# Ecotourism Development

A Manual for Conservation Planners and Managers

Volume I

# An Introduction to Ecotourism Planning

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Ecotourism Development – A Manual for Conservation Planners and Managers
Volume 1



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# Preface to the Ecotourism Development Manual

Ecotourism has become an important economic activity in natural areas around the world. It provides opportunities for visitors to experience powerful manifestations of nature and culture and to learn about the importance of biodiversity conservation and local cultures. At the same time, ecotourism generates income for conservation and economic benefits for communities living in rural and remote areas.

The attributes of ecotourism make it a valuable tool for conservation. Its implementation can:

- ❖ give economic value to ecosystem services that protected areas provide;
- ❖ generate direct income for the conservation of protected areas;
- ❖ generate direct and indirect income for local stakeholders, creating incentives for conservation in local communities;
- ❖ build constituencies for conservation, locally, nationally and internationally;
- ❖ promote sustainable use of natural resources; and
- ❖ reduce threats to biodiversity.

Some areas have greater potential for realizing the benefits of ecotourism than others. In areas with low visitation, the potential is not usually clear. In others, tourism may already be an important factor. In both cases, the ecotourism planning process is critical to achieving ecotourism's potential as a powerful conservation strategy.

Of course, not all tourism to natural areas is ecotourism. Nature tourism, as opposed to ecotourism, may lack mechanisms for mitigating impacts on the environment and fail to demonstrate respect for local culture. Economically, nature tourism is also booming. Consequently, we are witnessing an onslaught of visitation to natural areas which, in many cases, is undermining the values that make these areas attractive.

Because of their ecological value, protected areas, especially those found in the tropics and in less-developed countries, contain many of the world's greatest ecotourism attractions. These attractions may consist of one or a combination of rare or endemic species of flora or fauna, abundant wildlife, high indices of species diversity, unusual or spectacular geomorphological formations, or unique historic or contemporary cultural manifestations in a natural context.

Protected area managers, then, are faced with the challenge of controlling and limiting the impacts of unfettered nature tourism while at the same time deciding where and how to plan adequately for the development of ecotourism as a compatible economic development option.

By integrating ecotourism development into a systematic approach to conservation using The Nature Conservancy's Conservation By Design[1] framework we can ensure that ecotourism is only initiated when it is the most effective strategy to achieve tangible, lasting results at scale. These distinct but intimately interrelated aspects of ecotourism — conservation management and business development — must be fully understood by ecotourism planners and protected area managers before moving ahead with plans to implement ecotourism activities. Conservationists have typically approached ecotourism with a limited understanding of business issues and an incomplete understanding of the management mechanisms that are available and necessary to ensure the sustainability of tourism in protected areas. Typically, starting points for an ecotourism initiative have been guide training programs or lodge construction. This approach is almost guaranteed to end in failure. It has led to:

- ❖ the creation of high expectations in communities which are seldom fulfilled;

1 *Conservation by Design: A Framework for Mission Success.* 2001. Arlington, Virginia: The Nature Conservancy.

- ecotourism activities becoming a drain on scarce NGO and protected area resources as projects struggle to reach break-even point;
- NGOs and protected areas being pulled away from their central conservation mission; and
- tourism destroying the natural attractions that originally drew visitors.

On the other hand, nature tourism operators have typically carried out their initiatives with an incomplete understanding of conservation issues and consequently operate in an unsustainable fashion.

We now recognize that in order for ecotourism to be successful, conservationists need a greater understanding of business considerations; likewise, developers need a greater awareness of the management mechanisms that are necessary to ensure the sustainability of the activity. Combining both perspectives is essential for a successful ecotourism program.

Protected areas may be state, private or community owned or administered, or any combination thereof. Funds for protected area management of all types are usually scarce in developing countries. As a result, these areas often lack the capacity to ensure that tourism generates the full range of benefits it should. Hence, in many areas opportunities for income generation for site conservation and local communities are under exploited and tourism may in fact pose a threat to conservation.

For ecotourism to fulfill its potential and generate sustainable benefits, protected areas must implement a planning framework to guide and manage the activity.

This manual focuses primarily on providing a set of criteria to ecotourism planners and managers at conservation NGOs to facilitate decisions with respect to ecotourism management and development. However, it should also be helpful to protected area specialists and managers of state-owned and community-owned reserves, as well as to other actors in ecotourism including tour operators and hotel developers who seek greater orientation in understanding the conservation implications of proposed activities. Additionally, it will be of use to investors considering ecotourism development proposals.

The manual consists of two distinct but related standalone volumes. Conservationists who are intrigued by ecotourism and want a greater understanding of it, or who are considering ecotourism as a conservation strategy for a protected area, may elect to consult Volume I: *An Introduction to Ecotourism Planning,* Part I initially for a brief overview.

For those who seek fuller understanding of the ecotourism management planning process or decided that ecotourism may be right for their site, Volume I, Part II should be consulted. Part II: "Ecotourism Planning and Management" explains the process for ecotourism development and management planning from Site Conservation Planning and Preliminary Site Evaluation to Full Site Diagnostic, participatory ecotourism management planning and implementation of a plan.

Volume II, *The Business of Ecotourism Development and Management* provides orientation and guidence on both key conservation management and key business development strategies. Part I: "Key Strategies of Ecotourism Management," is an introduction to the critical elements of ecotourism management planning including zoning, visitor impact monitoring, visitor site design and management, income generation mechanisms, infrastructure and visitor guide-lines, and naturalist guide systems. This volume may be usefully consulted to review options for mitigating tourism threats that may already exist at a site.

Volume II, Part II: "Business Planning for Conservation Managers," outlines the business planning process. It will allow conservation managers and planners to develop an understanding of business planning and be able to promote viable business partnerships with communities or private tourism operators, and to contribute to the preparation of business plans.

Most chapters end with a *References and Resources* section that includes publications, organizations, institutions and useful web sites for investigating these themes further.

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# An Introduction to Ecotourism

# Introduction

The first volume of this manual series introduces the concept of ecotourism, presents the key players and gives an overview of their roles in ecotourism planning and development. Most chapters contain illustrative examples in shaded boxes. These describe how the concepts discussed in the chapter are manifested in real cases.

Chapter 1 provides a brief description of how and why ecotourism has evolved and what it means. The broadly accepted definition of ecotourism is presented along with definitions of other terms related to ecotourism. Chapter 2 is a description of the various players involved in ecotourism management and development.

Chapter 3 describes the roles of protected areas and their managers in ecotourism management and development. An overview of the role that communities play in ecotourism management and development is found in Chapter 4, while Chapter 5 describes the role that NGOs play in ecotourism management and development related to protected areas. Chapter 6 is a brief introduction to the tourism industry, its structure and its role in ecotourism development.

Ecotourists exploring the Amazon © Andy Drumm

## Chapter 1
# What is Ecotourism?

### Ecotourism Defined

Ecotourism is a relatively new concept, and it is still often misunderstood or misused. Some people have abused the term to attract conservation conscious travelers to what, in reality, are simply nature tourism programs which may cause negative environmental and social impacts. While the term was first heard in the 1980s, the first broadly accepted definition, and one which continues to be a valid "nutshell" definition was established by The (International) Ecotourism Society in 1990:

> *Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people.*

As awareness and experience of the activity has grown, so has our need for a more comprehensive and detailed definition. Most recently (1999), Martha Honey has proposed an excellent, more detailed version:

> *Ecotourism is travel to fragile, pristine and usually protected areas that strives to be low impact and (usually) small scale. It helps educate the traveler; provides funds for conservation; directly benefits the economic development and political empowerment of local communities; and fosters respect for different cultures and for human rights.*

However, consensus exists among organizations involved with ecotourism (including The Nature Conservancy) around the definition adopted in 1996 by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) which describes ecotourism as:

> *Environmentally responsible travel and visitation to natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features, both past and present) that promote conservation, have a low visitor impact and provide for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local peoples.*

The Nature Conservancy has adopted the concept of ecotourism as the type of tourism that it recommends its partners use in most protected area management, especially for national parks and other areas with fairly strict conservation objectives. For The Nature Conservancy, ecotourism represents an excellent means for benefiting both local people and the protected area in question. It is an ideal component of a sustainable development strategy where natural resources can be utilized as tourism attractions without causing harm to the natural area. An important tool for protected area management and development, ecotourism must be implemented in a flexible manner. However, the following elements are crucial to the ultimate success of an ecotourism initiative. Ecotourism must:

- have a low impact upon a protected area's natural resources;
- involve stakeholders (individuals, communities, ecotourists, tour operators and government institutions) in the planning, development, implementation and monitoring phases;
- respect local cultures and traditions;
- generate sustainable and equitable income for local communities and for as many other stakeholders as possible, including private tour operators;
- generate income for protected area conservation; and
- educate all stakeholders about their role in conservation.

### Evolution of Ecotourism

Ecotourism is a concept that evolved over the last 20 years as the conservation community, people living in and around protected areas, and the travel industry witnessed a boom in nature tourism and realized their mutual interests in directing its growth. Ecotourism has brought the promise of achieving conservation goals, improving the well-being of local communities and generating new business — promising a rare win-win-win situation.

Relations among conservationists, communities and tourism practitioners have not always been smooth and collaborative. However, the concept and practice of ecotourism brings these different actors together. Ecotourism has emerged as a platform to establish partnerships and to jointly guide the path of tourists seeking to experience and learn about natural areas and diverse cultures.

### *Conservationists and Ecotourism*

Specific circumstances on all sides motivated this new interest in ecotourism. On the conservation side, protected area managers were in the midst of redefining conservation strategies. For practical reasons, they were learning to combine conservation activities with economic development as it became obvious that traditional conservation approaches of strict protectionism were no longer adequate and new ways of accomplishing goals were needed (Brandon et al., 1998).

For years, conservationists established and managed protected areas[1] through minimal collaboration with the people living in or near these areas. Circumstances in many countries, particularly in developing regions, have changed dramatically in recent years and have affected approaches to conservation.

### *Local Stakeholders and Ecotourism*

Over the past two decades, many developing countries have experienced large population increases with declining or stagnant economic conditions. These countries have frequently been pressured into exploiting their natural resource base in an unsustainable fashion in order to meet immediate economic needs and to pay interest on foreign debt. This combination leads more people to compete for fewer natural resources. Outside protected areas, the natural resources that many people have depended upon for sustenance and many businesses have relied upon for profit making have disappeared.

For most countries, protected areas have become the last significant pieces of land that still retain important reserves of plant and animal diversity, water, clean air and other ecological services. Meanwhile, protected areas have become increasingly attractive to farmers, miners, loggers and others trying to make a living. The economic development pressures on these areas have intensified on local, national and global scales. Thus, ecotourism has become very important for potentially reconciling conservation and economic considerations.

Because of this competition for resources, conservationists realized that local people and economic circumstances must be incorporated into conservation strategies (Redford and Mansour, 1996). In most cases, local people need financial incentives to use and manage natural resources sustainably. Existing economic and political conditions often limit their options and increase their reliance on natural areas. Conservation work often means creating alternatives to current economic practices so that multiple-use zones around protected areas can be maintained and threats to protected areas minimized.

In looking for alternative economic activities, conservationists have become more creative and are exploring many options. Ecotourism is one such alternative. The rationale behind ecotourism is that local tourism businesses would not destroy natural resources but would instead support their protection. Ecotourism would offer a viable strategy to simultaneously make money and conserve resources. Ecotourism could be considered a "sustainable" activity, one that does not diminish natural resources being used while at the same time generating income.

**Table 1.1 Top Tourism Destinations in the Americas**

| Country | Arrivals in 2000 | % change |
|---|---|---|
| 1. United States | 52,690,000 | +8.7 |
| 2. Canada | 20,423,000 | +4.9 |
| 3. Mexico | 20,000,000 | +5.0 |
| 4. Brazil | 5,190,000 | +1.6 |
| 5. Puerto Rico | 3,094,000 | +2.3 |
| 6. Dominican Republic | 2,977,000 | +12.4 |
| 7. Chile | 1,719,000 | +6.0 |
| 8. Cuba | 1,700,000 | +8.9 |

source: World Tourism Organization, 2001

### *Travel Industry and Ecotourism*

The explosion in nature tourism has lead to the need to address the impacts of the industry. The growing

1 In this document, the terms "protected area" and "site" or "ecotourism site" are used interchangeably. However, a protected area usually refers to a fairly large, legally protected expanse of territory, usually administered by a government entity or whose management has been delegated to the private sector or a coalition of government and private interests. Site and ecotourism site are more generic terms applied to any expanse of land or water where ecotourism occurs and is being managed by either the private or public sector. The term "visitor site" refers to a relatively small location where intensive use and management occurs within a larger ecotourism/conservation context.

demand for nature-based tourism sparked interest among protected area managers to place tourism within a conservation context. Travelers have been the driving forces in the evolution of ecotourism. What brought about this nature tourism boom? First, let us examine the status of the tourism industry in general.

According to the World Tourism Organization (2001), world tourism grew by an estimated 7.4 per cent in 2000 — its highest growth rate in nearly a decade and almost double the increase of 1999. Over 698 million people traveled to a foreign country in 2000 spending more than US$476 billion, an increase of 4.5 per cent over the previous year.

The travel and tourism industry supports 200 million jobs worldwide — 1 in every 12.4 jobs. By 2010, this is estimated to grow to 250 million, or 1 in every 11 jobs (WTTC and WEFA, 2000).

The fastest developing area is East Asia and the Pacific with a growth rate of 14.5%. In the Americas the fastest growth is in Central America (+8.8%).

There is currently no global initiative for the gathering of ecotourism data. However, certain indicators show us how the larger nature tourism market, of which ecotourism is a segment, is growing at a rate faster than that for tourism as a whole, particularly in the tropics.

Ceballos-Lascuráin (1993) reports a WTO estimate that nature tourism generates 7% of all international travel expenditure. The World Resources Institute found that while tourism overall has been growing at an annual rate of 4%, nature travel is increasing at an annual rate of between 10% and 30% (Reingold, 1993). Data which supports this growth rate is found in Lew's survey of tour operators in the Asia-Pacific region who have experienced annual growth rates of 10% to 25% in recent years (Lew, 1997). Some other indicators of this growth are:

- Visitation to Hol Chan Marine Reserve in Belize increased by two-thirds over a five year period, from 33,669 tourists in 1991 to 50,411 in 1996 (Belize Tourism Board, 1997).
- More than two-thirds of tourists in Costa Rica visit protected areas and reserves.
- A survey of U.S.-based outbound ecotourism operators shows that the number of operators grew by 820% between 1970 and 1994, or an average of 34% a year (Higgins, 1996).
- The global destinations of U.S.-based outbound ecotourism operators' clients were: Central America 39%, South America 25%, North America 18%, Mexico and the Caribbean 5% and other regions 13% (Higgins, 1996).
- Ecotourism is growing at a rate of 10-15% annually, as estimated by the World Travel and Tourism Council.[2]
- Many countries whose primary attractions are natural areas are experiencing dramatic increases in tourist arrivals. For example, arrivals in Costa Rica more than quadrupled from 246,737 in 1986 to 1,031,585 in 1999 (ICT, 2001). Belize has seen more than a 600% visitor increase, from 51,740 in 1986 to 334,699 ten years later (WTO, 1997).
- In Honduras, experts estimate that the number of nature-loving visitors grew nearly 15% (for a total of 200,000 tourists) in 1995; a 13-15% increase in visitors was anticipated for 1996 (Dempsey, 1996).

Why are people so attracted to nature destinations? Most likely this trend has followed the global increase in interest in the environment. As people hear about the fragility of the environment, they become more aware of conservation issues around the world. At home, they are willing to pay more for "green" products and services and are taking specific conservation actions such as recycling. For their own pleasure, they want to learn first hand about endangered species and threatened habitats. They want to understand the complex challenges of rainforest conservation and want to experience them first hand.

Travelers are seeking more remote destinations. They want to go off the beaten path, go to the heart of the jungle. Many travelers are becoming activists. As they experience a threatened wilderness area and learn about its plight, they want to help. On the demand side, we have seen a burst of nature tourists seeking new opportunities. International and national travelers are looking for environmental education, are willing to pay entrance fees and are eager to buy local products and services that strengthen the local economy. In sum, they are an ideal audience for addressing the conservation challenges of these areas.

2 The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) is the Global Business Leaders' Forum for Travel & Tourism. Its members are chief executives from all sectors of the travel and tourism industry, including accommodation, catering, cruises, entertainment, recreation, transportation and travel-related services. Its central role is to lobby governments on the industry's behalf.

