

# COOPERATIVE MANAGEMENT IN NATIONAL PARKS

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## **SUMMARY**

The last decade has brought many innovations to cooperative park management approaches used by park agencies and aboriginal peoples. This paper briefly reports on cooperative management efforts in six northern Canadian national parks, Wapusk, Nahanni, Tuk Tuk Nogait, Kluane, Vuntut and Auyuittuq, and two US national parks, Grand Canyon and Badlands. Interviews with park staff, aboriginal representatives and consultants involved with cooperative management processes serve as the source for this information. The paper is based on a series of factual and experiential questions which address: 1) park establishment; 2) history, identity and aboriginal influences on park culture and management; 3) cooperative management; 4) park and aboriginal relations, past and present; and 5) the role of consultants and other “outside” facilitators of cooperative management. The types of arrangements for cooperative management that exist in each park are examined through the prism of the participants’ actual experiences in the field. The paper briefly highlights different aspects of cooperative management and critical elements for its success. The subject areas include: 1) defining roles and responsibilities in cooperative management; 2) fostering communication between park agencies and aboriginal communities; 3) mechanisms for collaborative decision making; 4) establishment and maintenance of effective cooperative management boards; and, 5) co-development and implementation of projects such as documentation and interpretation of aboriginal culture, ecosystem management and ecological integrity planning. A larger report arising from this project will provide practitioners and researchers interested in cooperative management with detailed case studies of cooperative management in each of the eight parks studied for this project. The report will be available by the end of 2003.

## **1. COOPERATIVE MANAGEMENT**

During the past decade considerable discussion has focused on the idea of shared planning and management of protected areas. Many believe that collaboration between indigenous peoples, local communities and park agencies in the establishment and management of parks can result in greater success in achieving biodiversity and cultural heritage conservation goals (1). However, more theory than action has resulted from this discussion. Early pioneering efforts such as CAMPFIRE in Zimbabwe, the co-management of national parks in Australia and conservation strategies in Nepal have met with uneven success, and sometimes outright failure (2, 3).

Several recent papers explore the factors that appear to affect practitioners’ ability to achieve successful forms of collaborative and cooperative management. These include: Fisher’s case study review of South-east Asian collaborative management arrangements (3); McNeely’s more theoretical overview of global trends in collaborative management (1); Igoe’s review of aboriginal involvement in collaborative management (2); and Wall, Hallman and Skibicki’s examination of shared and cooperative management of national parks in Australia, New Zealand and the US (4). Within Canada, four studies provide an excellent base to launch further investigation. These include Danby and Slocombe’s case study on the Alaska-Yukon St. Elias

region, and Gardner's (2001), Weitzner's (2000) and Budke's (1999) reviews of collaborative and cooperative management in Western Canadian parks (5, 6, 7, 8). While these studies provide some good background for understanding cooperative management, further investigation of the factors necessary to achieve effective and efficient cooperative management of protected areas is needed.

## **2. PURPOSE AND METHODS**

"Cooperative management" is a key issue in the evolving relationship between First Nations and governments at all levels. Although there is not yet a generally accepted understanding of the term, the concept of cooperative management is particularly important for national parks and other protected places. Many parks and park agencies are attempting to implement cooperative management more effectively. Within Canada cooperative management is a key aspect of the management of national parks in areas where aboriginal land claims have been settled. Many such parks are situated north of the sixtieth parallel in Nunavut, the Northwest Territory and the Yukon Territory where the majority of parks in the study in question are situated. Parks Canada, the principal federal government agency charged with the management of national parks in Canada, has had a long-standing policy to work with a broad range of federal, provincial, territorial and municipal government agencies as well as Aboriginal interests to achieve mutually compatible goals.

The purpose of this study was three fold: 1) to assist Wood Buffalo National Park learn from the experiences of other national parks in developing suitable cooperative management arrangements tailored to meet its own needs; 2) to systematically document the factual and behavioural aspects of cooperative management that exists at these parks so that the results may be shared by others; and, 3) to present this information on the experience of cooperative management at these parks so that it is of practical value to participants in cooperative management at these parks and elsewhere. These objectives were achieved first through a review of academic and professional literature on the topics of collaborative and cooperative management and a detailed study of case study park documents and second through interviews with participants in cooperative management at the national parks in the sample. A total of eight parks were selected for the study, six in northern Canada and two in the United States (US). The northern Canadian national parks were made up of a sample from each jurisdiction north of the sixtieth parallel with the addition of a park from northern Manitoba, national parks which in geographic, cultural and political terms were comparable to Wood Buffalo National Park. The two US parks were selected to provide additional information on aboriginal collaboration in areas related to park management having already been examined in a previous comparative cooperative management study in 1995. The case study approach allowed for more in-depth knowledge to be captured than might otherwise be the case in a more broadly based survey. It also enabled the unique character of each park to be captured through oral interviews. The national parks included in the study are detailed in Figure 1; in Canada a National Park Reserve is an area or a portion of an area proposed for a national park, subject to an aboriginal land claim, which has been accepted for negotiation by the Government of Canada.

