

The Stewardship Approach and its Relevance for Protected Landscapes

Introduction

Every country has landscapes that have been shaped by the interactions of people and nature over time. These landscapes are rich in traditional patterns of land use that have contributed to biodiversity and other natural values, have proven sustainable over centuries, and are living examples of cultural heritage. As countries worldwide move to expand and strengthen their national protected areas systems, greater attention must be paid to protecting working landscapes—places where people live and work.

Emerging trends in conservation and protected areas management set the stage for new approaches that engage local people in the stewardship of working landscapes and embrace the interactions of people and nature.

One trend is that conservation strategies are becoming increasingly bioregional. The field of conservation biology has highlighted the pressing need to work on the scale of ecosystems and the wider landscape to conserve biological diversity.

Another important change lies in how we view national parks and protected areas. Worldwide, there is growing recognition that protected areas can no longer be treated as islands, but must be seen in a larger context. In regions such as Latin America and the Caribbean the phenomenon of “paper parks”—protected areas in name only—has

demonstrated forcefully that approaches that rely solely on regulation and enforcement are costly and too often meet with failure. Protected area managers are turning instead to “inclusive” models, in which the interests of local communities are considered, resident populations are not displaced, and there is a high degree of local participation in planning and management of the protected area (Borrini-Feyerabend 1996).

A third trend lies in our growing understanding of the link between nature and culture: that healthy landscapes are shaped by human culture as well as the forces of nature, that rich biological diversity often coincides with cultural diversity, and that conservation cannot be undertaken without the involvement of those people closest to the resources.

Fundamental to these new direc-

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tions in protected areas is the need to engage and support local people in the stewardship of their natural and cultural heritage.

The Stewardship Approach

Stewardship means, simply, people taking care of the Earth. In its broadest sense, it refers to the essential role individuals and communities play in the careful management of our common natural and cultural wealth, both now and for future generations. More specifically, it can be defined as *efforts to create, nurture, and enable responsibility in landowners and resource users to manage and protect land and its natural and cultural heritage.*

Stewardship taps our basic human impulse to care for our home and its surroundings—be it a parcel of land, a neighborhood, or a historic monument, or the larger area of a watershed, mountain range, or stretch of coastline. It builds on our sense of obligation to other people: our family, our community, and future generations. By fostering individual and community responsibility, the stewardship approach puts conservation in the hands of the people most affected by it.

Stewardship emphasizes the integration of people and nature, not the attempted isolation of one from the other. It recognizes that all landscapes are cultural, and that conservation needs can be addressed on

land that cannot be removed from human existence and commerce.

Landscapes typically encompass a mosaic of land ownership: private, public and, in many countries, customary or communal ownership. The scenic, biological, and cultural qualities that make certain landscapes special are the result of the interactions of people and nature over time (Figure 1). It follows that protection of these landscapes inevitably must rely on fostering stewardship by those who own or live on the land. Experience with private land stewardship in North America—and, increasingly, in other regions of the world—offers an array of tools to conserve the natural and cultural values of landscapes.

Specific stewardship tools vary according to social, legal, ecological and institutional constraints, but all operate to encourage, enable, or formalize responsible management. Briefly, these techniques include environmental education, technical information, demonstration projects, recognition of achievement, certification, voluntary management agreements, subsidized management, deed restrictions, public-private partnerships in protected areas management, and outright acquisition of property by private organizations. These tools (with many others and more variations) represent a spectrum of options beginning with those that require little or no formal commitment or involvement and little per

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Figure 1. Woodstock, Vermont, and Billings Farm (part of Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park), from the South Peak of Mount Tom. *Photo by Barbara Slaiby.*

capita investment (e.g., education) to more “permanent” and specific protections (e.g., easements and acquisition) (Mitchell and Brown 1998; Diehl and Barrett 1988; Endicott 1993; Hilts and Moull 1988).

**Working Landscapes as
Protected Areas: The Potential
Role of Category V**

While national parks and other strictly protected areas are essential, they alone cannot achieve biodiversity conservation objectives, nor can they encompass working landscapes. There is a pressing need for new models of protected areas that can

respond to the pressures on these landscapes.

As Beresford and Phillips write in this issue, the protected landscape approach is central to a new paradigm for protected areas, one which is based on inclusive approaches, partnerships, and linkages. This approach can provide valuable models of how to integrate biodiversity conservation, cultural heritage protection, and sustainable use of resources.