As their interests have changed, consumers have placed new demands on the tourism industry; this, in turn, has encouraged the greening of the tourism industry in addition to encouraging ecotourism. Consumers are requesting new destinations, new ways of doing business and, for some, the opportunity to contribute to natural resource management. Many travel companies are responding to these changing market conditions. Some companies are offering fewer beach vacations and more wilderness treks. New companies devoted solely to nature travel are emerging.

This demand-side trend was destined to coincide with the conservation trend toward effective integration with economic development. When they intersected, people from conservation areas, local communities and the travel sector started talking about ecotourism as a means to meet their common interests. Ecotourism connects travelers seeking to help protected areas with protected areas needing help.

But while the match between conservationists and the tourism industry initially seemed ideal, establishing partnerships has been rocky. Each side continues in the long process of understanding how the other functions and all are learning to incorporate new activities into their work. Ecotravellers — conscious and sensitive nature tourists — constitute a growing segment of the nature tourism market that seeks sensitive interaction with host communities in a way that contributes to sustainable local development. Local communities meanwhile increasingly expect to play a role in the management of tourism.

### Related Terms

As a popular word, ecotourism has been used loosely. But if implemented fully, it is a critically important conservation strategy for achieving sustainable development.[3] There are a variety of related terms that are frequently linked, and sometimes confused with ecotourism, including the following:

**Nature tourism** is simply tourism based on visitation to natural areas. Nature tourism is closely related to ecotourism but does not necessarily involve conservation or sustainability. This is the type of tourism that currently exists in most natural areas before a plan is established and conservation measures are in place. As different elements of ecotourism are integrated into a nature tourism program, its effect on the environment may change.

**Sustainable nature tourism** is very close to ecotourism but does not meet all the criteria of true ecotourism. For example, a cable car carrying visitors through the rainforest canopy may generate benefits for conservation and educate visitors, but because it represents a high degree of mechanization and consequently creates a barrier between the visitor and the natural environment, it would be inappropriate to describe as an ecotourism initiative. In altered and heavily-visited areas, sustainable nature tourism may be an appropriate activity. For example, larger "eco" resort development would not be considered low impact if it required significant clearing of native vegetation but may contribute to conservation financially and provide conservation education.

The line between sustainable nature tourism and ecotourism is subtle but very important. A project must meet all of the necessary criteria listed above before it can accurately be defined as ecotourism. Projects that fall short on any of the criteria do not truly benefit conservation or the people involved over the long term.

**Scientific or research tourism** is tourism with particular investigative objectives. These types of projects are common in natural areas and often contribute to conserving them. An example of scientific or research tourism would be the trips coordinated by the Earthwatch Institute. Some of these trips might qualify as ecotourism because they provide information about the ecology of the area while meeting all the other criteria of ecotourism.

**Cultural, ethno or cultural heritage tourism** concentrates on local traditions and people as the main attractions. This kind of tourism can be divided into two types: The first and conventional type is where tourists experience culture through museums and formalized presentations of music and dance in theatres, hotels or occasionally in communities themselves. In many instances, this has lead to the "commodification" of culture as it becomes adapted for tourist consumption, often resulting in degradation of the hosts' cultural traditions. The second type is more anthropological and contains a strong visitor motivation for learning from indigenous culture rather than simply viewing an isolated manifestation of it. For example, there is growing interest in learning how indigenous people use natural resources. The Cofan of Ecuador have specialized in teaching visitors about their traditional uses of medicinal plants (Borman, 1995). This type of tourism is often a companion to, or an element of, ecotourism.

3 Sustainable development is defined in the "Brundtland Report," *Our Common Future*, as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987, p. 43).

It is important that cultural tourism be managed on terms defined by host communities and that indicators of the cultural impact of tourism be monitored to ensure visitation does not erode the cultural resource.

**Green/Sustainable tourism** refers to travel operations that use natural resources judiciously. Green or sustainable tourism can be considered the "greening" of the tourism industry. Examples include the airline industry becoming more energy efficient, the cruise line industry recycling its waste or large hotel chains adopting environmental regulations. Large hotels have discovered that by advising guests to reduce water consumption or recommending that they not expect their towels to be washed every day, the hotels not only gain a "greener" image (which is increasingly important to consumers), but they also reduce operating costs. Thus, green tourism is clearly an attractive proposition to the conventional tourism industry.

In reality, reducing the hotel's water consumption by 15%, although desirable and relatively easy to achieve at most large hotels, is not enough to convert the hotel into a sustainable operation. Sweeting et al. (1999) review this issue comprehensively and make recommendations for reducing conventional tourism's impact on the environment. While greening the existing conventional mass tourism industry will produce some benefits, new developments in natural areas, including beaches, need to address energy consumption, waste management and environmental interpretation in the design phase and not as an afterthought if they are to be truly sustainable. Large hotels washing towels only every *other* day may not be enough to protect the water table in an arid area. Not building the hotel in the first place in an area where water resources are scarce may be the best option.

Developing a sustainable or green tourism industry in all its dimensions is as worthy a cause as working to maintain protected areas through tourism. In fact, some would argue that promoting sustainability of the broader tourism would be a better conservation mission than focusing on protected areas alone. However, for the present purposes the focus will be on ecotourism development, and the greening of conventional tourism will be addressed in future publications and by others.

It may be easiest to think of ecotourism (which works to protect natural areas through tourism) and sustainable tourism (which works to make the whole tourism industry more environmentally friendly) as two valuable, but distinct, missions.

## Working with Ecotourism

A comprehensive view of conservation is implicit in the definition of ecotourism. It incorporates elements of community participation and economic development including the many activities and participants that fulfill this mission.

There are many possible ways that ecotourism contributes to conservation. First, ecotourism can generate funds for protected areas. Second, it can create employment for surrounding communities, thus providing economic incentives to support protected areas. Third, it can advance environmental education for visitors. Fourth, it can provide justification for declaring areas as protected or increasing support for these areas. Finally, ecotourism programs aim to limit the negative impacts of nature tourists.

These are the criteria for ecotourism. They provide useful guidelines for judging at what point nature tourism becomes ecotourism. *But this judgement is not simple.* Nor is it an academic or semantic exercise. Only in striving to implement ecotourism and meet all of its criteria in appropriate places will conservation planners and managers meet their long-term goals. We face many challenges in applying these criteria to practical situations in the field.

Actually, implementing ecotourism guidelines is a difficult and complex task. The rewards for a job well done, however, are tremendous. Judgements about ecotourism for a particular site must be done within the context of the area's conservation objectives. As managers and planners investigate actual and potential tourism impacts, both positive and negative, they need to remember the protected area's goals and functions. In some cases, negative impacts from tourism need to be accepted in order to gain conservation benefits. For example, tourism may result in trampled vegetation along trails but also allows for more protected area guards to be hired. Hiring additional protected area guards may be more important to the overall conservation of the protected area than intact vegetation near trails. Whatever the mix of costs and benefits, the key question should be, "Is tourism advancing the long-term conservation agenda of the area?" If so, it is likely ecotourism.

As a final note on the definition of ecotourism, we typically discuss it in the context of protected areas. Protected areas, private reserves and international biosphere reserves are already slated as conservation units and offer the best arenas for pursuing ecotourism.

Although sometimes weak, the legal and management structures of these areas facilitate their ability to capture the benefits and minimize the costs of ecotourism. But ecotourism can take place in areas with less formal conservation status as well. In fact, there may be cases where ecotourism helps establish the protective status of areas currently not formally protected.

The rest of this volume and accompanying volumes of this manual are designed to help protected area planners and managers acquire the expertise to navigate successfully among what may appear to be conflicting goals of ecotourism.

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The International Ecotourism Society. 1998. *Ecotourism statistical fact sheet.* N. Bennington, Vermont: The International Ecotourism Society.

The International Ecotourism Society (TIES)
ecomail@ecotourism.org www.ecotourism.org
*TIES is an international membership organization dedicated to disseminating information about ecotourism. Its 1,700 members come from more than 55 different professions and live in more than 70 different countries. Most of their members work in the tourism sector, study tourism, or use tourism to support the conservation of natural settings and sustain the well-being of local communities.*

The Nature Conservancy. 2000. *The five-S framework for site conservation: A practitioner's handbook for site conservation planning and measuring conservation success*. Available at www.conserveonline.org.

The Nature Conservancy's Ecotourism Program — www.nature.org/ecotourism

Planeta.com — EcoTravels in Latin America
www2.planeta.com/mader/ecotravel/ecotravel.html
*Planeta.com is a clearinghouse for practical ecotourism. It provides more than 10,000 pages of practical features and in-depth scholarly reports and hosts a variety of online forums and conferences.*

### Sources of Tourism Statistics

The ARA Consulting Group
The Marine Building
355 Burrand, Suite 350
Vancouver, British Columbia V6C 2G8 CANADA
Tel: 604-681-7577 Fax: 604-669-7390

Journal of Travel Research
University of Colorado Campus 420
Boulder, Colorado 80309-0420 USA
Tel: 303-492-8227 Fax: 303-492-3620

Tourism Works for America Council
1100 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 450
Washington, D.C. 20005-3934 USA
Tel: 202-408-8422 Fax: 202-408-1255

U.S. Travel Data Center at
the Travel Industry Association of America
1100 New York Avenue NW #450 West
Washington D.C. 20005-3934 USA
Tel: 202-408-1832 Fax: 202-293-3155

World Tourism Organization (WTO)
Capitán Haya, 42
28020 Madrid, SPAIN
Tel: 34-1-567-8100 Fax: 34-1-571-3733
www.world-tourism.org

The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC)
1-2 Queen Victoria Terrace
Sovereign Court
London E1W 3HA UK
Tel: 44-870-727-9882 Fax: 44-870-728-9882
enquiries@wttc.org

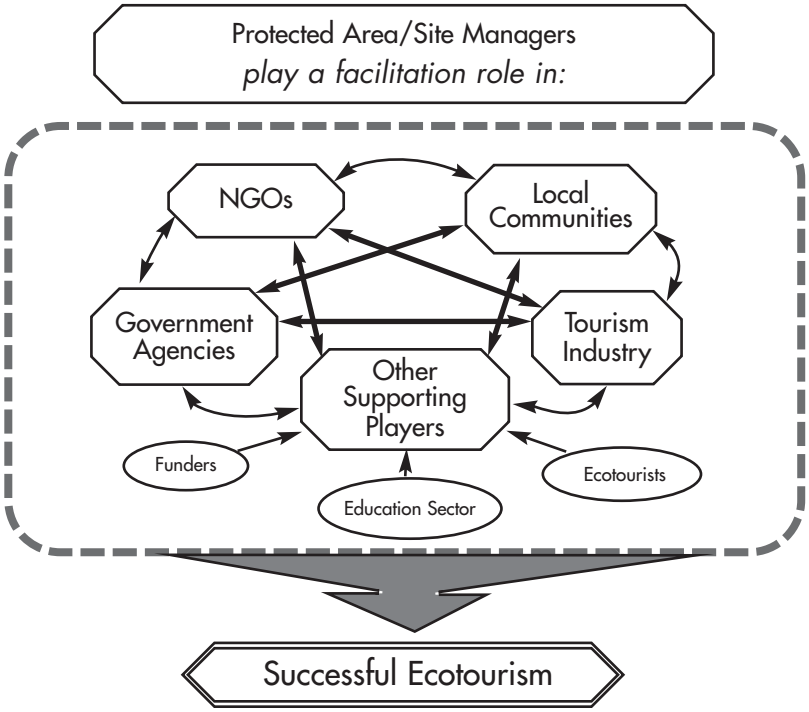
## Chapter 2
# Ecotourism Participants

A huge range of players with varying interests and goals participates in ecotourism. Some play more prominent roles than others, but almost all are represented in the development and management of ecotourism sites. A key to the success of ecotourism is the formation of strong partnerships so that the multiple goals of conservation and equitable development can be met (see Figure 2.1). Partnerships may be difficult because of the number of players involved and their different needs, but forging relationships is essential. The key players can be classified as: protected area personnel, community organizations and individuals, private sector tourism industry members and a variety of government officials and nongovernmental organizations. Their effective interaction creates effective ecotourism.

### Core Decision Makers

**Protected area managers.** Ecotourism involving protected areas places those in charge of the areas in a challenging position. Protected area personnel are often biologists, botanists or wildlife specialists whose job is to protect significant marine and terrestrial sites. Their key duties usually involve conducting inventories, managing wildlife populations and maintaining visitor facilities. Effective ecotourism, however, requires that protected area personnel be able to work closely and knowledgeably with local people and community leaders as well as with a wide variety of tourism industry representatives including tourism operators, travel agents, tour guides, government tourism agencies and others. Protected area personnel must be able to guide the sometimes conflicting inter-

**Figure 2.1 Ecotourism Partnerships Needed for Success**



ests of all of the ecotourism participants so that they come together for the benefit of the protected area and its conservation goals. This task is a difficult one but cannot be left to anyone else. In some cases, however, it may be useful for NGOs to assume this role, usually at the request of the protected area administration.

Protected area managers and staff play crucial roles in ecotourism. As the main authorities on their protected area's plants and animals, they provide valuable input to create environmental education programs and impact monitoring systems. On the frontlines of management, protected area personnel are the first to notice natural resource changes such as environmental damage from tourism.

**Local communities.** People who live in or near protected areas are not a homogeneous group. Indeed, even within one small community there will be a diversity of people with a range of views and experiences. But we can make a few generalizations about local residents and their relationship to ecotourism. First, some rural communities that once featured quiet living are finding themselves in the middle of an international trend. Nature tourists are invading their homelands, but

**Box 2.1 The Community of Capirona in the Amazon Region of Ecuador**

This program was established in 1990 to discourage the intrusion of oil development. Since then, the ecotourism operation has expanded into not only a more effective means of ensuring the autonomy of indigenous territory but also a template for other ecotourism initiatives. Known around the world as one of the first community-based ecotourism programs anywhere (Colvin, 1994; Wesche, 1993, 1995), Capirona offers simple lodgings set in secondary tropical rainforest mixed with opportunities for intercultural exchange. Capirona's territory covers 2,000 hectares of land, three-quarters of which is intact primary forest and the remainder reserved by the community's 70 families for agricultural purposes.

There are three sleeping cabañas in the central area of the community. The cabañas have a mix of dormitory-style and double rooms with a total of 30 beds. Guests share two batteries of showers and flush toilets. The main tourism complex also includes a store (where soft drinks and handicrafts can be purchased), a kitchen/dining cabaña, a theater, a volleyball court, a beach, a two-way radio, a well, latrines, two large motor canoes, two dugout paddle canoes and several well-maintained walking trails. Those who wish to experience a more adventurous night in the jungle can use a much more rustic cabaña located 45 minutes away by foot. The community plans to renovate this building into a fully-equipped cabaña in the near future.

Every stay in the Capirona community includes a cultural presentation of song, dance and the making of Quichua handicrafts performed in a theater built solely for that purpose. In this intercultural exchange visitors are also asked to present their own culture in song, dance or story. The ecotourism program includes easy jungle walks to giant ceibo and colorful capirona trees, a birders' lookout spot and a salt lick cavern for viewing nocturnal creatures. Intermixed with these activities are hours of free time during which tourists can swim in the river, play volleyball, tan on the beach, explore the surrounding paths or read up on Quichua history. Guests are often encouraged to participate in a community work project. Every visit to Capirona includes a tour of the community including the schoolhouses, the chapel and the soccer field. Samples of chicha, a traditional staple in the Quichua diet, can be tasted here too. These program components take place over a three to six night stay.

Capirona is a community-owned ecotourism program that rotates the project's workers and administrators on a regular basis. The four trained guides manage visitor activities, interactions with the community and special requests. Capirona will continue to invest in its human resources by arranging for additional guiding courses and supplementary training for those already involved in ecotourism.

The local conservation NGO Fundación Jatun Sacha, which has a field station nearby, works with the community to help train guides and also sends Ecuadorian and foreign students to learn about the Capirona example and appreciate how tourism can be used to protect nature and indigenous culture.

The community receives around 1,000 visitors per year and has generated significant revenues that have boosted individual and family subsistence incomes and created a community fund for health and education. In order to offset potential negative impacts and to share the benefits of tourism with the broader Quichua community in the region of the Upper Napo, community leaders created a network of communities called RICANCIE (Red Indígena Comunitaria del Alto Napo de Convivencia Intercultural y Ecoturismo) based on the Capirona model. This network now receives clients through a centralized office in the provincial capital of Tena.

adapted from Wesche and Drumm, 1999

they are generally just passing through the neighborhood, not coming to meet residents.

Residents have mixed reactions to this intrusion. Some want nothing to do with tourists; they want privacy and do not welcome the changes that tourism brings. Others are intrigued by tourism and are taking steps to develop it. Tourism may be particularly alluring if other employment options are limited or if residents feel tourism may help protect their precious resources.