**Figure 1: Park, location and date of establishment**

CANADA	AUYUITTUQ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1976 reserve status</li> <li>• 2001 national park status</li> </ul>
	KLUANE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1942, 1972 reserve status</li> <li>• 1995 national park status</li> </ul>
	NAHANNI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1972 (reserve status only)</li> </ul>
	TUKTUT NOGAI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1998 national park status</li> </ul>
	VUNTUT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1995 national park status</li> </ul>
	WAPUSK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1996 national park status</li> </ul>
US	BADLANDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1939 national monument status</li> <li>• 1978 national park status</li> </ul>
	GRAND CANYON	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1893 forest reserve status</li> <li>• 1908 national monument</li> <li>• 1919 national park status</li> </ul>

Semi-structured interviews were conducted by telephone with a number of stakeholders from each park region. The interviews featured several avenues of questions including: 1) park establishment, 2) aboriginal history and culture, 3) cooperative management, 4) park and aboriginal relations past and present, and 5) the role of consultants and other “outside” process facilitators. Participants interviewed during the study included park staff (superintendents, wardens, cultural resource officers), and aboriginal representatives who currently or in the past have represented aboriginal interests on park management boards or in joint park-community projects. The latter generally had formal training in cultural or resource management, or had extensive traditional knowledge associated with the region. A selection of aboriginal participants was identified with the help of park staff. A small number of consultants who had worked for the aboriginal communities or Parks Canada at the sites were also interviewed, as was the national coordinator for Indian Relations for the US National Park Service (NPS). When needed, a professional interpreter was used to facilitate communication.

### **3. FINDINGS**

Analysis of the study’s results is at an early stage, however some preliminary observations are outlined below. Further information on the study, including copies of the final paper, will be available by the end of 2003 (contact Wood Buffalo National Park).

In general, the six parks in Canada exhibited a wide range of cooperative activities, joint projects and shared agendas. This can be attributed to the legacy of land claim agreements that have, in several of the parks, formed a cooperative foundation upon which formal and informal relations have developed between the managing government agency (Parks Canada) and the aboriginal people in the area where the park is located.

Findings from the study were condensed into three categories: 1) tools and approaches used to achieve successful cooperative management, 2) ongoing challenges associated with cooperative management, and 3) critical elements which appear to foster successful cooperative management. Some of the key tools and approaches that were identified by both Parks Canada staff and aboriginal communities included:

1. the establishment of cooperative management boards tailored to the needs of each park/region in which they were employed;
2. identification of common goals early in the process and on an ongoing basis, with incremental actions focused on those areas of the parks where both parties would like to see their joint management/planning efforts applied;
3. consistent formal and informal communication;
4. identification of clear roles and responsibilities for park staff and aboriginal community members early on in the cooperative management process;
5. transparency, as regards an open budgetary process; consistency and follow through (“do what you said you would do”) as regards commitment; and accessibility in terms of easy and open access to decision makers; and,
6. training programs (for both aboriginal community members and park staff from outside the local community) to help staff and participants succeed at what they are doing collaboratively.

Three central conclusions were drawn from this project, including:

1. successful cooperative management does not happen automatically; it requires personal commitment which goes beyond the confines of the job;
2. ethical and human factors are just as, if not more, important as money for successful cooperative management;
3. continuing research is important in helping government and communities better understand how they are doing in cooperatively managing protected areas and how they can do better.

#### **4. SUMMATION**

The above findings will help the development of cooperative management strategies at Wood Buffalo National Park. They will also help get a deeper understanding of cooperative management in northern Canada and in those parks where there is a close working relationship with aboriginal people. Wood Buffalo National Park shares more in common with its northern neighbours; however, it is also characterized by multiple aboriginal communities and a long history of establishment and, as a result, lessons from the two US parks selected in the study may also be of relevance. Regardless of the direct and indirect application of the research, the data collected through the study represents an important addition to the cooperative management field, especially due to its case study, practice oriented approach.

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