According to the IUCN *Guidelines for Protected Area Management Categories*, the definition of a Category V protected landscape/seascape is:

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... an area of land, with coast and sea as appropriate, where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinct character with significant aesthetic, ecological and/or cultural value, and often with high biological diversity. Safeguarding the integrity of this traditional interaction is vital to the protection and evolution of such area (IUCN 1994).

The protected landscape approach can be particularly appropriate in diverse regions of the world, including many places in the Americas, because it:

- Links people's needs and biodiversity conservation;
- Typically comprises a mosaic of land ownership patterns, including private and communally owned property;
- Can accommodate diverse management regimes, including customary laws governing resource management;
- Has important specific objectives related to conservation of cultural heritage;
- Seeks to bring benefits to local communities and contribute to their well-being through the provision of environmental goods and services; and
- Has proven to work well in certain indigenous territories where strict protected areas have failed, because it accommodates traditional uses and customary tools

for resource management.

The protected landscape approach engages local communities in stewardship of working landscapes because it:

- Reinforces local responsibility for resource management;
- Builds on existing institutional responsibilities; and
- Encourages flexible arrangements for management of resources, including collaborative management agreements and the range of private land stewardship tools (Brown 1999).

**Opportunities to Establish
Protected Landscapes in the
Western Hemisphere**

While Category V appears on lists of protected areas for most countries in the Americas, typically it has been applied to existing designations. Until recently, there has not been a consistent effort to embrace the principles outlined above. A number of recent developments present new opportunities for establishing protected landscapes, as demonstrated by recent progress in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as in North America.

In the USA and Canada, many protected areas have been recognized as meeting the criteria for management as Category V protected landscapes. Sites as diverse as Point Reyes National Seashore, Cuyahoga Valley

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National Recreation Area, Roosevelt International Park, and parts of Denali National Park are considered Category V protected landscapes. Most areas are managed by government agencies, though a few are non-traditional in structure, such as the St. Croix Waterway Heritage River.

However, exciting opportunities for the protected landscape approach are being created by new models of public-private partnerships. In northeastern North America these include heritage areas, such as the developing Champlain-Richelieu Valley International Heritage Corridor (New York, Vermont, and Quebec); greenways, such as the Hudson River Valley Greenway (New York); and large-scale cooperative management projects, such as the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge (Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont). The new Atlas Timberlands Project (Vermont) is an example of how nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), timber companies, and public agencies can cooperate to sustain and better manage a working forest.

In Mexico, "zones subject to ecological conservation" are currently listed as meeting protected landscape criteria, while biosphere reserves are considered Category VI resource management areas.

In several countries of Latin America, NGOs are advocating the

use of protected landscapes and are pushing for supportive legislation. For example, Peru has just adopted new legislation to include Category V in its protected areas systems. The recent enactment of legislation for private reserves in many Latin American countries further sets the stage because, in cases like Colombia, it explicitly recognizes the conservation efforts of NGOs and communities, and the traditional uses of natural resources that protect and enhance biological diversity (Higgins and Nieto 1996). Finally, a number of countries are considering reclassification of national parks as a means of addressing conflicts with resident populations.

In Andean South America (Figure 2), new sites are being proposed as protected landscapes. At a recent UNESCO-World Heritage Convention meeting held in Arequipa, Peru, fifteen cultural landscapes in the Andes were nominated for protection. Among the candidates in Peru are Urabamba (a sacred valley of the Incas) and the Cordillera de Huayhuash in the central sierra of Peru. In Ecuador there is growing interest, at local and national levels, in declaring the Quijos River Valley the country's first protected landscape. Its designation would create a natural corridor among three important protected areas, consolidating them into Ecuador's largest protected area and fostering conservation at an ecoregional

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Figure 2. The cultural landscapes of the Andes have been shaped by traditional patterns of grazing and cultivation. *Photo by Jessica L. Brown.*

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scale (Sarmiento 1997; Sarmiento et al., this issue).

The emergence of networks of private reserves in many countries of Latin America (e.g., Costa Rica, Colombia, Ecuador, Chile and Brazil) is one important way in which the stewardship approach is being applied. While relatively recent in their inception, private reserves are already making significant contributions to conserving cultural and natural heritage, and the movement is gaining momentum. This development holds great potential for protecting working landscapes in the region.

A number of countries in the Eastern Caribbean, such as St. Lucia and the British Virgin Islands, are beginning to include Category V protected landscapes in their systems of protected areas. National trusts in these countries have found that the model is highly appropriate for small, intensively settled island countries, where the landscapes reflect human interactions over time, much land is privately owned, and the pattern of ownership necessitates innovative management arrangements (see the paper by Romulus and Lucas in this issue).