Indigenous Cofan guides explain traditional medicinal plant use to European ecotourists © Andy Drumm

Many communities in developing countries are hosting visitors and creating ecotourism programs. Sometimes their motivation is to protect their surrounding natural resources. For others, they may see ecotourism in a more economic perspective, as a means to gain income. Many communities have organized their own ecotourism programs. Box 2.1 describes one such community.

Whatever their initial reaction to tourism, local residents are often unprepared for its demands. Those who do not want tourism have no means to stop it. They often cannot compete with the powerful tourism industry or the fiercely independent travelers who want to discover new areas. Those who are interested in pursuing tourism may not be familiar with its costs and benefits. Many have little experience in tourism business enterprises and are not connected to international tourism markets.

The interests and concerns of local residents regarding tourism development need special attention. Tourism touches all the other groups involved professionally, in a mostly economic sense. For members of communities, it also touches their personal lives by affecting their lifestyles, traditions and cultures, as well as their livelihood and their long standing ways of organizing themselves socially and politically. In addition, most of the other players enter into tourism voluntarily, whereas in many cases communities must deal with tourism impacts whether or not they choose to.

Local residents play an important role in ecotourism for two main reasons. First, it is their homelands and workplaces that are attracting nature travelers. Equity and practicality require that they be active decision-makers in ecotourism planning and management. Second, local residents are key players in conserving natural resources both within and outside of neighboring protected areas. Their relationship to and uses of natural resources will determine the success of conservation strategies for protected areas. In addition, local or traditional knowledge is often a key component of visitors' experience and education.

**Tourism industry.** The tourism industry is massive. It involves a huge variety of people including: tour operators and travel agents who assemble trips; airline and cruise ship employees; minivan drivers; staff of big hotels and small family lodges; handicraft makers; restaurant owners; tour guides; and all the other people who independently offer goods and services to tourists. The complexity of this sector indicates how challenging it can be for protected area staff and local communities to learn about and form partnerships with the tourism industry.

Consumers are in contact with many members of the tourism industry throughout their journeys. For an international trip, the traveler often first contacts a travel agent, tour operator or airline. The agent will generally contact an outbound tour operator based in the tourist's country of origin, who in turn will contact an inbound tour operator based in the destination country. The inbound tour operator is best placed to make local travel arrangements such as transportation, accommodations, and guide services. Once the traveler is at the destination, many local entrepreneurs will also become part of this scenario.

One element that binds all businesses within the tourism industry is the pursuit of financial profit. There may be additional motivations for some businesses, particularly those involved in ecotourism, but tourism companies exist only when they are profitable.

Members of the tourism industry are valuable to ecotourism for many reasons. First, they understand travel trends. They know how consumers act and what they want. Second, the tourism industry can influence travelers by encouraging good behavior and limiting negative impacts in protected areas. Third, the tourism industry plays a key role in promoting ecotourism. Its members know how to reach travelers through publications, the Internet, the media and other means of promotion, thus providing a link between ecotourism destinations and consumers. See Eagles and Higgins (1998) for a more detailed analysis of the structure of the ecotourism industry.

**Government officials.** Officials from many government departments participate in ecotourism planning, development and management. These departments include tourism, natural resources, wildlife and protected areas, education, community development, finances and transportation. Ecotourism involves officials primarily from the national level, although regional and local levels also contribute to the process.

Government officials have several significant functions in ecotourism. They provide leadership. They coordinate and articulate national goals for ecotourism. As part of their overall tourism plans, they provide vision for this industry. They may even propose a national ecotourism plan; in Australia, the government created a National Ecotourism Strategy and then committed AUS$10 million for its development and implementation (Preece et al., 1995).

Government officials at the national level may also establish specific policies for protected areas. For example, government officials decide about visitor use fee systems at protected areas, and their policies outline what systems are established and how revenues will be distributed. They may also delineate private sector practices, e.g., tour operators may be required to use local tour guides in certain areas or developers' property ownership rights may be regulated. Government policies direct ecotourism activities and may easily advance or hinder their growth.

Additionally, government officials are responsible for most basic infrastructure outside protected areas ranging from airline facilities in big cities to secondary roads leading to remote sites. The government generally takes the lead in all major transportation systems and issues. It may also provide other services important to ecotourism such as health clinics in rural areas.

Finally, government officials promote ecotourism. Sometimes the promotion is part of a national tourism campaign. At other times, advertisements for specific nature sites are created or perhaps a flagship species is identified and promoted. National government participation gives prominence to ecotourism destinations.

**Nongovernmental organizations.** Nongovernmental organizations are valuable players because they provide a forum for discussion and influence regarding ecotourism. They offer a means of communication with great numbers of interested individuals. These organizations can serve as vehicles for bringing together all the elements of ecotourism. NGOs can play many different roles in ecotourism implementation: directly, as program managers or site administrators; and indirectly, as trainers, advisors, business partners with ecotourism companies or communities and, in exceptional circumstances, as providers of ecotourism services.

There are several different types of nongovernmental organizations. Among them are for-profit tourism associations consisting of private tour operators, airlines and hoteliers; ecotourism associations such as those in Belize, Costa Rica, Ecuador, etc., that bring together groups from all the sectors involved; and other trade organizations that handle travel issues. These NGOs often have members who meet regularly and communicate industry concerns through publications such as newsletters. Members are often asked to subscribe to certain principles or "codes of ethics." These associations and organizations are effective at keeping the industry informed about current trends and events.

Another set of nongovernmental organizations involved with ecotourism includes the private, nonprofit groups that focus on conservation and development or may be dedicated specifically to ecotourism. Their focus may be local, national or international. Frequently, these organizations serve as facilitators between protected areas, communities and all the other players in ecotourism, sometimes providing financial and technical assistance or directly managing ecotourism sites. Some of these NGOs have constituencies that enjoy nature and would be interested in ecotourism education and promotion.

## Supporting Players

**Funders.** Many different groups can fund the development of ecotourism through loans or grants: financial institutions, including investment corporations; bilateral and multilateral donor agencies such as the World Bank and the Interamerican Development Bank; private investors; venture capital funds such as the EcoEnterprise Investment Fund; NGOs; and private banks. These contributions are often critical for protected areas that pursue ecotourism. Typically there are studies to carry out, facilities to build, infrastructure to create and people to train. With protected area budgets so limited, outside funding is necessary.

Several international NGOs based in the United States and Europe provide funding and/or technical assistance to ecotourism projects in developing countries. Many of them use funding provided by government agencies such as USAID, GTZ and DFID, the governmental foreign aid departments of the United States, Germany and the United Kingdom, respectively. The Nature Conservancy, through its USAID-funded Parks in Peril program, has helped many local NGOs develop ecotourism projects connected with protected areas. The recently created EcoEnterprise Fund also provides funding on favorable terms for sound ecotourism project proposals (see Volume II, Part II).

Financial institutions do not generally participate in planning for ecotourism or in decisions about what is appropriate for a particular protected area. In this regard, they may be considered a second-tier player in ecotourism, but they are important nonetheless. For anyone that wants to develop ecotourism, access to funds is often the biggest obstacle confronted (see Volume II, Part II).

**Academics.** Academics at universities is another group that plays a secondary, though valuable, role in the planning and daily functions of ecotourism. It is a group that helps to frame the issues of ecotourism and raise questions to ensure that ecotourism meets its stated goals. Researchers and academics facilitate learning by asking such questions as: Who exactly is benefiting from ecotourism? How do we measure benefits? How does ecotourism contribute to our existing knowledge

**Box 2.2 Who is an Ecotourist?**

*The International Ecotourism Society constructed the following ecotourist market profile in 1998 based on a survey of North American travelers.*

| | |
|---|---|
| **Age:** | Ranged from 35-54 years old, although age varied with activity and other factors such as cost. |
| **Gender:** | 50% were female and 50% male, although clear differences by activity were found. |
| **Education:** | 82% were college graduates. A shift in interest in ecotourism was found from those who have high levels of education to those with less education, indicating ecotourism's expansion into mainstream markets. |
| **Household composition:** | No major differences were found between general tourists and experienced ecotourists.** |
| **Party composition:** | A majority (60%) of experienced ecotourism respondents stated they prefer to travel as a couple; only 15% preferred to travel with their families and 13% preferred to travel alone. |
| **Trip duration:** | The largest group of experienced ecotourists (50%) preferred trips lasting 8-14 days. |
| **Expenditure:** | Experienced ecotourists were willing to spend more than general tourists; the largest group (26%) was prepared to spend $1,001- $1,500 per trip. |
| **Important elements of trip:** | Experienced ecotourists' top three responses were: (1) wilderness setting, (2) wildlife viewing, and (3) hiking/trekking. Experienced ecotourists' top two motivations for taking their next trip were: (1) enjoy scenery/nature and (2) new experiences/places. |

** Experienced ecotourists = Tourists who had been on at least one "ecotourism" trip. Ecotourism was defined in this study as nature/adventure/culture oriented travel.

from Ecotourist Market Profile completed by HLA and ARA consulting firms; The International Ecotourism Society, 1998

about conservation? What are the links between ecotourism and tourism? Academics can focus on the big picture and help us understand how ecotourism interacts with other concepts and global trends.

In addition to helping shape the hypotheses, academics conduct research. In coordination with NGOs, governments and local communities, they may:

- develop and execute surveys, e.g., of visitor preferences, willingness to pay, etc.;
- produce data about tourism patterns;
- inventory flora and fauna;
- document tourism impacts and share results to develop a good base of information;
- provide material to guide us in our discussions and conclusions about ecotourism; and
- facilitate the sharing of this information and conceptual thinking through conferences, publications, the Internet, etc.

**Travelers.** Travelers have a unique position as players in ecotourism. Box 2.2 provides a profile of ecotourists. They are the most vital participants in the industry and provide motivation for everyone else's activities, but few participate in formal meetings about ecotourism. Nevertheless, the choices they make when they select a tourism destination, choose a tour operator or travel agent and, ultimately, the kind of tour in which they wish to participate, have a tremendous impact upon the eventual success or failure of ecotourism projects.

Ecotourism, then, is a multifaceted, multi-disciplinary, multi-actor activity requiring communication and collaboration among a diverse range of actors with different needs and interests. Consequently, achieving ecotourism is a challenging process though ultimately enormously rewarding for all involved.

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Asociación Ecuatoriana de Ecoturismo (ASEC)
Calle Víctor Hugo E10-111 y Isla Pinzón
Ciudadela Jipijapa
Quito, ECUADOR
Tel: 245-055 and 466-295
asec@accessinter.net
www.planeta.com/ecotravel/south/ecuador/asec.html
*The Ecuadorian Ecotourism Association brings together private tourism companies with NGOs, universities and community-based organizations to promote ecotourism development.*

Asociación Mexicana de Turismo de Aventura y Ecoturismo
(Mexican Association of Adventure Travel and Ecotourism-Amtave)
Mexico City, MEXICO
Tel: 52-5-663-5381 info@amtave.com www.amtave.com
*A group of about 50 travel providers with various interpretations of ecotourism. The group was formed in 1994 to assist members in promoting alternative tourism services.*

Conservation International - EcoTravel Center
www.ecotour.org/ecotour.htm
*Washington DC-based environmental group which has developed a number of ecotourism projects in Latin America and sponsors a global Ecotourism Excellence Award.*

Department for International Development (DFID)
*DFID is the government department responsible for managing Britain's program of development assistance and for ensuring that government policies which affect developing countries, including the environment, trade, investment and agricultural policies, take account of developing country issues.*

Departamento de Recursos Naturales/ICT
(Costa Rican Tourism Institute)
San Jose, COSTA RICA
Tel: 506-223-1733, ext. 328
info@turismo-sostenible.co.cr www.turismo-sostenible.co.cr
*A Costa Rican government office which is developing certification standards for green hotels.*

The EcoEnterprises Fund
www.ecoenterprisesfund.com www.fondoecoempresas.com
*The fund — a joint initiative of The Nature Conservancy and the Inter-American Development Bank — uses the tools and principles of venture capital to protect natural areas in Latin America and the Caribbean. It is an adventure fund for nature, uniting business and conservation.*

Kiskeya
P.O. Box 109-Z
Zona Colonial
Santo Domingo, REP. DOMINICANA
Tel: 1-809-537 89 77
kad@kiskeya-alternative.org www.kiskeya-alternative.org/cangonet/
*Enterprising organization focusing on ecotourism as well as indigenous dance. Works mostly in the Caribbean.*

Organization of American States — Tourism Unit
www.oas.org/tourism
*Multinational group charged with promoting both tourism and development in the region.*

USAID
www.usaid.gov/
*The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is the US government agency responsible for foreign assistance. The Nature Conservancy, USAID and other partners in the Caribbean and Latin America have developed the Parks in Peril program — an emergency effort to safeguard the most important and imperiled natural areas in the tropical world, such as cloud forests, tropical forests and savannas. By bringing on-site management to 37 critical areas since 1990, Parks in Peril has protected more than 28 million acres in 15 countries.*
www.parksinperil.org

# Chapter 3
# Ecotourism and Protected Areas

## Introduction

By definition, ecotourism is about traveling to and visiting natural areas, places where nature still exists in a relatively unaltered state. In a world where population pressure and increased resource consumption are placing huge demands upon our natural resource base, natural areas are increasingly hard to find. At the same time, our global cultural heritage is under attack, making it increasingly difficult to learn from other cultures and to remain in touch with cultural roots throughout the world. Today, the remaining natural areas are mostly protected in some way. Ecotourism attractions, whether they are wildlife viewing possibilities or dramatic natural landscapes, tend to be found in these protected natural areas.

Protected areas began evolving in the 19th century largely as a response to these pressures. By "protected area" we mean a piece of land (or body of water) which is characterized by the following:

1. The area has defined borders.
2. The area is managed and protected by an identifiable entity or individual, usually a government agency. Increasingly, though, governments are delegating responsibility for protected areas to other entities that are private, public or a combination thereof.
3. The area has established conservation objectives that its management pursues.

The rapid increase in the numbers and territorial coverage of protected areas since the 1960s coincides with more rapid increases in the aforementioned pressures. Traditionally, protected areas are set aside and managed by government authorities in order to protect endangered species or examples of outstanding scenic beauty. In much of the southern hemisphere, financial pressures on government budgets, global trends towards decentralization and a society which increasingly values the role of nongovernmental participation have caused some profound changes in the way protected areas are being administered and managed.

These changes are manifested in two major ways:

1. Protected areas are increasingly expected to generate some portion of the funding necessary for their own management.
2. Many other organizations, both private and public, are becoming involved in the management and conservation of protected areas, either in partnership with the traditional government agencies in charge of protected areas or by managing their own protected areas.

An additional responsibility of park managers is to bring conservation to the people. Without a constituency for conservation, we will ultimately fail. This constituency can be local, national and international. Ecotourism is crucial for achieving this goal and not just as a source of conservation finance. The link between ecotourism and protected areas is therefore inevitable and profound.

## The Role of Ecotourism

Tourism and ecotourism are usually a part of the management strategy for a protected area. The degree to which tourism activities are pursued depends upon the priority assigned to them by the area managers, who in turn should be guided by a planning document prepared for that purpose. The planning document (or management plan) should be the result of a comprehensive evaluation of the area's natural and cultural resource base. It determines the stresses, their sources and the real threats to the area's natural and cultural integrity, as well as the strategies to reduce these threats. The plan should define the area's long-term management objectives and a zoning scheme that identifies where certain activities may take place (see Part II, Chapter 4).

What we have is a coming together of two different forces to create a symbiotic relationship: ecotourism needs protected areas, and protected areas need ecotourism.

Ecotourism is increasingly being considered as a management strategy for protected areas that, if imple-

**Box 3.1 Lessons from the Galapagos National Park, Ecuador**

The Galapagos National Park is located in the Galapagos Islands and lies on the equator about 1,000 kilometers off the coast of Ecuador. Both the terrestrial national park and the Galapagos Marine Reserve are internationally recognized for their extraordinary ecosystems, their remarkable state of conservation, their easily observable evolutionary processes, their rich biodiversity and the high level of endemism of their plant and animal species.

Although the national park was created in 1959, active park administration and organized tourism did not begin until 1968. Both park administrators and tourism industry representatives quickly realized that if they did not work together to ensure that tourism was carried out responsibly, the unique characteristics of the Galapagos ecosystem could be greatly deteriorated. A comprehensive management plan for the park was prepared in 1974 which included a list of approved visitor sites and a zoning system that determined where tourism (and other activities) would occur.

The park service, together with the Charles Darwin Research Station (CDRS), instituted a naturalist guide system in 1975. All tour groups are required to travel with a guide, and all guides are required to pass a training course in order to receive a license to work in the park. This requirement has encouraged many local residents to become involved with tourism and, via the training course and their experiences in the park, to increasingly value conservation of the resources of the park and the reserve. The guide system has also helped to enforce park regulations and to increase the park management's presence throughout its 7,000 sq. km. of territory. Guides have also been instrumental in ensuring that visitors become educated about the incredible conservation value that the Galapagos Islands represent.

