

Protected Area Programme Dynamics: The Case of Protected Areas Systems Planning in Newfoundland and Labrador

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INTRODUCTION

On September 7, 1989, World Wildlife Fund (Canada) in conjunction with approximately 50 other national environmental groups announced a programme to increase the amount of protected spaces within Canada from 6.3 percent (the current level) to 12 percent by the year 2000. Although there has been much debate about the basis of selecting 12 percent as the target and how the ratio ought to translate into numbers and locations of protected areas, it is generally agreed that at present protected area establishment and planning has come to be described by several researchers as a "logjam" (Nelson and Jessen, 1984; Smith et al., 1986).

The province of Newfoundland and Labrador (113,300 square kilometres) currently protects the least amount of land within Canada (Hummel, 1990). In spite of the presence of two National Parks (i.e. Terra Nova and Gros Morne); the Avalon Wilderness Area; a provincial parks system; and a small network of ecological reserves and seabird sanctuaries, approximately 1 percent or slightly less is currently conserved and protected on a long term basis. Five provincial legislative mechanisms can be used to identify, establish, conserve and protect areas, however, only two of these Acts are capable of establishing and protecting a system of natural areas within which there are no major development activities (Provincial Parks Act, 1970 with amendments and the Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Act, 1980, amended 1983).

The Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Act (WERA) is considered by other provinces and researchers as exemplary enabling legislation as it views wilderness as an essential quality of life in the province as well as a part of the areas cultural and natural heritage. The philosophy in the Act refers to the protection of areas for people. Hunting, berrypicking, fishing, hiking, some air access and inholdings are permitted within designated wilderness areas. Motorized vehicles and powered water transport, mining, forestry, wood cutting and major recreational service developments are not permitted in these areas.

The process of designation and establishment involves a citizen-government Advisory Committee that reports directly to the Minister responsible for the Act. There are numerous opportunities in the process for public consultation, agency and scientific review. Unfortunately, since WERA was proclaimed in 1980 only one reserve has been established. Some have attributed the current "log jam" to a lack of public awareness and political commitment to the programme. Others have suggested that Newfoundland's economic situation and resource industries have successfully kept the issue of protected areas off the political agenda. A few have commented that the causes of a lack of progress in establishing an approach to systems planning and candidate areas is the result of the lack of a large grass roots organization that has failed to appeal to and develop a broad based support for the programme and the province's limited levels of funding and person years allocated to the establishment, planning and management of a protected area system as the cause of the current bottleneck.

Many Canadian parks and protected agencies have long felt that the "systems function" is a type of normative planning (Ozebekhan, 1969) to be developed in house, with limited public consultation and involvement. Protected areas initiatives in Europe, the US and many other countries have increasingly involved a variety of publics during systems and management planning in a cooperative and collaborative manner (Graham and Huff, 1985; Atkinson, 1986; President's Commission on America's Great Outdoors, 1987; Shannon, 1987; Hartig and Vallentyne, 1989). The Bruntland Commission recognized the principle of interdependence (Axelrod, 1984) by noting that law and policy alone cannot enforce a common interest. Community knowledge and support are key components to conservation and protection of an area (United Nations, 1987).

In response to the apparent difficulties in designating and establishing protected areas and the announcement of World Wildlife Fund's endangered spaces programme a new citizen-government group has emerged, acquired funding, and developed an action plan to ensure that Newfoundland's natural heritage is recognized and maintained through a system of protected areas by the year 2000. The Protected Areas Association (PAA) is a consortium of an advocacy group (Wilderness Society of Newfoundland and Labrador), representatives from the Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Advisory Committee and a group of citizens, government agency individuals and university researchers interested in building support for a system of protected natural areas that would be representative of the natural regions of the province.

Although the PAA's programmes and initiatives have only been in place for approximately ten months, this alternative approach to development of a systems plan has garnered significant financial support and commitment from a wide range of federal and provincial government agencies, non-governmental groups and university researchers. This preliminary research attempts to build an initial insight into the question of why, at this point in time, an alternative approach seems to have begun to release the logjam.

METHODS

This case study explores the dynamics of Newfoundland and Labrador's emerging approach to protected natural area systems planning. Meidinger's (1987) model of culture, law, and policy is used to gain an understanding of factors that have led to the development of the PAA, and the implementation of its programme of research and public education. The approach taken broadly outlines: the history and current situation before development of the PAA (i.e. the repertoire of images, practice, law and policy from which the current situation evolved); how shared expectations for protected areas limited existing programme implementation; how internal and external regulatory communities behaviours and relationships led to the emergence of the alternative; and how the inherent pattern of protected area designation and management planning created a dynamic process that led to current actions. Information was derived from existing literature, participation as a member of the PAA on one of their advisory committees, and selected open ended interviews with key network knowledgeable.

RESULTS

Although very preliminary, findings suggest that:

1. the provinces unique legislation, in particular WERA, created sufficient flexibility to enable key members of WERA's Advisory Committee and representatives of provincial and federal government agencies to participate and support the activities of the PAA
2. the unique organizational structure of the PAA enabled government representatives, members of the public and interested researchers to engage in a series of research projects and an open dialogue about the designation and establishment process
3. the advocacy component of the PAA, kept at arms length from the PAA was able to have a wilderness area (Bay du Nord – Middle Ridge) and an ecological reserve established in a relatively short period of time, after 9 years of limited activity.

DISCUSSION

Rather than using a targeting approach to designating protected areas the PAA's primary role is one of securing sufficient resources and people to develop and implement a series of research

projects that will lead to an adopted protected area systems plan for Newfoundland within the next 5 to 10 years. Committees reporting to the PAA and supervising a variety of projects include: an expert advisory panel, systems plan and candidate areas committees.

The goal of developing a systems plan and its acceptance by government is being accomplished by a series of studies and projects that are bridging the gap between government departments with limited resources and an interested public. Some of the studies include: a natural regions study; a province wide attitude study to identify public beliefs, knowledge and attitudes about protected area establishment, a native peoples involvement programme designed by native peoples and implemented by them, an economic impact of protected areas study, a visitor use study, a nomination of candidate areas study and a project to develop public education and community involvement programmes. Study teams are composed of interested individuals from government, universities and the public.

The Wilderness Society continues its advocacy role for preservation and conservation of the natural heritage of Newfoundland and Labrador. The Society also maintains a public monitoring and reporting role for the PAA and is represented on the Board of Directors of the PAA.

Funding from a variety of sources both government and private sector has been committed to the project.

The approach to systems planning currently being implemented in Newfoundland uses a combination of mixed scanning (Etzioni, 1967), adaptive planning (Rolling, 1978) and transactive planning (Friedman, 1987) to develop a protected areas system.

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