Examining the Interaction between the Federal Government and Local Stakeholders: Implications of Kentucky and the Daniel Boone National Forest

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Abstract: The concept of public land is relatively recent one, with the idea taking shape only in the past 150 years. Many of the public lands designated over the past 50 years have begun to engage and consult local stakeholders before the creation of parks and protected areas. The input was, and still is, not always enough to reduce friction between local stakeholders and the specific land management agency. The problem lies where the conservation and preservation of an area come into conflict with traditional uses that have been practiced for many generations. This paper will provide two examples highlighting some of the land management/stakeholder conflicts and how they came about at Cape Hatteras National Seashore and Ozark National Scenic Riverways. Specifically, the examples provide some insight into how lands in Eastern Kentucky are managed and how these lands may be protected in the future with input from local stakeholders. Suggestions for future research in Eastern Kentucky and the Daniel Boone National Forest will also be discussed.

Keywords: public lands, conservation, land management, national parks

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of public land is relatively recent, with the idea taking shape only in the past 150 years. Throughout history, public land was non-existent and preserves were playgrounds for the rich. Most early public lands were designated in areas with few people; and when people did inhabit an area, they were often transient in nature (Sellars, 1999). Even if the common person had public land at their disposal, it was unlikely they had the time or resources to enjoy recreational experiences.

Setting aside lands for conservation and recreation is a model that America has exported worldwide (Barker & Stockdale, 2008). The model has evolved from one where people were removed from the land, to one with an effort to include the local inhabitants in the management and preservation of it (Berkes, 2009). Regardless of the way in which many public lands came to be, the modern consensus is that parks and federal lands are a positive concept providing a place for tens of millions of citizens to recreate, and peace of mind that natural areas still exist (Cordell, 2004).

Many public lands designated over the past 50 years began to engage and consult local stakeholders before the creation of parks and protected areas; and with the advent of policies such as the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the public had a voice in the management of proposed and existing public lands. The input was, and still is, not always enough to reduce friction between local stakeholders and the specific land management agency. The problem lies where the conservation and preservation of an area come into conflict with traditional uses practiced for generations.

This paper will provide two examples highlighting some of the land management/stakeholder conflicts and how they came about. The discussion will be based on the authors' experiences working with federal management agencies and local stakeholders. The examples examined – off-road vehicle use at Cape Hatteras National Seashore (CAHA) and motorized vs. non-motorized use of the rivers at Ozark National Scenic Riverways (OZAR) – translate to many protected areas across the country. Specifically, the examples provide some insight into how lands in Eastern Kentucky are managed and how these lands may be protected in the future with input from local stakeholders. Little research has been done on public land use and conflicts around the Daniel Boone National Forest in Eastern Kentucky. A review of the literature showed only one report (United States Forest Service, 2005) on conflicts regarding off highway vehicle use. Although many studies regarding federal land management agencies and user conflicts exist (for an extensive review see Manning, 2010), site-specific studies are critical for managers to make informed decisions (Brownlee et al., 2012).

EXAMPLES OF CONFLICT

Ozark National Scenic Riverways.

The area of Southern Missouri where Ozark National Scenic River is located has been inhabited for centuries. From Native Americans to 19th century settlers of Scottish and Irish decent, this land has been hunted and cultivated (Zedeno & Basaldu, 2003). The Current and Jacks

Fork Rivers were, and still are, an important thoroughfare for trading goods and providing recreational opportunities (boating, fishing, etc.). The area became a popular tourist destination due to the unique nature of the spring-fed rivers and declining opportunities to recreate in an untainted river. As the rest of the country urbanized through the 20th century, the culture of the Ozark Highlands remained intact, maintaining a sense of community built upon family values, independence, and reliance on local resources. However, the mid-1900's brought a frenzy of dam building to provide reservoirs for growing cities, as well as to provide low cost hydroelectric power. A dam was proposed for the Current and Jacks Fork Rivers shortly after WWII, but through local and national activism (Zedeno & Basaldu, 2003), in 1964 the Current and Jacks Forks Rivers became Ozark National Scenic Riverways.