The first management plan established a maximum capacity of 12,000 visitors per year for the park, a figure which was rapidly surpassed as tourism mushroomed to its present level of approximately 66,000 visitors annually (Benitez, 2001). While several efforts have been made over the years to establish a carrying capacity for the park, it has been difficult to enforce the limits due to the complexity and number of factors that contribute to tourism in the Galapagos National Park. It has gradually become evident that managing the individual visitor sites for their individual capacities as well as aggressively monitoring visitor impacts are more effective ways to manage tourism numbers. The park authorities adjust boat itineraries to ensure that visitor numbers are kept within established site visitation limits.

The original entrance fee of US$6 has now reached US$100. This has not reduced the flow of visitors to the islands, but it has allowed the Ecuadorian government to capture a greater share of tourist expenditure there. For many years, all of the income generated by the Galapagos National Park returned to the national treasury. With the creation of the Marine Reserve and the consequent greater responsibility of protecting the marine portions of the Galapagos Islands, which could not be achieved without the support and participation of several government entities, the entrance fee receipts are currently divided between the national park, local municipalities, the CDRS and other government agencies. It is expected that this funding distribution will generate a more holistic approach to environmental protection in the Galapagos Islands.

Recent illegal fishing in the marine reserve has created a great deal of conflict between conservationists and resource exploitation interests. The various stakeholders, led by the park and the CDRS, have established a process of conflict resolution and participatory planning for the marine ecosystem called Participatory Management (Benitez, 2001). The principal stakeholders sit down at the same table and reach conclusions about catch size, locations for fishing and other related matters. Their first efforts led to a Special Law for the Galapagos in 1998 which has helped settle many issues related to the marine reserve as well as tourism in the islands. Many conflicts could have been avoided if Participatory Management had been in place when tourism was beginning.

Tourism in the Galapagos Islands began when "ecotourism" did not exist. Yet, through trial and error, park managers and tourism industry representatives have gradually created a situation which closely approximates what ecotourism represents: benefits to the community, the private sector and resource conservation; visitor education; economic sustainability for the national park; and visitor impact management. It has not been easy nor is the present situation perfect. Yet an important group of diverse interests has been created which will ensure that the unique qualities of the Galapagos Islands will continue to be protected.

mented appropriately, constitutes an ideal sustainable activity. It is designed to:

- ❖ have minimum impact upon the ecosystem;
- ❖ contribute economically to local communities;
- ❖ be respectful of local cultures;
- ❖ be developed using participatory processes which involve all stakeholders; and
- ❖ be monitored in order to detect negative and positive impacts.

There are many compelling reasons why conservationists and protected area managers are considering ecotourism as a protected area management tool (see the Galapagos Islands case in Box 3.1). These include the following:

1. Conventional tourism sometimes appears as a source of stress on the biodiversity of a protected area. In other cases, ecotourism can be regarded as an appropriate strategy for addressing threats to conservation targets. Nature tourists are presently going to protected areas in growing numbers. At a minimum, managers must control tourism's negative impacts. Even if elaborate visitor centers and extensive tourism businesses are not created, measures must be taken to ensure that these growing numbers of visitors do not negatively impact the biodiversity values of a protected area. These measures include increasing staff, developing monitoring systems and refining environmental education efforts. Managing visitors and minimizing impacts is a primary responsibility of protected area managers.
2. Ecotourism can capture economic benefits for protected areas. Visitors with no place to spend money are missed opportunities. Hundreds of thousands of dollars of potential revenue currently are being lost both to protected area managers and local communities because tourists do not have adequate opportunities to pay fees and buy goods and services.
3. Properly implemented, ecotourism can become an important force for improving relations between local communities and protected area administrations. This relationship is perhaps the most difficult aspect of ecotourism since it involves levels of communication and trust between different cultures and perspectives that have traditionally been difficult to achieve.
4. Ecotourism can provide a better option than other competing economic activities for natural areas. Many natural areas are threatened and need to be fortified in order to survive; ecotourism may help guard against some of these threats and competing land uses. For example, a successful ecotourism program can forestall implementation of logging in an area by generating greater revenues, especially over the long term.
5. By implementing ecotourism in protected areas, we are demonstrating that tourism need not be massive and destructive. We are demonstrating that, even within the fragile environment of protected areas, sustainable development can work.

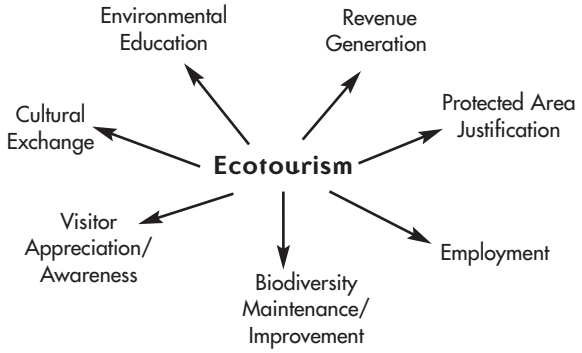
## Opportunities and Threats

Tourism presents a mix of opportunities and threats for protected areas. Ecotourism seeks to increase opportunities and to reduce threats. If an opportunity is realized, then it becomes a benefit. If a threat is not avoided, then it becomes a cost. There are no automatic benefits associated with ecotourism; success depends on good planning and management. Carelessly planned or poorly implemented ecotourism projects can easily become conventional tourism projects with all of the associated negative impacts.

Opportunities and threats, and consequently benefits and costs, will vary from situation to situation, from group to group and from individual to individual within groups. Benefits to one group may be costs to another. Determining which opportunities to pursue and which threats to abate is a subjective decision that can best be made by involving all stakeholders. Ranking the importance of each benefit is part of the compromising involved in the ecotourism planning process.

The entire spectrum of ecotourism's opportunities and threats does not apply to every protected area. For example, in a protected area that attracts primarily domestic visitors, opportunities to generate foreign exchange are limited, but good opportunities may exist to raise conservation awareness locally. Environmental degradation will vary depending on the fragility of natural resources and the types of activities that are permitted. The circum-

**Figure 3.1 Ecotourism as an Opportunity**



stances of each protected area create a particular set of opportunities and threats.

The remainder of this chapter identifies and describes the opportunities and threats that tourism development represents for a protected area.

## Potential Opportunities of Ecotourism

### Revenue Generation

Bringing money into protected areas is a major concern of conservationists. Governmental funds available for protected areas have been decreasing globally, and many important natural areas will not survive without new sources of revenue. Tourism offers opportunities to generate revenue in diverse ways, such as entrance fees, user fees, concessions to the private sector and donations. New funds allow protected area managers to handle tourists better and to hold the line against other threats.

***Entrance or visitor use fees*** are charged directly to visitors to see and experience an area. Collected at the gate, entrance fees have various structures. In some cases, a flat fee is charged. In other cases, multi-fee systems are established with various rates for different types of users. Typically, foreign tourists are charged more than local visitors are. User fees are charged for specific activities or for using special equipment in a protected area, such as electrical hook-ups when camping or various rental fees.

***Private sector concessions*** include snack bars, restaurants, lodges, gift shops, canoe rentals and tour guides. All of these can be privately owned or managed with a portion of the profits returned to the protected area. This arrangement is favorable because it reduces business responsibilities assigned to untrained or uninterested protected area personnel. Concessions allow protected areas to benefit from the energy and profits of private sector enterprises. However, concessions must be negotiated for the protected area's long-term benefit and must be monitored closely. This monitoring ensures, for example, that the concessionaire is complying with contracted services such as trash removal, trail maintenance, etc.

***Donations*** may be solicited through a simple box at the door or perhaps via a more sophisticated campaign such as an "adopt-an-endangered-species" program. Protected areas with threatened or unique plants and animals can request financial assistance for them. Visitors who have just completed a fascinating nature experience are a perfect audience for this type of appeal. Many protected areas report a high rate of success with setting up donation programs for specific campaigns. For example, Fundación Natura in Colombia and ANCON in Panama have successful "adopt-a-hectare" programs. The Galapagos Islands National Park has a successful "Friends of Galapagos" program. Such programs and funds should be established parts of any ecotourism program to a protected area. Ecotourists *want* to contribute to conservation — let's not deny them the opportunity!

There may be other ways tourism can bring revenue to protected areas. For example, visitors may also be "virtual," which entails visiting a web site that has been established for a protected area. Donations may also be solicited from a much larger audience of such virtual visitors. For some protected areas, tourism can become the primary revenue generator. For others, it will be only one of many sources of financial contributions. But for almost all protected areas, visitors should be considered a readily available and accessible income source that should be exploited equitably for long-term sustainability and to promote return visits.

A key issue is to ensure that money generated through tourism stays within the protected area and is used for conservation purposes. Refer to Volume II, Part I, Chapter 5, "Revenue Generating Mechanisms," for more information on this topic.

### Employment Creation

New jobs are often cited as the biggest gain from tourism. Protected areas may hire new guides, guards, researchers or managers to meet increased ecotourism demands. In surrounding communities, residents may become employed as taxi drivers, tour guides, lodge owners or handicraft makers, or they may participate in other tourism enterprises.

In addition, other types of employment may be augmented indirectly through tourism. More bricklayers may be needed for construction. More vegetables may be needed at new restaurants. More cloth may be needed to make souvenirs. Many employment sources are enhanced as tourism grows.

In some cases, community residents are good candidates for tourism jobs because they know the local environment well. Residents are ideal sources of information; for example, they can tell visitors why certain plants flower at particular times and what animals are attracted to them. As indigenous residents of the area, community members have much to offer in ecotourism jobs. However, care must be taken to protect the rights (sometimes referred to as intellectual property rights) of

local peoples so that their knowledge is not exploited or appropriated unfairly by visitors or a tourism program.

The Kimana Group Ranch, outside of Amboseli National Park in Kenya, gained international attention for establishing the first community wildlife sanctuary in Africa. Managed by the Masai ranchers, Kimana has its own warden, guides, entry gate and lodge concessions (Western, 1997).

We should not overstate the value of ecotourism employment in rural areas. There are a few important caveats to consider. First, while there is often talk of big tourism dollars, ecotourism will generally not be an economic bonanza for an entire community. More realistically, it will generate some jobs, depending on how popular the protected area is, but will not automatically become an income provider for hundreds of people. Furthermore, many ecotourism jobs will be part time and seasonal and should be considered only supplemental to other sources of income. Overall, ecotourism employment will likely be limited for most communities.

A second concern about ecotourism employment is the nature of jobs for communities. Typically, few management and ownership positions are available. Tourism will always have many service positions, because it is a labor-intensive industry. But communities may resent ecotourism if their members are not represented in the higher levels of employment. The profitability of tourism for local residents is minimized if they are offered only menial jobs and not given opportunities for advancement. Additionally, gender inequities may be generated while the higher paying guiding and management jobs all go to men and women are restricted to lower paying laundry, cleaning and cooking positions.

Another hurdle to ecotourism employment is the issue of training. For many residents, new employment is a major personal and professional transition. It sounds good on paper that former loggers may become tour guides, thereby conserving the trees they used to cut. But redirecting careers is a big undertaking. New job candidates need information on all facets of ecotourism management. They need training in business development as well as such basics as languages, food preparation, first aid, motorboat maintenance, interpretation, group management, etc. They need access to international markets. New tourism jobs require new skills and therefore training. Ecotourism project plans need to budget for these training costs over the long term.

In addition, there are many social and cultural considerations in switching jobs; it involves lifestyle changes. Diversifying into nature tourism jobs may change the way communities look and operate. Conflicts among residents may develop. For example, tourism jobs are likely higher paying than traditional sources of income. Within a community, a farmer may earn the equivalent of US$50 a month. A neighbor working as a tour guide may earn the same amount with one tip from a wealthy tourist. Will these inequalities create jealousies? How are these resolved? Who gets the coveted tourism jobs if there are more candidates than opportunities? Does a community want to become a tourist destination if it means losing traditional economic foundations, such as agriculture?

One important issue to keep in mind when evaluating the effectiveness of ecotourism jobs is what employment alternatives the local populations have. In many cases, ecotourism may be the best option if the other potential land uses are more threatening to the survival of the area's natural resources, even if these ecotourism jobs are few and flawed. In analyzing ecotourism jobs, it is essential to keep in mind their relationship to threats to the biodiversity of an area. For more discussion of ecotourism and communities, please refer to the chapter in Volume II, Part II, "Developing Ecotourism with Local Communities."

### Justification for Protected Areas

Visitors, or the potential to attract visitors, are among the reasons that government officials and residents support protected areas. For government officials, declaring areas protected and providing the financial assistance to maintain them is often a difficult process. These officials face many competing interests in making decisions about how to use land and marine resources. Conserving protected areas requires long-term vision; this is often a challenge for government officials, especially when confronted with the prospect of short-term financial gains for logging, mining and agriculture activities.

But as government officials review land and water-use options, nature tourism may sway them to provide protected status to an area or strengthen the protective status of an existing protected area or reserve, particularly if it can generate income and provide other national benefits. International tourism motivates government officials to think more about the importance of managing natural areas. Visitors are more likely to visit and support a natural area if it is protected, which in turn adds justification to the existence of protected areas.

Visitation to the area may be the impetus for residents near protected areas, or potential protected areas, to support the continued protection of these areas.

### A Stronger Economy

Tourists visiting nature sites boost economies at the local, regional and national levels. If tourism brings jobs to residents at the local level, they then have more money to spend locally, and economic activity within the area increases.

The same pattern may occur at the regional and national levels. Nature tourists arrive in the capital city of a country. They may stay for a few days or travel to the countryside. Along the way they use hotels, restaurants, shops, guide services and transportation systems. Typically, a multitude of businesses benefit directly from nature tourists. Although these businesses usually are set up to accommodate the broader groups of international and national tourists, nature tourists are an added market. Also, some operations whisk visitors directly from the airport to a full itinerary in a private protected area, thus leaving the visitor no opportunity to spend money in local communities. In such cases, it is important to ensure that there are mechanisms such as airport taxes to obtain at least some tourist revenue. Industries that support tourism, such as manufacturing and farming, are also affected by numbers of tourists. Growing ecotourism creates a stronger economy throughout the country.

National governments can also generate tourism dollars through import duties and taxes. For example, researchers determined that the Belizean government earned BZ$7 million from taxes on fuel used in the tourism industry (Lindberg and Enriquez, 1994). Other taxes include occupancy taxes (directly to hotels) or departure taxes (directly to tourists). These taxes are generally a good way to target visitors directly while avoiding inflationary problems with local populations. Also, these charges need not adversely affect demand. For example, nature tourists do not stay away from Belize because they have to pay a US$22.50 departure tax. This income is a big help to the national economy, with portions supporting the protected area system.

### Environmental Education

Nature tourists provide an ideal audience for environmental education. During an exciting nature hike, visitors are eager to learn about the local habitats. They want to hear about animal behavior and plant uses as well as the challenges of conserving these resources. Many want to know the economic, political and social issues that surround conservation.

Nature guides are one critical source of environmental education. Visitor surveys show that good guides are a key factor in a trip's success. For example, in 1996 the RARE Center for Tropical Conservation asked 60 conservation groups in Latin America to identify their most urgent obstacle to developing ecotourism; the lack of well-trained nature guides ranked second in their concerns (Jenks, 1997). See Volume II, Part I, Chapter 7 for more information about naturalist guides.

Visitor centers with displays, printed materials and videos are also an excellent means of environmental education. Additionally, interpretation in the form of trail signage can give important biological information and conservation messages. Interpretation for visitors is becoming increasingly creative and interactive.

Environmental education is an equally important opportunity to reach national visitors. Whether they are local school children learning about the resources that are valuable in their daily lives, or travelers from neighboring regions learning about the significance of their national protected areas, citizens are a key audience. Conservation messages have a special urgency for them.

Environmental education is most effective when pre and post-trip information is made available. Preparation encourages visitors to think about appropriate behavior, thereby minimizing negative impacts, and the use

**Box 3.2 The Point-A-Pierre Wild Fowl Trust in Trinidad**

The Point-A-Pierre Wild Fowl Trust is an environmental NGO in Trinidad that has expanded to be a major environmental education facility in the country. Located in the center of the island's largest petro-chemical and oil refinery complex, the Trust was established 30 years ago and now comprises 23 hectares (60 acres) of natural wilderness area and two large lakes.

With an original mandate to establish a breeding area for water birds, the Trust recognized the important role of educating people about this mission. Now more than 16,000 visitors come to the environmental education center annually. In addition to a successful captive-breeding program, the Trust has helped thousands of residents and foreigners, from school children to oil workers, become more informed about conservation challenges in Trinidad.

adapted from Shephard, 1994

of follow-up materials continues the environmental education process.

