded from the Blackwell Synergy website.

Table of contents: www.blackwell-synergy.com/toc/cbi/20/1

Redford et al: www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1523-1739.2006.00350.x

Wilkie et al: www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1523-1739.2005.00291.x

Brockington et al: www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1523-1739.2006.00335.x

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