The history of the Ozark Riverways and its people is important, and it is very much alive and interpreted today by the National Park Service (NPS) staff at OZAR. People with deep roots still live in and around the park; cemeteries and old homesteads within the boundaries hold significant meaning to families of the area. For these reasons, management actions impacting the local way of life may lead to controversy.

The NPS and OZAR are in the process of developing a general management plan (GMP) to guide the management of the riverways for the next 15-20 years, which brings to light many issues that are not regularly dealt with, due to the potential for conflict between the NPS and local stakeholders. Many issues at OZAR revolve around access to the riverways and the types of recreation allowed on the river. Canoeing, motor boating, and tubing are popular activities at Ozark Riverways, with about 1.5 million visitors annually participating in some form of river recreation (National Park Service, n.d.). Local residents own many of the outfitters providing boats for people using the river. Much of the conflict revolves around the goals of the NPS, which are to preserve the riverways while still providing for recreational activities.

The riverways receive the majority of visitation from Memorial Day to Labor Day. On any given weekend in July certain areas of the riverways are choked with tubes, so much so that it is nearly impossible for one to navigate upriver (a problem in case of emergency). The weekends also find locals and visitors out with their families in the traditional means of motorized conveyance, the johnboat. Finally, many users look for a more rustic experience, canoeing sections of the river. In many cases, tubing, canoeing and motor boating are not compatible uses. Canoeists tend to look for a scenic and quiet experience, tubers are generally out for a social experience in large groups of friends and family, and motor boaters are fishing or taking their families to traditional hangouts along the river (Manning, 2010).

The general management plan aims to segregate these uses to maintain the integrity of the riverways; this means, however, that use restrictions may be placed on sections of the rivers. For example, in order to maintain the sense of solitude sought by canoeists, motorboats may not be allowed on a section of the river frequented by canoes; this causes controversy between OZAR staff and local stakeholders. Motorboats have always been a

traditional use of the riverways (although "traditional" is not always easily defined), and local stakeholders feel this should not be taken away to meet the perceived needs of another user group. The local community also relies on income generated from motorboat sales, service, and storage; if motorboat use is restricted, there is fear this income may disappear. Local stakeholders canoe and tube as well, but the real issue is about motorized versus non-motorized use of the river. In this instance, the mostly local motorized contingency is battling with a mostly non-local environmental group about proper use of a scenic river. The NPS and management at OZAR are caught in the middle. Should OZAR accommodate local stakeholders and continue to provide mostly unrestricted motorboat use? Should the management at OZAR manage the park with strict interpretation of the enabling legislation, and thus potentially alienate local stakeholders? Both options are being entertained through the GMP process and regardless of the outcome, someone is sure to be unhappy.

Cape Hatteras National Seashore.

Cape Hatteras National Seashore (CAHA) was established in the mid-1960's, when there was an intentional effort by the federal government to provide more public recreation opportunities involving water (Cordell, 2004). The area provides a wide range of recreational opportunities from beach walking, to swimming, fishing, and quite possibly the most popular activity, off-road beach driving. Cape Hatteras is a very popular destination receiving between two and three million visitors annually from all over the country (National Park Service 2010). Although the majority of people recreating at Cape Hatteras are not full-time residents, there is a year-round contingency that relies heavily on the visitation created by the national seashore. Recently, a controversy has erupted at CAHA that pits locals who base their income and livelihoods on visitors, against the NPS and the guidelines they are mandated to follow.

Off-highway vehicle (OHV) use at CAHA is very popular (Mansfield et al., 2010). The use of OHVs allows access to larger areas of the seashore for families and their related equipment, as well as allowing anglers to easily reach some of the best ocean fishing on the east coast. OHV use, however, often comes at a cost to the environment. The NPS at CAHA is mandated to provide for recreational opportunities, as well as protect the natural environment. The continued churning of the beaches by OHV tires causes erosion, and vehicles may track items such as non-native seeds and trash onto the beach and leave behind oil and other fluids. Wildlife is impacted by OHVs through disturbance of bird and sea turtle nesting, and sometimes the killing of seashore life (Defeo et al. 2009). OHV use is viewed as an acceptable and traditional use of the seashore, and has been managed by the NPS throughout CAHA history. In recent years though, there has grown an extremely contentious debate between the OHV community and the NPS. Many species are impacted by OHV use (i.e. ground nesting birds, sea turtles), but some sensitive bird species have become the focal point of the debate, mainly Piping Plovers. The NPS has enacted closures of certain parts of the beach during sensitive nesting periods for these species. The closures prohibit OHV use, and although many other

areas remain open, some nesting areas are popular visitor attractions.