### Appreciation and Pride

Appreciation and pride are less tangible benefits than the others listed here, but they can lead to tangible actions. It is common for people not to fully appreciate their surroundings and to take what they have for granted. Often, it is outsiders who take a fresh look and add value to our resources. This phenomenon happens both in big cities and in remote natural areas. Although rural residents who have grown up among spectacular wilderness areas generally understand the intricacies of nature and value its role in their lives, many have little idea of the global importance of their natural resources. Many rural people do not realize the magnitude of the global attention, study and concern that their homelands receive.

**Box 3.3 National Plan for Ecotourism Development in Guyana**

The country of Guyana provides an example of how tourism can promote conservation efforts. With pristine rainforest, rugged mountains, expansive savannas and roaring rivers, it has many tropical birds, giant river otters, black caiman and the rare harpy eagle. Guyana is relatively pristine. In order to keep resources intact, Guyana is creating a system of protected areas and reserves and creating a National Plan for Ecotourism Development.

As part of this planning process, Guyana's only national park, Kaieteur, has been chosen to demonstrate how developing tourism can augment conservation efforts. The entire national park system is then expected to serve as a foundation for ecotourism development. The national government, with the assistance of outside advisors, is taking a lead role in establishing a plan and determining policies so that ecotourism will support its newly created protected areas.

adapted from Andersen, 1996

On the other hand, adventurous nature tourists are often wildly enthusiastic about exploring new wilderness sites. They pour into small communities with video cameras and document all they see. Journalists from National Geographic and other magazines write inspiring stories with glossy photos. Natural sites that were once secret, especially in tropical countries, are being promoted with unprecedented fervor.

Native peoples are often surprised at the level of outside interest in their natural resources and in their culture. In most cases, however, they see their surroundings in a new light after international exposure. They gain a new appreciation for the nearby natural areas and wildlife that attract tourists. If the tourism experience is managed with proper community participation and control, it can also lead to greater appreciation by a community of its own culture, the same culture which visitors increasingly seek to learn about and admire.

### Improved Conservation Efforts

As a result of growing appreciation and pride, conservation efforts often increase. Many residents are motivated to protect their areas and may change their patterns of resource use. Cultivation practices may be altered. Litter on roads may be cleaned up. Water may be better managed. Local populations often learn more about conservation and modify their daily habits because of tourism.

Awareness often increases at the national level also, resulting in such improved conservation efforts as mandating and supporting protected areas. Even at the international level, ecotourism may engender an international constituency for improved conservation efforts and support for particular protected areas. International and local visitors to a protected area are likely to rally to its defense if a valuable area is being threatened. For example, when illegal oil exploration was taking place in the Cuyabeno Wildlife Reserve in Ecuador in 1993, indigenous Quichua and Cofan communities which were very involved in ecotourism turned to environmentalists and tour operators in the region for support. The tour operators encouraged their guests to participate in what became a decisive campaign of international letter writing to stop the threat to the reserve and to the livelihoods of the local communities.

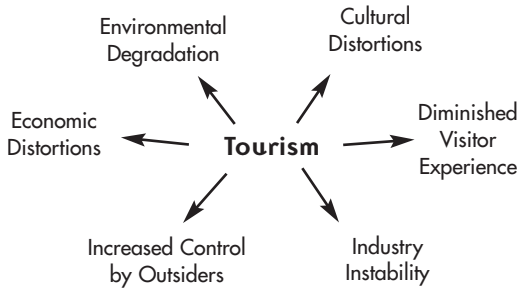
## Potential Tourism Threats

### Environmental Degradation

This is the problem most commonly associated with tourism in protected areas. Visitors may destroy the very resources they come to see. Degradation happens in many ways and in varying degrees. Much of tourism's damage to natural resources is visible: trampled vegetation, trail erosion and litter.

Tourists pose other kinds of threats to protected areas. In addition to surface damage, they affect the intricate workings of nature, causing subtle changes and problems including the alteration of such animal behav-

**Figure 3.2 Potential Tourism Threats**




ior as eating habits, migration and reproduction. Many changes are difficult to detect, but all are important indicators of the health of natural resources.

Protected area managers are starting to track these changes as equipment and methods become more sophisticated. Managers need strong baseline data about protected areas' flora and fauna. They also need good monitoring programs to document and analyze changes, allowing us to determine best practices of minimizing environmental degradation. Ecotourism planning should involve an analysis of the expected volume of visitor traffic and its potential impact on the protected area.

Visitors can also cause negative environmental impacts to surrounding lands. In some cases, attention is focused on tourism's impacts to residential water supply. Recent research examined water quantity and wastewater treatment issues related to tourism growth in the towns of Banff and Canmore in Canada. These towns surround a major tourist destination, Banff National Park, and received more than five million visitors in 1995 (Draper, 1997). For more information on mitigation of environmental impacts, refer to Volume II, Part I, Chapter 3, "Visitor Site Planning and Design" and Chapter 6, "Visitor Impact Management."

**Box 3.4 Environmental Impacts of Tourism in Kibale Forest Reserve, Uganda**

In 1992, Kibale Forest Reserve in Uganda was converted into a national park. Visitor trails and a visitor center were established, and visitation increased from 1,300 in 1992 to 5,000 in 1996. Although visitor numbers were still relatively low in this 560 sq. km. park, the Uganda Wildlife Authority and the managers of Kibale National Park were concerned about tourism's environmental impacts.

Having conducted impact assessments, researchers concluded that more than three-quarters of the camping sites within the area had experienced some degradation and that 10-30% of the trails were eroding, even after such a short exposure to visitors. Researchers are promoting a long-term impact management strategy.

adapted from Obua and Harding, 1997

### Economic Instability

Ecotourism, like other forms of tourism, can be an unstable source of income. Many external factors influence tourism demand. These factors are completely outside the control of tourist destinations yet affect levels of visitation. For example, political conflict or rumors of unsafe conditions within a region or country can discourage international visitors for years. Natural disasters, such as hurricanes, can easily destroy tourism infrastructure at marine sites. In addition, fluctuations in international currency can lead visitors to some countries and away from others.

These factors all play major roles in the decision to travel. No matter how much protected area managers and communities prepare, build and promote, much of tourism demand is determined by outside circumstances. Visitor numbers can shift dramatically with little warning and greatly affect the financial status of small tourism businesses. Owners and managers of microenterprises in remote areas do not typically have a diversity of employment options at their disposal should their businesses fail. A decline in tourism can mean disaster not only for individuals but for whole communities if their economies are dependent on the volatile nature tourism industry.

### Crowding

A sense of crowding can be a problem within both communities and nature sites. Tourists may start to compete with residents for space. In some bigger communities with commercial centers, lines may get longer at grocery stores. Residents may have to wait for dinner at the local restaurants. Crowds can also be a nuisance for visitors, many of whom are seeking a quiet nature trip. International tourists may be disappointed to have traveled long distances only to be overwhelmed by other tourists.

Residents may also be disturbed by too many visi-

**Box 3.5 Ecotourism's Instability — Central Africa**

Political conflict can contribute to ecotourism's instability. In the Parc des Volcans in Rwanda, the mountain gorilla was subjected to intense pressure from poaching and loss of habitat during the 1960s and 1970s resulting in a major decline in the gorilla population. There were fewer than 400 individuals in the wild. In response, the Mountain Gorilla Project was established in 1979 to assist the Rwanda National Park Service and the National Tourism Bureau in protecting the Parc des Volcans, where more than a third of the gorillas lived.

Tourism took off and started bringing substantial economic benefits to local communities and the national economy. Led by local guides, tourists paid US$180 per visit, and the park became the third most important source of foreign exchange for the country. The conservation benefits were also significant — the gorilla population stabilized and began to increase.

In the early 1990s, a civil war intensified in Rwanda. Reports of human devastation were horrific, and tourism stopped. Interestingly, both sides of the conflict made great efforts to protect the gorillas and their habitat because the combatants understood their economic value. But international tourism will not be the same for this country for many years, if ever. In addition to having to reconstruct its human communities, Rwanda faced enormous economic losses. Local residents and the national government experienced dramatic changes in incomes when nature tourism demand shifted.

As a consequence of the loss of access to the Parc des Volcans, visitation greatly increased at Bwindi National Park in neighboring Uganda, also home to a population of gorillas. Several lodges were constructed near the park to house the growing number of tourists. But in 1999 the conflict in Rwanda tragically overflowed into Bwindi, and armed fighters killed several tourists and park guards. Tourism to the region stopped immediately, and it will be a long time before Bwindi National Park reaches the previous levels of visitation.

adapted from Boo, 1998

tors at their local sites. These are the places they knew while growing up before they became international attractions. If access to these treasured spots becomes difficult, tensions often grow.

### Excessive Development

When a location becomes a popular tourism destination, local entrepreneurs will create lodging, restaurant and other services to cater to visitors' needs. In some cases where tourism demand is strong, people from other parts of the country will move to a community to take advantage of the increased economic opportunity. With the increased need for tourism services comes increased infrastructure demands: hotels, restaurants and homes for recently-arrived employees or entrepreneurs. These demands place pressure on basic services such as water supplies, wastewater treatment, electricity, etc. In addition to the burden put upon municipal services, increased development typically occurs with minimal planning and can become an aesthetic as well as an ecological problem for both the community and the protected area.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, in order to flourish, ecotourism requires that natural and cultural resources be protected. Governments increasingly partner with conservation NGOs to administer and protect natural areas. While local communities protect their territories and holdings in order to attract ecotourism development, NGOs, private companies and individuals create private reserves that often have a combined conservation and ecotourism business mission. Tourism brings a range of threats and opportunities that must be evaluated before deciding to proceed with a conventional tourism or ecotourism development project. Threats can include: environmental degradation, cultural distortions, economic distortions, increased control by outsiders and industry instability. Any or all of these could result in diminished visitor experience, and congestion may occur at popular visitor sites.

Ecotourism has the potential to reduce the threats posed by conventional tourism to natural areas and to the people who live in and around them via income generation for: conservation, local enterprise and employment, cultural exchange, environmental education, protected area justification and visitor appreciation. Ecotourism requires rigorous planning and management, however, to realize this potential.

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The Charles Darwin Foundation — www.galapagos.org
*Information and news about the Galapagos National Park and the Charles Darwin Research Station.*

Fundación Natura, Colombia — www.natura.org.co/

PARKS Magazine
*Published three times a year by IUCN, the World Conservation Union. Information about subscriptions can be obtained by writing to: 36 Kingfisher Court, Hambridge Rd, Newbury, RG14 5SJ, UK.*

RARE Center for Tropical Conservation — www.rarecenter.org
*RARE Center's mission is to protect wildlands of globally significant biological diversity by empowering local people to benefit from their preservation.*

World Commission on Protected Areas, associated with IUCN, the World Conservation Union — www.wcpa.iucn.org
*The WCPA website includes news about the commission, its task forces, meetings and publications. Publications may be downloaded free of charge.*

Chapter 4

# Ecotourism and Local Communities

## Introduction

Communities are the traditional stewards of many of the world's natural areas, but since the great waves of colonization of tropical countries by Europeans they have largely been excluded from management decisions with respect to their development and even their self determination. In recent decades, this exclusion has been manifest in economic development, not least in the tourism sector. Tourism tends to be managed by private companies located in distant cities and even foreign countries. Traditionally, the state has sought to deny local people access to and participation in activities in protected natural areas. Consequently, community members have not been recognized as stakeholders and have been marginalized from nature tourism opportunities around the world.

## Definition of Community

Community refers to a heterogeneous group of people who share residence in the same geographic area and access a set of local natural resources. The degree of social cohesion and differentiation, strength of common beliefs and institutions, cultural diversity and other factors vary widely within and among communities (Schmink, 1999).

## The Role of the Community in Ecotourism

In recent years, conservationists have come to recognize the crucial role rural and coastal communities play in conserving biodiversity; many protected area managers have developed mechanisms to incorporate these communities as stakeholders into the planning and management process. At the same time, the growing interest by tourists in learning from and experiencing different cultures has led the tourism industry to incorporate communities into its activities. This has led to a growing awareness by communities of the opportunities tourism presents. Where communities are well organized and have title to traditional lands they have been more successful in capturing a greater share of tourism spending in natural areas. In the 1990s, numerous indigenous and other local groups adopted ecotourism as part of their development strategy (Wesche, 1996).

One of ecotourism's greatest contributions to conservation is the degree to which it can shift community activities from the "threats" category to that of "opportunities," i.e., those activities which contribute to sustainable development and the achievement of an area's conservation goals.

In order to maximize the conservation benefits of an ecotourism activity, it is necessary to define how local stakeholders can participate in its planning and management (see Volume II, Part II for a more detailed treatment).

Not all communities or community members will wish to be involved in tourism activities, and planners and developers should respect this. For those that do seek involvement, they may choose from a range of degrees of participation, including:

- renting land to an operator to develop while simply monitoring impacts;
- working as occasional, part-time or full-time staff for private tour operators;
- providing services to private operators such as food preparation, guiding, transport or accommodation, or a combination of the above;
- forming joint ventures with private tour operators where the community provides most services while the private sector partner manages marketing, logistics and possibly bilingual guides; and
- operating as independent community-based programs.

The role chosen by a community should be based, among other things, on its interest, organizational capacity, experience, cultural sensitivity, presence of strong leadership, quality of natural and cultural resources, tourism demand, training opportunities, availability of partners and private sector interest.

It may be that a community has a great deal of interest in developing ecotourism, but it may not be a viable

option because of one of the above factors. It is extremely important that the financial feasibility of an ecotourism project be evaluated before proceeding with infrastructure development (see Volume II, Part II). Conservation NGOs have frequently looked to community ecotourism as a solution to compatible economic development, but community expectations have often been raised only to be dashed when the project fails to generate the anticipated benefits.

It is crucial that the enthusiasm of conservationists and communities be tempered with preliminary site evaluations (see Part II, Chapter 2), good participatory planning and feasibility analysis.

**Figure 4.1 Essential Elements for Ecotourism in a Community Setting**

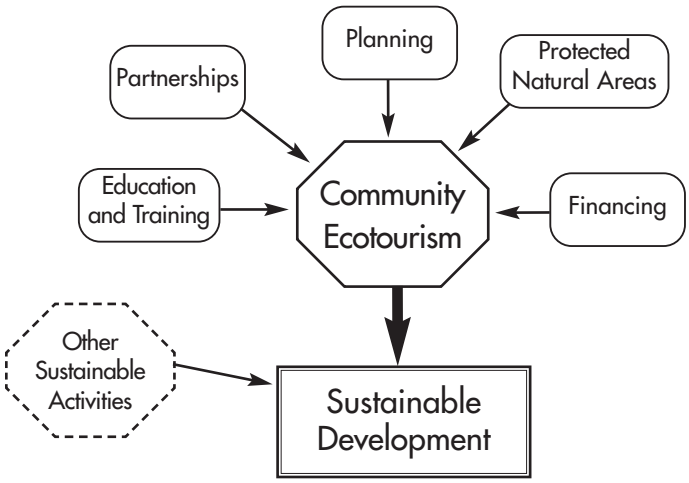


Figure 4.1 illustrates the multiple and diverse elements essential for ensuring that communities fulfil their role in ecotourism development.

## Protected Areas and Ecotourism

For ecotourism to thrive, the attractions must be protected. These attractions may be within a national park or within a community reserve. The buffer zones of national parks can be ideal places for communities to establish reserves to facilitate ecotourism activities. National park managers should seek to collaborate with such communities and integrate them into the management planning. They may also wish to dedicate a percentage of income generated from visitor use fees to neighboring community compatible economic development projects, as is the case with the Galapagos National Park (Government of Ecuador, 1998).

## Potential Positive Impacts

### Sustainable Income

When communities engage in ecotourism, new sources of income can be generated for the community as a whole as well as through individual employment

**Table 4.1 Potential Impacts of Tourism in Communities**

| | POSITIVE (with community participation) | | NEGATIVE (without community participation) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | For communities | For protected areas | For communities | For protected areas |
| 1. | Sustainable income | Reduced threats and compatible economic development (CED) | Erosion of natural resource base | Incompatible economic development |
| 2. | Improved services | Reduced threats and CED | Growing economic inequity | Poaching, overuse of natural resources |
| 3. | Cultural empowerment | Reduced threats and CED | Cultural erosion | Alienation from traditional sustainable use |

opportunities. This income could be generated through collecting fees for access to trails, providing accommodation or guiding services, preparing and selling food and handicrafts and so on.