Challenges

Among the challenges to protecting working landscapes in the Americas, a basic one is unfamiliarity with designations such as Category V, which is currently not well represented in most national protected

area systems. In many countries, particularly in regions such as Latin America and the Caribbean, the complexity of land use, tenure, and institutional roles can make it hard to work at the scale of landscapes. A key challenge lies in coordinating the efforts of diverse actors, all using different mechanisms, to achieve biodiversity conservation goals at the scale of bioregions.

The extraordinary growth of private land conservation throughout the Americas and in other regions of the world holds much promise for protecting working landscapes. However, there is a need to develop further the criteria and management guidelines for private reserves at a regional level. Legal and institutional mechanisms must be in place to encourage and ensure management agreements. Long-term provision for management and monitoring will be essential to assure adherence to agreements, as well as to evaluate the effectiveness of different approaches.

These and other challenges to developing stewardship initiatives (in any context) are summarized in Box 1.

Conclusions

Landscapes are dynamic and change along with the communities living in them. As Adrian Phillips of the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas has observed, this dynamism poses a central dilemma in landscape protection. "It is not

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Box 1. Challenges to developing stewardship of landscapes.

The definition of protected landscapes, with its emphasis on the interaction of people and nature over time, implies that people living in the landscape act as its stewards. In a changing world, new tools are needed to support and ensure stewardship of natural and cultural heritage in keeping with conservation goals. Stewardship techniques offer great potential to strengthen and extend the impact of conventional protected areas. Challenges to developing stewardship initiatives include:

- **Creating a legal framework conducive to private initiatives.** Incentives (e.g., tax advantages) for conservation and best management practices on private lands must be incorporated into national legislation. Even voluntary and non-binding tools often benefit from governmental recognition. As key actors in stewardship, NGOs require a stable legal basis for establishment and legitimacy as an important sector in civil society.
- **Developing legal and institutional mechanisms to ensure “conservation in perpetuity.”** Long-term provision for management and monitoring will be essential to assure adherence to agreements, as well as to evaluate the effectiveness of different approaches.
- **Creating the climate for productive, enduring partnerships among sectors.** Government agencies charged with protected areas management must have the flexibility to develop appropriate partnerships with NGOs and other private interests. To create an atmosphere of trust and cooperation, government must view these NGOs as true partners, rather than subcontractors; NGOs must be willing to engage in non-adversarial relationships with government; all parties must be committed to ongoing communication and coordination of efforts.
- **Integrating stewardship into land-use planning and protected areas management.** Private stewardship efforts, however extensive, are no substitute for a strong government role in land-use planning and protection of natural areas. These efforts should reinforce land-use planning and policy at all levels. At the same time, private initiatives should be viewed not as an afterthought, but as central to meeting protection and management objectives. To this end, coordination among private and public actors is essential.
- **Ensuring participation by all interested parties.** Stewardship relies on public support and participation. Whether through landowner contact or public forums, opportunities must be created for those most affected by land-use decisions to voice their concerns. Value must be placed on local knowledge and traditional resource management systems. Opportunities for collaborative management should be explored.
- **Marshaling the necessary resources.** Funding is necessary for land acquisition and compensation for certain development rights or uses. Often NGOs are in a strong position to raise private funds for these purposes. Fiscal incentives, such as reduced property taxes, may carry a cost in terms of lost revenues to municipalities.
- **Striking a balance between responding to opportunities and taking a strategic approach.** To maintain the ecological integrity of landscapes and protect representative ecosystems requires strategic approaches. A key challenge lies in coordinating the efforts of diverse actors, all using different mechanisms, to achieve biodiversity conservation goals at the scale of bioregions. While responding to protection opportunities as they arise, local stewardship initiatives must also be proactive, addressing emerging trends in land use, such as reprivatization or increased development pressure.

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enough therefore to attempt to protect the landscape as such: attention must be given to the ways of life of those who are architects of the landscape and upon whom the survival of the biodiversity within it depends." Protection should seek not to "fossilize the ways in which communities use the land, but rather to encourage sustainable approaches to land use and development" (Phillips 1997).

Any strategy for protection of working landscapes will require tools, adapted to the special charac-

teristics of the local and national context, which can be applied across a mosaic of land ownership and use patterns. It will respect the land and resource rights of indigenous and other traditional peoples. It will rely on approaches that engage local residents and communities, and build on long traditions of caring for natural and cultural heritage.

The stewardship approach offers tremendous potential for sustaining special landscapes in diverse regions of the world.

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