The year-round residents and business owners feel their businesses have suffered from the closures, causing a great deal of friction at the seashore. The NPS completed an environmental impact statement (EIS) as part of the NEPA process (National Park Service, 2010), requiring certain areas of the seashore to be zoned for wildlife protection, thus not allowing any OHV use. The EIS also requires OHV users to obtain a $50 permit and watch a 7-minute educational video. In essence, OHV use went from lightly regulated to very highly regulated.

This example at Cape Hatteras clearly highlights how the push and pull of two groups – local stakeholders and "outside" environmental groups – created a need for the NPS to make a decision that, in many ways, satisfies no one. This issue has become extremely contentious to the point where ranger stations were vandalized, and signage defaced and destroyed. Adding complexity to the issue are the people who remember "the way it was." Many people who live and own businesses on the seashore remember when Cape Hatteras was not run by the government, or who are only one generation removed from that time (much like at Ozark Riverways). Only time will tell if the policy will indeed be a detriment to the locals' livelihoods; but one thing is for certain, residents and business owners on Cape Hatteras will continue to fight for a lifestyle they have known for generations.

IMPLICATIONS FOR KENTUCKY AND THE DANIEL BOONE NATIONAL FOREST: FUTURE RESEARCH NEEDS

The examples provided in this paper are not isolated incidents. Where there is a public and private land interface there is potential for conflict between the government and local stakeholders. Also, when a federal land management agency seeks to implement a new proposal (or carry out existing ones), stakeholders need to be involved early to avoid potential conflicts. The Daniel Boone National Forest in Eastern Kentucky is not immune to the issues discussed in this paper. The Forest receives upwards of five million visitors a year (United States Forest Service, 2005) and varies in use from hiking to OHV driving. The Forest managers have done a good job of informing the public on most issues, but even when being proactive, conflicts may still arise (see United States Forest Service, 2005). Although much of Eastern Kentucky is rural, it may not always remain so, and as population pressures and recreational demands increase, the ability of Forest managers to protect the resource is tested. That being said, opportunities will present themselves in the future to open the door to better lines of communication between land managers (and associated agencies) and local stakeholders.

Understanding how visitors receive information is almost critical for getting stakeholders involved in the management process. Currently, land management agencies are required to post management and policy changes to the Federal Register, and if environmental impacts are identified, public involvement through the NEPA process is put into action. The inherent problem with this process is that most Americans are unaware of when public meetings are held, as well as when and how to provide comments on

management actions or policies. The public is typically only truly engaged in high-profile decisions (e.g. snowmobile use in Yellowstone National Park); therefore, the question that needs answering is: "How can this process become more accessible to the public, and in particular, local stakeholders?" Research is needed into how people, often in rural areas such as Eastern Kentucky, receive their information about public lands in their area. Through the mail? By phone? Have these largely rural areas bought into the technology boom of the past 10 years? Could social media be used? Can email and websites be effective means of keeping locals informed? Ultimately, social scientists can provide public land managers with the information they need to truly understand their local stakeholders in order to effectively communicate with them, and thus attempt to avoid conflicts.

Finally, public land managers need to understand perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of local stakeholders when a potentially controversial plan will be put into motion. If perceptions and attitudes are known about a particular topic (e.g. OHV use or placing use restrictions on visitors) before planning begins, land managers are able to incorporate this information into the plan or action in hopes of making it more palpable to local stakeholders, thus decreasing potential for conflict. This step may increase the amount of time and resources needed to successfully complete a proposed action, but the amount of time and resources needed if this step is NOT taken may very well exceed the level of up-front effort.

How and when land managers communicate with local stakeholders can ensure the success of a plan, or derail it before it even begins. It can be argued that public lands are for all American citizens, not just for the enjoyment and benefit of local stakeholders; however, policies and actions enacted on public lands tend to disproportionately impact local stakeholders. This is why the involvement of local communities will remain a vital step in managing our public lands, and why social science plays an important role in this part of the planning process.

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