This income will likely reduce dependency on unsustainable activities such as logging. However, it is important that the planning process avoid creating an overdependence on tourism which could lead to erosion of the quality of the communities' natural and cultural attractions as well as to increased economic vulnerability to economic fluctuations in the marketplace which are beyond their control.

### Improved Services

To the degree that the community as a whole receives new income from, for example, fees paid to a community fund, there is the potential for improving health and education services. These fees can have the long-term effect of improving conservation consciousness within the community and reducing threats. Better health services can improve the overall attractiveness of a community and give it the upper hand in attracting tourism.

### Cultural Empowerment and Cultural Exchange

Visits with traditional and indigenous communities are often the highlights of a trip to a natural area. Natural attractions take on an added level of interest for tourists if they can relate to them through the eyes and words of people who live with them. The opportunity to learn from a traditional culture is increasingly valued by travelers, and community participation adds considerable value to an ecotourism program. At the same time, traditional communities can feel greater self-esteem as a result of the respectful interest shown by visitors, especially if outside attitudes have tended to belittle them.

However, the success of such a visit depends upon local residents being empowered by, and in control of, the process and situation. Tourists should also be prepared to share in a two-way cultural exchange, though it is important to remember that some communities are not interested in cultural exchanges with outsiders. These exchanges usually sensitize visitors, broaden their thinking about the world and help them understand more clearly the context of conservation.

## Potential Negative Impacts

### Price Increases

Price increases may become a problem when visitors and local residents want the same goods and services, including groceries, gasoline and restaurants. Prices are likely to escalate because outsiders are willing to pay much more for goods and services than the local market dictates.

Huaorani guide and community ecotourism coordinator Moi Enomenga in the Ecuadorian Amazon © Andy Drumm

There are a few possible solutions for this inflation. One is to have two-tiered price systems — one for residents, one for visitors. Vendors and entrepreneurs can then take advantage of visitors' relative affluence while respecting local residents' ability to pay. Different price systems may be hard to set up and execute, but they allow for an equitable balance between the income levels of both groups.

A similar solution that communities often enact is to create goods and services exclusively for tourists. Certain foods or handicrafts are produced for the tourist market alone, and prices are established accordingly. These alternatives for tourists often help local people maintain access to their traditional products.

Another solution to rising prices is to increase the supply of goods and services. Some communities are unable to do this, but others may realize a means for growth and economic development. Tourists are not just competitors, they are new markets to serve.

Tourism may also spark increases in land and real estate prices that can be devastating for local residents. When visitors experience new and exciting places, some want to buy the land they visit, especially since prices are often low compared with costs at home. Hotel developers and other tourism businesses also come in search of land. Outside individuals and companies often price residents out of the local market. This situation leads to housing shortages for local residents and inadequate land for their economic activities.

### Outside Control

A threat related to price increases is that of outsiders taking "too much" control of tourist areas. This is often a subjective call but can be a source of concern for residents and others who care about these areas. Outside developers and investors have plentiful financial resources and years of experience in tourism development. Local residents may be squeezed out of business opportunities if they cannot match the outside expertise and funding.

Ecotourism should be used as a tool for increasing a community's ability to manage its own affairs, for empowering itself, but this is not what usually occurs. Outside tourism interests frequently take over potentially successful ecotourism projects, leaving local people in supporting positions only. The consequence is a lack of ownership of, or responsibility for, the results. Communities may start to resent tourism if they feel they have no control over it.

### Economic Leakage

An economic concept often equated with outside control is "leakage." Leakage happens primarily when local tourism businesses are not available or adequate for the demand. Seeing a gap, international businesses import products and services rather than develop local markets. In other cases, tourists purchase international goods rather than local products because they feel these goods are superior. In either case, money that potentially could strengthen the local economy leaves the area.

Some economic leakage is normal in nature tourism, but it must be limited in ecotourism. Fortunately, as tourists learn about the cultural and physical environment, they usually become interested in purchasing goods and services that support indigenous groups and local economies because they understand how these purchases help develop and conserve the area. Tourism businesses respond to this demand and start building local enterprises. In addition to market forces, local and national policies and regulations can help manage leakage.

### Cultural Change

Cultural changes caused by tourism can be positive or negative. Many outsiders do not want indigenous populations to change because they want their cultures to be preserved. Other outsiders see indigenous groups as new markets to influence and want them to change and diversify. Indigenous peoples themselves have mixed feelings. Some want to modernize their cultures and so actively solicit changes. Others are looking for new means of economic development and simply accept the cultural changes that accompany this pursuit. Still others see no reason to change and do not want to modify their traditions and customs.

Tourism-induced cultural change usually occurs without the opportunity for communities to decide whether they actually want change. There is often an imbalance of power in the relationship between tourists and residents. Tourists can provoke changes, often unintentional and subtle, without consent from residents. Conflicts may brew within communities and between communities and visitors as a result. Unprepared communities, with no means to stop tourism, are ideal settings for negative cultural impacts. Ecotourism programs allow for communities to be adequately informed of the benefits and costs of ecotourism and to decide for themselves the degree of change to which they wish to subject themselves.

## Key Considerations for Ecotourism Development at the Community Level

These days, most conservationists recognize that working with communities is fundamental to achieving protected area goals and conservation strategies, including ecotourism. There are a number of basic principles that should be considered in planning for community involvement in ecotourism activities. Some of these topics are covered in greater depth in Volume II, Part II.

### Create Partnerships

Ecotourism organized at the local community level can rarely be successful without assistance or cooperation from tourism operators. Links to the market, language skills and poor communications are three major aspects which limit communities' ability to "go it alone"

in ecotourism. Ecotourism operators can make ideal partners to provide the missing links for communities in exchange for (sometimes exclusive) access to community resources.

Protected area managers must play a role in guiding ecotourism implementation outside of the protected area, but in many cases that role may have to be a "secondhand" one. Because of his/her many responsibilities, as well as possible resistance on the part of local residents, the protected area manager may need to pursue other means for fulfilling this function. NGOs are generally perceived as neutral parties and thus more acceptable as providers of technical assistance to local communities. In some cases, the NGOs may be the protected area managers. Training, for example in basic accounting and guiding, is a key need for communities to effectively participate in ecotourism. This is a role that NGOs are best placed to provide.

### Avoid Putting All Eggs in the Ecotourism Basket

An ideal community setting should consist of interesting, accessible attractions, local people with the interest and initiative to take advantage of opportunities, and

**Box 4.1 The Case of the Toledo Ecotourism Association, Belize**

Three distinct communities of people live in the southern Toledo District of Belize: Creoles, Garifunas and Mayans. The District is considered one of the poorest in the country, and the residents' primary economic activities are farming and fishing. Due to its tropical rainforests and rich cultural heritage, tourism is also a source of income in Toledo, albeit a limited one. Access to the area is difficult, and there has been minimal investment in tourism development.

However, as Belize has become an international nature tourism destination in recent years, residents in the Toledo District decided to try developing this industry locally. In 1990, they formed the Toledo Ecotourism Association (TEA) as a vehicle to consolidate their efforts. They created a program called the "Village Guesthouse and Ecotrail Experience" to help residents plan, develop and manage a series of guesthouses. One of the key features of this program is a rotation system that shares tourists to the District among participating villages. As tourists arrive, villages take turns hosting them. The TEA office acts as the central coordinating body, assigning visitors to the next village on the list. Within each village, several families take responsibility for preparing meals, attending to the guesthouse, providing guiding services and offering other entertainment.

The goals of this rotation system are to distribute the economic benefits of tourism as equitably and widely as possible and to minimize the negative impacts of tourism within any one village.

Of the roughly 30 villages in this area, about 12 are actively participating in the visitor program. Each village is in a different stage of participation; some have several years of experience hosting tourists, and others are just constructing guesthouses. Of the money generated through tourism, 80% stays in the community and 20% goes to TEA. The vast majority of the money that stays in the community goes directly to the service provider, with a small portion allocated for group maintenance and taxes. The money that TEA collects is used primarily for health, education and conservation projects in the area as well as for administrative costs and marketing (Beavers, 1995).

Visitation to the area remains somewhat limited at roughly 500 visitor nights a year, but it is slowly increasing. While the visitor program overall is considered a success, it has brought challenges to the community. One issue that has caused conflict among some original TEA members is bringing in new members. Each of the original members invested time and materials into the launching of this project and, now that it is taking off, they feel new members should be required to pay the same dues. Also, tourism income is still minimal, and original members are resistant to it being divided further among more villages. Although tourism income is intended only to supplement other sources, members do not want to have so many participants that it is not profitable.

One way to increase income is to increase visitor numbers, so TEA is expanding marketing efforts. As this happens, residents realize that the administrative capacity of TEA must be strengthened. The Association has already provided an important forum for visitor development in the area. As tourism grows, so will TEA's responsibilities to monitor the impacts on residents and the area's natural resources.

adapted from Boo, 1998

leaders who will interact, learn and work with the protected area managers, NGOs and tourism operators.

Ecotourism must be seen as one of several activities in a community's development portfolio. To rely solely on ecotourism as an alternative source of income is not usually a wise development strategy. Tourism and ecotourism are subject to periods of instability due to fluctuating national and international economic trends, political events and public perception generated by the mass media. In addition, ecotourism rarely involves a significant portion of a community as relevant jobs are usually limited to the service industry and a few others. In those communities that have achieved measures of success in evolving a more sustainable lifestyle, ecotourism has been only one component of that change. Other important elements are: improved education, improved access to information, improvements in protected area management and increased economic opportunities other than ecotourism (Brandon, 1996).

The things that come with tourism, including the introduction of strangers, new values and customs, and new ways of doing business, may not be what the resident population wants. Local residents should be well informed about the likely impacts of ecotourism development before they agree to accept it.

### *Link Ecotourism Benefits to Conservation Goals*

For ecotourism to promote conservation, local people must clearly benefit and understand that the benefits they receive are linked to the continued existence of the protected area (Brandon, 1996). There must be a close working relationship between the protected area administration and the surrounding communities. Unfortunately, the limited benefits provided by many tourism projects frequently are not recognized by local residents as connected to the protected area.

The example from Belize in Box 4.1 demonstrates several of the above principles in action.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, ecotourism can be seen as one way by which communities can resume or strengthen their traditional stewardship role in natural areas, a role that has largely been compromised by unfavorable economic conditions imposed upon rural communities in tropical countries.

Recognizing the crucial role rural and coastal communities play in conserving biodiversity, they must be incorporated as stakeholders into protected area planning and management processes. At the same time, given the added value that community participation brings to ecotourism products and the benefits of participation for sustainable community development, active community participation in ecotourism is good for business and good for conservation.

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Toledo Ecotourism Association (TEA), Belize
*Formed by residents in the Toledo District of Belize in 1990 as a vehicle to consolidate their ecotourism efforts.*

Chapter 5

# Ecotourism and NGOs

## Introduction

Nongovernmental conservation organizations (NGOs) play an ever-increasing role in ecotourism management and development in both the developed and developing world. NGOs concerned with conservation issues have discovered that ecotourism embodies many of the positive elements that characterize conservation activities:

- Mitigation of negative impacts upon the natural environment.
- Increase in visitors' awareness of natural and cultural resources and of the issues that affect their conservation.
- Generation of significant income for conservation activities.

## The Role of NGOs

As a result of the direct links between ecotourism and conservation, many conservation NGOs embrace ecotourism as part of their organizational activity. However, the roles they play can differ:

1. Some NGOs act as **facilitators** between other players in the ecotourism context, e.g., communities and the tourism industry, and protected area managers and communities. This role is a particularly valuable one since NGOs are frequently seen as neutral players among competing interests that have had difficulty collaborating before (see Box 5.1).

2. NGOs may extend their reach and achieve greater conservation impact when they **partner** with or provide services to a community-based ecotourism enterprise or private ecotourism company.

3. NGOs frequently serve as **trainers and sources of relevant technical information and expertise** that other institutions involved with ecotourism may not have access to or time to develop. The information

Guest cabins at La Milpa, Rio Bravo Conservation Area, Belize © Andy Drumm

may be in the form of a publication which the NGO develops (such as this one) or a workshop in which ecotourism participants receive training.

4. NGOs **partner with protected area administrations** to implement an aspect of an ecotourism program, e.g., an environmental education or interpretation program. Usually the NGO obtains funding from outside sources and carries out the activity according to a mutually agreeable plan of action. In some cases, the NGO will take charge of implementing the entire ecotourism program.

5. Increasingly, NGOs **manage their own private protected areas** or are asked to **take charge of government-administered protected areas.** In these situations, the NGO is responsible for implementing all of the area's management activities including the public use program, which is where ecotourism is usually housed. Sometimes, the NGO administrates the protected area in conjunction with a government agency. Such is the case with Fundación Defensores de la Naturaleza, The Nature Conservancy's partner in Guatemala, which manages Sierra del Lacandón National Park with CONAP (Consejo Nacional de Areas Protegidas).

6. In exceptional circumstances, NGOs **provide ecotourism services** such as tour promotion and organization or lodging, transportation and food services. While this may sometimes seem like a logical step to take, it can easily distract an NGO from its primary role as a conservation agent and may take away opportunities from community-based enterprises or the tourism private sector.

NGOs play an important role in advancing ecotourism implementation through their positive interac-

**Box 5.1 Tourism Planning and Development with Programme for Belize**

**Tourism planning: Design and Implementation of the Ecotourism Development Plan**

The plan was developed at a cost of approximately $40,000 by private consultants. An important aspect of the planning process was the involvement of Programme for Belize's (PfB) board of directors and staff members throughout the process. The vision developed was, therefore, PfB's and not the consulting firm's. Importantly, the process not only produced the plan but also several other products including a site plan for a second site, the design of a 30 bed state-of-the-art student dormitory featuring green technologies and the provision of contacts and technical advice needed for procuring and maintaining green technologies at our ecotourism sites.

By linking environmental education with non-destructive human-nature interaction, PfB's two ecotourism sites offer a unique tourism experience which caters to a range of target group: serious ecotourists, researchers, high school and university-level student groups as well as casual nature lovers.

Our tourism experience commenced in 1992 hosting student groups through our partnership with Save the Rainforest, Inc. — a US–based non profit organization. In 1993 a tourism development unit was established to market our ecotourism programs and in 1997 we inaugurated facilities at a second site in the reserve.

**PfB's Partnership with Save the Rainforest, Inc.**

Through the combined marketing efforts of Save The Rainforests, Inc., and PfB, PfB offers a two-week Tropical Forest and Marine Ecology educational program geared to US high schoolers. One week is spent at Rio Bravo and the other is spent on an offshore island.

Between 1997 and 2000 this program has generated on average an annual net income of $50,000. About ten groups per year visit the program with an average group size of 15-20 students. Seven staff members including guides and cooks work full time with these groups between June and August.

PfB enjoys many benefits from hosting STR groups in addition to the tourism income. Visitors, particularly educational groups, very often make financial contributions to PfB. Also, over time, PfB has developed a pool of contacts from our tourism activities.

**Key Management Issues**

- Selection of service personnel: cooks, guides, lodge manager
- Keeping employees who are working at remotes sites content — work schedule, recreational activities
- Incorporating feedback from visitors into our yearly planning
- Capacity building of service personnel – both in the field and at our main office
- Investment in planning
- Continuous infrastructure maintenance and development
- Ensuring that our tourism development unit maintains high service delivery standards

tion with local communities, the private sector tourism industry, government-administered protected areas and others.

The particular role adopted by an NGO depends upon the set of circumstances within which it operates, e.g., its mission and purpose, the degree of openness to NGO collaboration and the interest of the tourism industry. Opportunistic situations also arise which affect an NGO's role, such as donation of a tract of land for ecotourism purposes or development of a friendly relationship with a community leader.

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Asociación San Migueleña de Conservación y Desarrollo (ASACODE), Costa Rica — www.asacode.or.cr/

**Box 5.2 Asociación ANAI, the Talamanca Biological Corridor, Costa Rica**

Asociación ANAI has worked with a number of community-based groups in the Talamanca rainforest region along the Atlantic coast of Costa Rica to establish a network of eco-tourism programs owned and managed by local small-scale farmers and community members.

These small-scale projects are mechanisms through which community-level groups such as ASACODE are able to supplement their income with occasional ecotourist and student groups. This additional income works as an incentive for the members of ASACODE to conserve the rainforest on their land and to incorporate sustainable agricultural practices in their production of cacao. The area of forest this farmer cooperative protects is key habitat for the over one million raptors that migrate between North and South America every spring and autumn. The simple guesthouse they built in the rainforest has shared showers and toilets and six double rooms, and it was highly rated by a group of members of The Nature Conservancy in 2000.

ANAI achieved its conservation targets by providing ASACODE with training and technical assistance and facilitating linkages between the ecotourism program and private tour operators in Costa Rica and abroad.

Chapter 6

# Ecotourism and the Tourism Industry

## Introduction

Of all the participants in the ecotourism activity, the tourism industry is perhaps the most important and the least appreciated by conservationists. Many conservationists dislike having to deal with the corporate, profit-motivated entrepreneurs that they characterize as comprising the tourism industry. Nevertheless, these entrepreneurs are essential to achieving conservation goals via ecotourism. They can, and indeed some of them must, become allies and partners with NGOs, protected area managers and communities if ecotourism is to become more than an abstract concept.

Increasingly, the tourism industry becomes the most powerful advocate for supporting protected areas, and this dynamic should be encouraged by establishing adequate mechanisms for communication and collaboration between protected area managers and tour operators.

The mechanics of international, and even national, level tourism require that a complex set of arrangements (transportation, lodging, guides, etc.) exists to facilitate the movement of tourists from their home to the tourism destination (see Figure 6.1). Each arrangement necessitates a specific set of activities and corresponding set of employees, infrastructure and costs.

Few tour operators specialize in ecotourism. There are, however, many adventure and nature tour operators, most of whom do not fully comply with ecotourism standards. Conventional tourism practices still predominate in the tourism industry, just as conventional practices still dominate in every other aspect of our lives, in spite of initiatives for them to become more sustainable. Nevertheless, the tourism industry is "greening" at an ever-accelerating pace as tourists

Birdwatchers at Noel Kempff Mercado National Park, Bolivia © Andy Drumm

demand more environmentally-sound services. For example, many hotels now recycle cans and bottles and encourage guests to reuse towels in order to save on water use.

The number of ecotourism businesses is also growing as new companies are established. Many of these have developed from the outset with an understanding of and commitment to the principles of sustainability, whereas many of the older, more established nature tourism companies have been slow to integrate all the principles of ecotourism into their activities.

Conservation NGOs working in partnership with private tour operators are ideally placed to provide the technical guidelines which upgrade a nature tourism operation into an ecotourism operation.

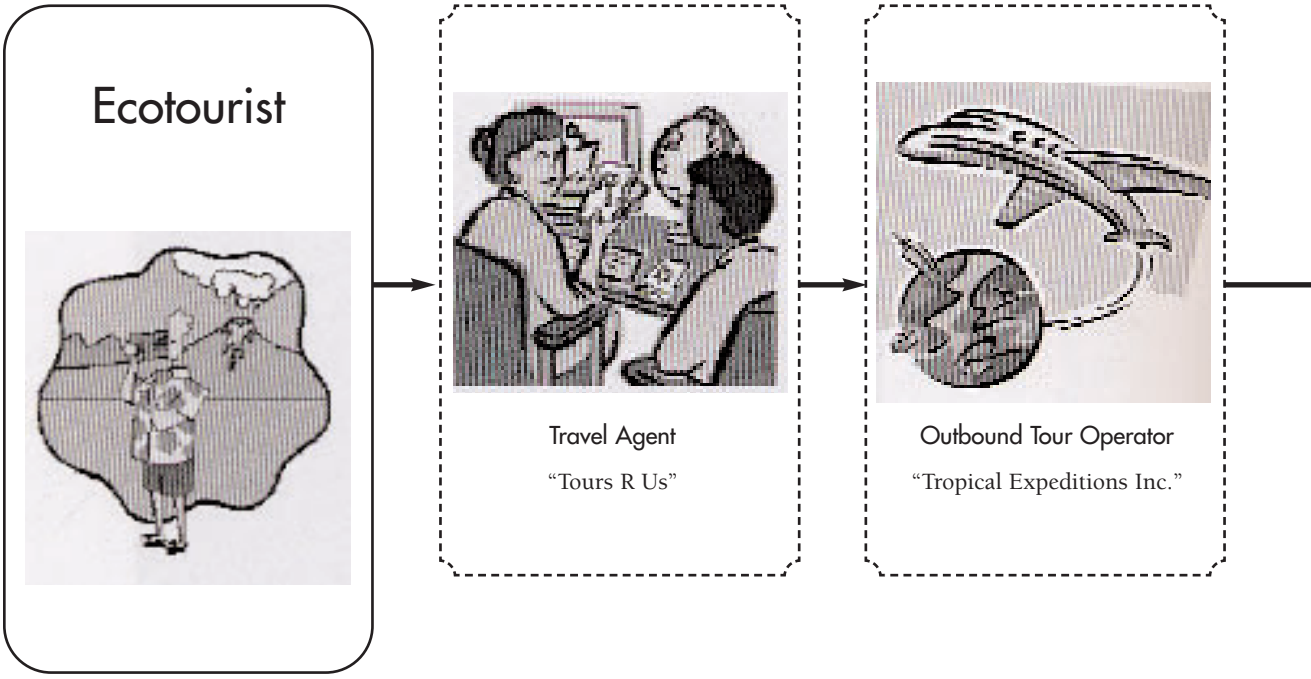
### The Links in the Tourism Chain

Figure 6.1 describes the links in the tourism chain which connects the ecotourist to the protected area.

1. ***The Travel Agent*** — Typically a generalist "shop" or chain of retail outlets that offers a broad range of domestic and international travel services to consumers who can drop in for a face to face discussion with a sales person in their own towns or neighbourhoods. They will normally sell the programs of an outbound operator. Eco travellers rarely purchase trips through these generalists who focus more on mass tourism destinations, cruises, etc.

2. ***The Outbound Operator*** — Typically an operator which specialises in a particular geographic region such as the Amazon or South America, or on a specific activity such as birdwatching or mountain

**Figure 6.1 Tourism Industry Structure**



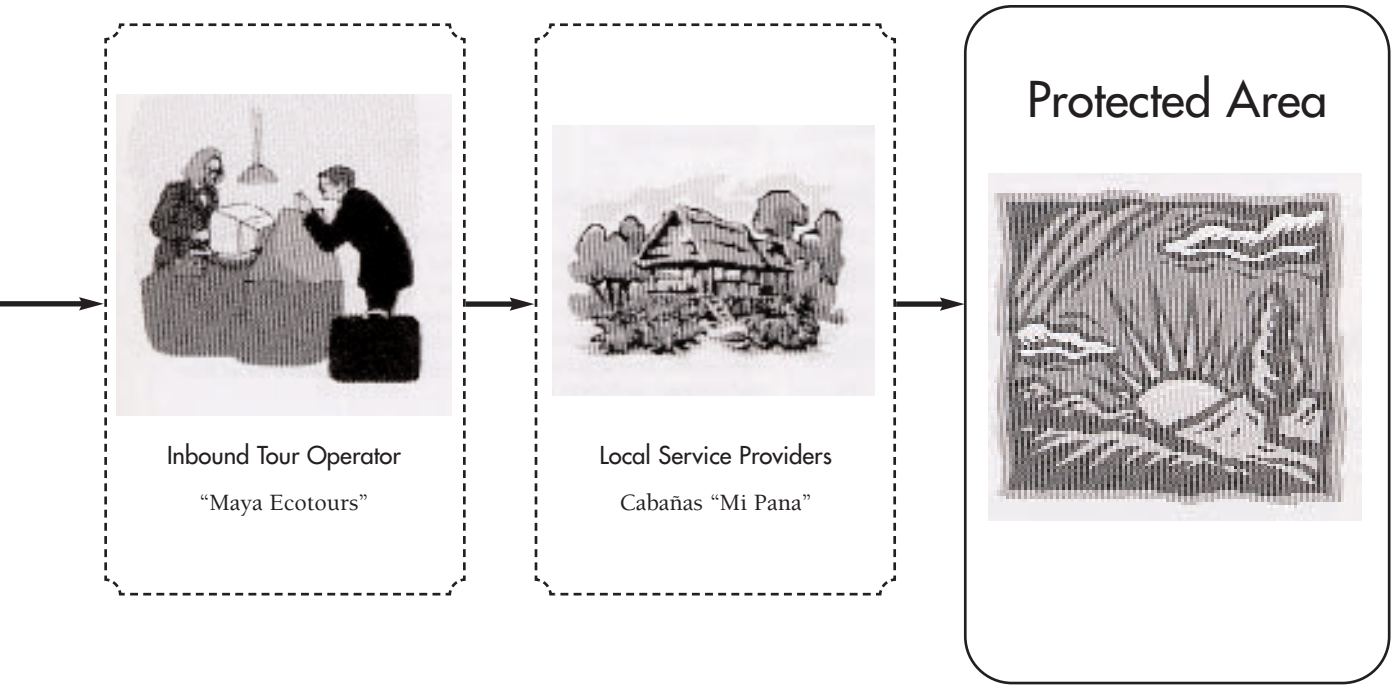
climbing. They will be located in the eco travellers country of origin. They produce brochures annually with a series of fixed departures for each tour program, and they often have a loyal clientele who return to purchase trips on a regular basis. They will put together a complete package for the tourist including air tickets, and may provide a tour leader to accompany their client groups but will typically contract with an inbound operator to provide services in the destination country.

3. ***The Inbound Operator*** — Located in the destination country, they provide complete packages of services from arrival in the country to departure. They may have their own facilities (vehicles, lodges) or they may subcontract others in the cities and regions the tourists will visit. Outbound operators contract with them to provide all "on-the-ground" services. With the advent of the internet, they are increasingly competing directly with the outbound operators for clients.

4. ***Local Service Providers*** — Outside the big cities, near the natural attractions, these may be local lodge and hotel owners, local transport providers, community-based ecotourism enterprises and local guides. These are where local communities typically join the tourism chain. More adventurous travellers often connect directly with these, especially if they feature in travel guides such as Rough Guides, Lonely Planet, etc.

### Including Private Tour Operators in the Planning Process

Implementing ecotourism can be a very challenging and costly venture. If the tourism industry is part of this process from the beginning, costs can be greatly reduced and success made more likely. Including the experience of a private tour operator in the ecotourism planning and design process would be invaluable and could not be duplicated by a conservation NGO. Essential inputs by various segments of the tourism industry could include:



1. Providing **information** about the potential market for ecotourism activities.
2. Providing **advice** concerning visitor preferences in terms of attractions, accommodations, food and transportation services.
3. **Marketing** an ecotourism activity or program.
4. Providing one or more of the **services** needed to facilitate visitor access to and appreciation of the ecotourism site.
5. Providing **training** of local guides and entrepreneurs.
6. **Investing** in an ecotourism operation. The investment will likely be contingent upon an expectation of a certain level of financial return.
7. **Operating** an ecotourism operation such as an ecolodge. Within a protected area situation, these operators would be considered concessionaires. As such, they would be subject to strict guidelines covering everything from the energy sources used to the number of guests they may handle at one time to the utilization of local supplies and labor. They would also be required to pay a concession fee to the protected area administration.

**Table 6.1 Most Popular Destinations in Latin America**

| Country | Number of US outbound operators who identified this as one of their primary destinations | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Costa Rica | 37 | 56% |
| Galapagos Islands | 32 | 48% |
| Peru | 29 | 44% |
| Mexico | 27 | 41% |
| Belize | 26 | 39% |
| Chile | 18 | 27% |
| Argentina | 16 | 24% |
| Ecuador | 16 | 24% |
| Brazil | 14 | 21% |
| Bolivia | 11 | 17% |
| Caribbean | 11 | 17% |
| Guatemala | 10 | 15% |
| Venezuela | 10 | 15% |
| Panama | 9 | 14% |
| Others | 5 | 8% |
| **Total # of respondents** | **66** | **100%** |

source: Oden et al., 1997

## The Demand for Nature Tourism

Table 6.1 shows the results of a survey of 66 US-based outbound nature tourism operators. They offer 271 destinations between them in South America. Fifty-six percent (37 of the 66 operators) offer Costa Rica as one of its principal destinations.

It should be pointed out that most of the respondents also offer destinations in Africa, Antarctica, Asia, Europe and within North America, with Alaska and Canada being especially popular nature tourism destinations.

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The International Ecotourism Society (TIES)
www.ecotourism.org ecomail@ecotourism.org
*TIES is an international membership organization dedicated to disseminating information about ecotourism. Its 1,700 members come from more than 55 different professions and live in more than 70 different countries. Most of its members work in the tourism sector, study tourism or use tourism to support the conservation of natural settings and sustain the well being of local communities.*

Part II

# Ecotourism Planning and Management

Chapter 1

# Ecotourism Management Planning: An Overview

This chapter presents some basic planning concepts related to the preparation of ecotourism management plans. It will focus especially on the **process** involved in preparing an ecotourism management plan.

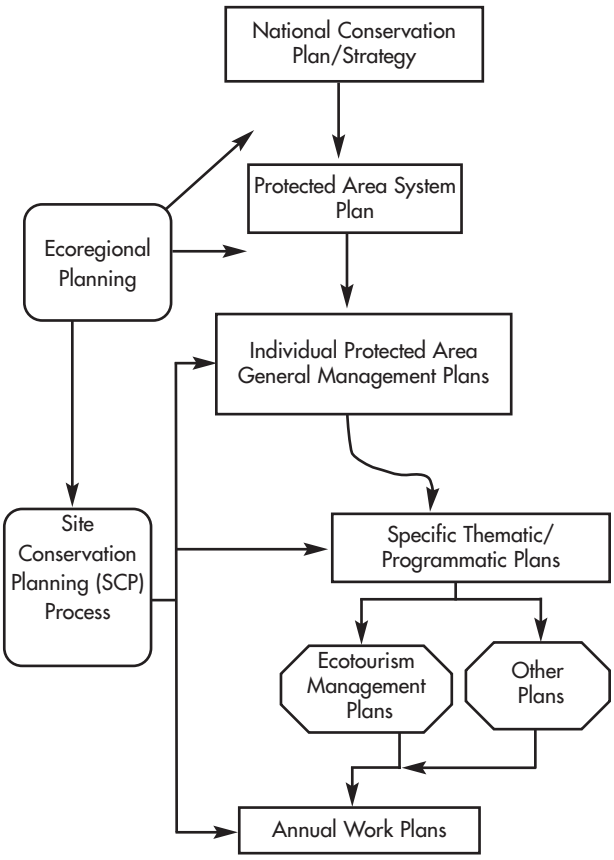
## Ecotourism Planning and Protected Areas

When most of us think about planning for protected areas, we think about management plans for a specific national park or other type of protected area. Nevertheless, it is important to understand that planning for individual protected areas takes place within a more general planning context with several different levels and components. Each level impacts upon the others. The reason for this derives from the role that protected areas play in achieving national and local development goals, which should be based on the concept of sustainable development (see Part I, Chapter 1 for more information). Figure 1.1 provides a graphic description of this planning context.

***General Management Plans*** are usually prepared for each individual protected area. These plans take the overall goals and objectives established for the protected area system and apply them to the natural and cultural situation of the specific protected area. The management plan will define the protected area's specific management objectives and a zoning scheme as well as establish strategies, programs and activities for achieving those objectives. The management plan is designed to provide protected area managers with the guidelines to manage their area for a period of five years or longer. More detailed plans will then be derived from the management plan.

***Site Conservation Plans*** (SCP) may be developed as tightly focused complements to general management plans or, in some cases, as alternatives. An SCP may identify ecotourism as a strategy to reduce threats at a site or as a source of conservation finance. In either case, an Ecotourism Management Plan (EMP) is called for. Figure 1.1 shows how thematic or programmatic plans such as an EMP will be based upon the general management plan and its recommendations. In some countries, management plans carry the force of law or ministerial sanction. In others, they are less strictly approved, and protected area managers have more liberty to apply them.

**Figure 1.1 Planning Context for Protected Areas**



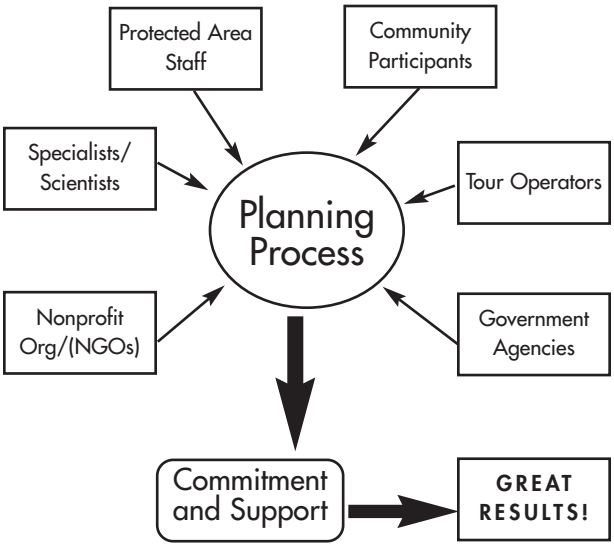

Note: The SCP process can be used to directly replace or enhance site-based management plans at all scales.

Many management plans have been prepared over the years, and much has been learned about how to develop them. Some of the major lessons learned are:

- Protected areas must be planned as an integral part of the development of the region and country where they are located.
- Management objectives should orient planning at all levels.
- The best planning is carried out by a **team** of people that has representatives from different disciplines, institutions and points of view. Local community organizations, tourism operations and governments should be represented in the planning process team. Some of these representatives may also be in a good position to provide lodging, transportation or even some funding for the planning team.
- The effective interaction of these individuals creates a synergistic situation in which the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts.
- Good planning depends upon the **effective participation** of all relevant stakeholders. With regard to an EMP, these stakeholders include all persons and institutions that will be involved in carrying out the ecotourism program within the protected area or other natural area.

Protected areas will need commitment and support from all of these people and organizations, as well as from their own personnel, if they are to fulfill the high expectations that are established for them. The planning process must involve all of them in meaningful ways in order to obtain that commitment and support.

**Figure 1.2 Who Participates in the Planning Process?**




### What is an Ecotourism Management Plan?

An ecotourism management plan is a tool to guide the development of tourism in a protected area by synthesizing and representing the vision of all the stakeholders while fulfilling the conservation objectives for the site. It should result in a document expressing the stakeholders' recommendations for how ecotourism is to be carried out in a particular protected area. Typically, an EMP will be a detailed continuation of general guidelines established in a general management plan or SCP.

The general management plan usually determines that ecotourism is the kind of tourism that is desired for a particular protected area and that ecotourism, or perhaps public use, will be a specific program to be carried out by protected area managers. The general management plan will also define the zoning configuration for the area, which in turn will designate those sectors that will be available for tourism purposes.

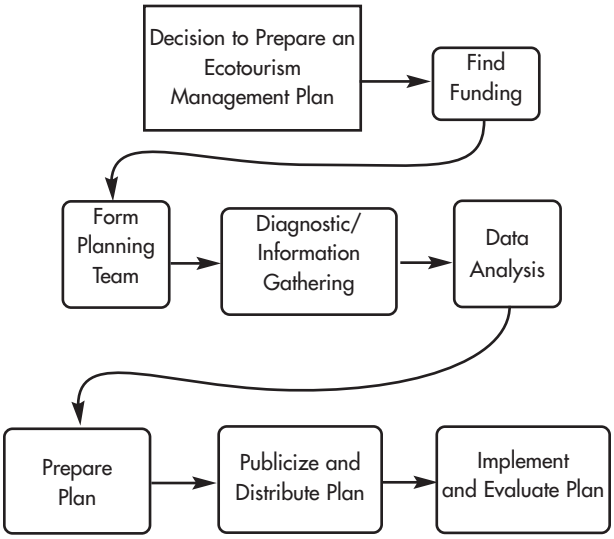
There is a step-by-step process to guide you in preparing an EMP. While these steps are presented in a linear sequence in Figure 1.3, the actual process is not nearly so straightforward. Planners will often need to return to one or more of the steps at various times throughout the process. For example, it is typical that when the planning team arrives at the Data Analysis step, the lack of essential information requires a return to the Diagnostic/Information gathering step.

Conversely, during the Diagnostic stage planning team members will think analytically about the data they are gathering in a preliminary manner. In reality, it is not uncommon for planners to be working on several different steps simultaneously.

How long will it take to accomplish these steps from start to finish? The length of the planning process depends on several factors, principally:

- **The availability and amount of funding.** If funding is fully available at the beginning of the planning process, then this facilitates the EMP planning process.
- **The complexity of the tourism/public use situation of the protected area.** If there are already a large number of visitors, tourism operators and/or visitor sites, the plan may require a lot of data collection and analysis. On the other hand, when a protected area has little tourism but a lot of perceived

**Figure 1.3 Planning Process Phases for an Ecotourism Management Plan**




potential, more evaluation of potential and resources needs to be done. The sheer size and number of actual and potential visitor attractions is also a factor.

- **The amount of time that the planning team dedicates to the process.** When planning team members have other responsibilities, the EMP process tends to be prolonged.
- **The amount of support that the planning team receives from stakeholders.** Active, positive participation by local communities, tourism operators and others makes the process more effective and productive.
- **The amount of detail that is required in the plan.** This is related to the amount of knowledge presently available or that can be obtained without huge amounts of effort or cost. There is so much that needs to be done to adequately plan for ecotourism that a first EMP may only deal with what is required to start an ecotourism management program. Some aspects may be left to later, or even more specific, plans, e.g., site development plans and architectural drawings. More about this can be found in Chapter 4, "Step 3: Data Analysis and Preparing the Plan." In any case, it is very important that the planning team and the protected area administration agree about the level of detail required in the plan before the process begins.

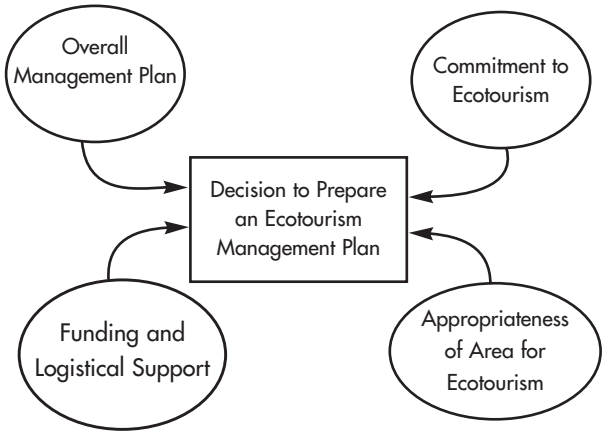
It is common to hear planners state that "the process is more important than the final document." While the process is designed to obtain the results needed to prepare the final document or plan, it is also a tool for involving all of the various stakeholders. If the stakeholders feel that they are a part of the process, they will then be committed to its implementation. An inclusive, participatory planning process provides extremely valuable, long-term support for the protected area's management.

### Prerequisites for an Ecotourism Management Plan

It may seem to make a lot of sense to prepare an EMP for your protected area, especially if it is a national park or other area whose management objectives emphasize recreation or tourism as well as resource protection. Before embarking on a full-scale EMP, however, a careful assessment of the protected area's resources, human capacity and tourism potential is essential. Certain fundamental issues must be considered:

1. The protected area should have a **general management plan** that sets out the broad guidelines on which to base an EMP: overall protected area management objectives and zoning structure and recommendations for public use/tourism management programs. The general management plan should mention the need to use ecotourism as a guiding concept or at least make the argument for low-impact, revenue-generating tourism activities.

**Figure 1.4 Major Factors Involved in the Decision to Prepare a Management Plan**




2. There must be **acceptance of and commitment to the principles of ecotourism** by the protected area's staff. This means accepting that mass tourism is not an option and that the protected area administration must diligently manage tourism impacts. It means fully accepting the involvement of communities,

tourism industry representatives and others in the planning and implementation of ecotourism activities and committing to working closely with them to make decisions about tourism and public use within the protected area. In many cases, the decision to move ahead with ecotourism means that the protected area administration must undergo a change in its relationship with and expectations of the general public in all aspects of the protected area's management, not just in ecotourism. Meaningful involvement and participation of the protected area stakeholders in the area's management is essential and often challenging.

3. There must be a reasonable expectation that the **required funding and the technical and logistical support** will be available when needed. Carrying out an EMP can be costly. Involving stakeholders early in the process enables one to see what they can bring to the table to help with the planning process.

4. The **appropriateness of applying ecotourism** to the protected area must be seriously considered. Will existing legislation allow or facilitate ecotourism? What have been the results of the Site Conservation Planning process? Have threats been identified that ecotourism can respond to? Will current/traditional tourism patterns within the protected area and/or the region make it difficult to implement the ecotourism concept? Do the circumstances of the protected area make it appropriate for visitor use?

Protected area managers must analyze these factors and determine whether or not an EMP is needed. Perhaps tourism is not going to be a significant factor in the protected area's future, or perhaps traditional tourism practices will be too hard to modify for the time being. But if the decision is made to move ahead, the EMP planning process requires commitment and dedication or else the plan will not meet expectations.

## Financing the Plan

Any planning process costs money, and an EMP is no exception. Money will be needed to pay for:

- ❖ technical assistance (consultants);
- ❖ logistical support (transportation, food/equipment in the field);
- ❖ meeting expenses (room rental, food, services, materials);
- ❖ communications expenses (mail, fax, telephone, etc.);
- ❖ publicizing and distributing the final document.

The total expense for an EMP can be significant, usually beyond the capacity of a protected area's budget to absorb. There are basically four different sources of funding for an EMP:

### *a) International Assistance*

International assistance can be found in a number of different ways, and each country and protected area will have a different situation. Through its local partners, The Nature Conservancy provides technical assistance and funding to selected protected areas, with priority going to ecotourism development. International environmental NGOs such as Conservation International and World Wildlife Fund are other possible sources of assistance.

Multilateral assistance projects implemented by, among others, the World Bank (especially through the GEF Program), the Interamerican Development Bank (IDB) and the Central American Development Bank (CADB) are potential sources of funding. Due to the scope and bureaucratic procedures associated with multilateral projects, it is advisable to be involved in their initial planning to ensure that one's particular priorities are addressed. Many standard development projects such as road building have environmental components that could fund protected area projects.

Bilateral assistance agencies, usually government to government, such as USAID (USA), GTZ (Germany), CIDA (Canada), and JICA (Japan), may have projects which involve protected areas, environmental protection or tourism development and be able to help fund an EMP.

### *b) National Sources*

There are more and more funding sources available at the national level in developing countries. Most of these sources are foundations or trust funds that have been developed using international as well as national sources. Requests to these organizations usually have to be made about a year in advance to allow them to plan budgets.

Private companies and businesses are becoming aware that supporting environmental programs is good business and provides them with some positive publicity. Some of these potential donors, especially the more high profile ones, may be willing to provide funding for your EMP. They will probably require that their contributions be mentioned in public presentations and in the related documents that are produced.

### *c) Local Communities/Governments*

Protected areas are not isolated, although it may seem that way at times. The land they occupy is adjacent to,

in some cases claimed by, local communities and governments. Increasingly, these entities are becoming interested in protected areas not only for their potential to produce revenue for local people and governments, but also for the prestige of association with a protected area.

**Figure 1.5 Sources of Support for Funding an EMP**


*d) Tourism Industry*

In most cases, there will be tourism operators already working in the protected area and others who may be interested in doing so. Some of them should be represented on the planning team. They should all be asked to help support the planning process with either transportation, lodging or funding, especially those who have been using the protected area without paying for the privilege through a concession or other user fee. Travel agencies and tour guides may also be interested in participating by providing logistical or financial assistance.

While it may seem easier to seek a lump sum source of support for the EMP, it may be more productive in the long term to look for different sorts of support among a wide range of sources. In this way, the protected area develops relationships with companies, organizations and individuals who may become important future contacts in terms of logistical support, information and even direct monetary contributions.

### Who Prepares an Ecotourism Management Plan?

Ecotourism, by definition, is about inclusion and involvement of all concerned. The planning process should represent the point at which all relevant stakeholders become involved in the decision making about ecotourism.

An EMP should be based on the consensus of:

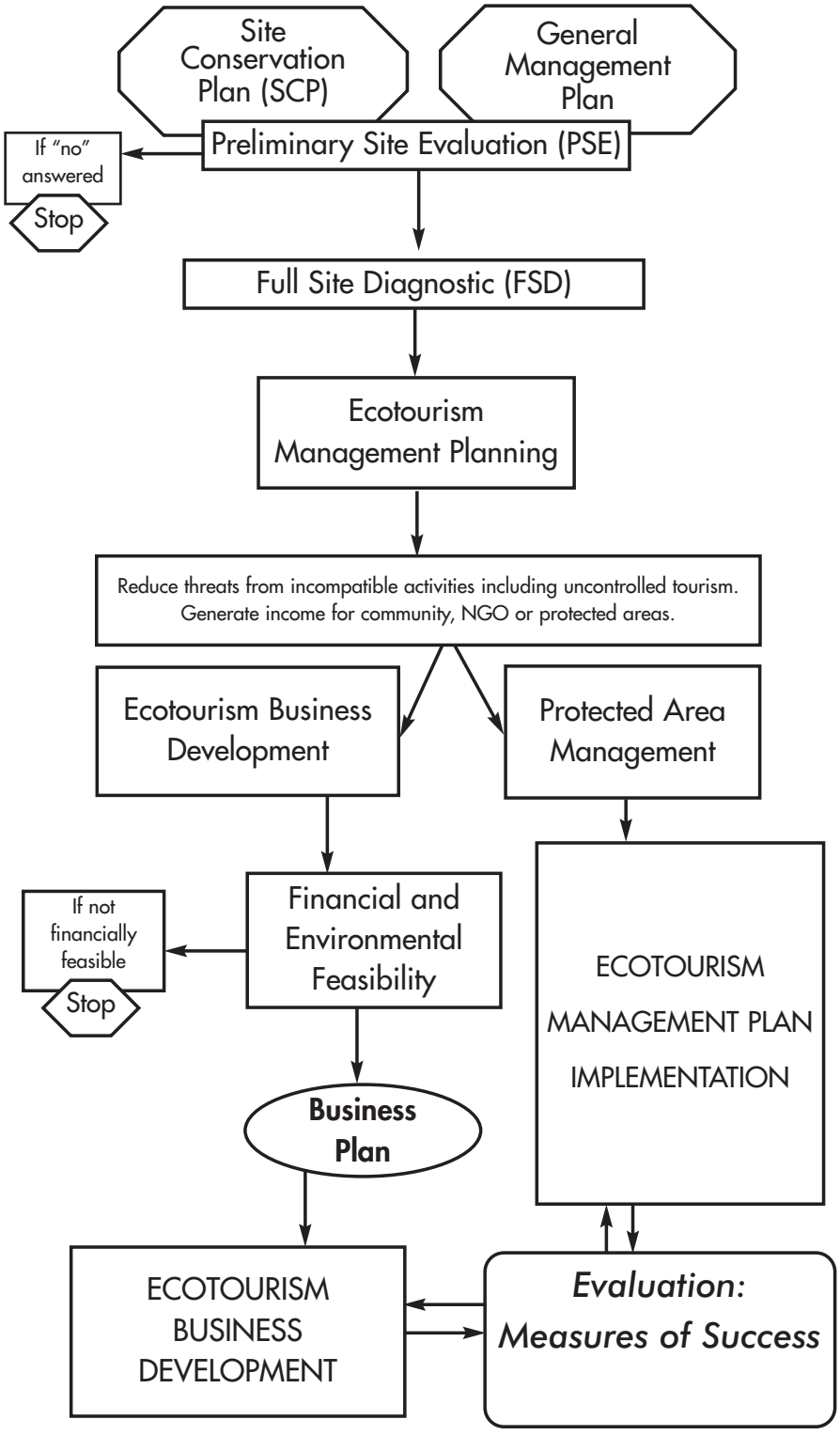
- tourism professionals (operators and guides) interested in and/or involved with the protected area;
- representatives from communities who will be impacted by ecotourism;
- representatives from local governments, government agencies, NGOs and others who have an interest in ecotourism development in the region; as well as
- protected area staff who know the area well and who will be responsible for the plan's implementation.

In order to achieve consensus, a participatory approach to planning must be applied. It is not sufficient for a consultant or the tourism program director to develop the plan alone and then present it to the others for their approval. The democratic approach to planning may take more time and more energy, but it produces better results. It should be designed so that all participants feel ownership of the plan and thus have a vested interest in its successful implementation.

Democracy does, however, require leadership. The planning process should be considered as having two levels of participation: permanent participants and eventual participants. The permanent participants will comprise a small **planning team** of perhaps two or three people who can dedicate most of their time to the process for several weeks or months. They will do the bulk of the administrative and other office work and will organize events and opportunities for the other stakeholders to participate in. They may also be responsible for collecting the information needed to carry out the Diagnostic Phase of the planning process (see Part II, Chapter 2).

The **eventual participants** will be all of the other stakeholders who will participate in workshops, seminars and other events where information is gathered, options are discussed and decisions are made. It is in these events where the important work of the planning process will be carried out. The planning team is responsible for these events being well organized and designed to maximize the stakeholders' input and participation. It is important to recognize that **a team** approach to planning means that the members of the team interact frequently and that they exchange ideas and opinions in both structured and informal situations. When team members interact in this way, the entire planning process is enriched. This synergistic process results in a product that is much better than if each participant contributed ideas independently.

**Figure 1.6 An Overview of the Ecotourism Management and Development Planning Process**



The planning team may be composed of protected area officials, a tourism operator or guide and one other stakeholder who can dedicate the necessary time to this task. Funding may be needed to pay for these individuals if their normal work is interrupted or if they cannot freely donate their time. One of the planning team members should be considered the Director of the process; this member should have overall responsibility for making sure that all participants carry out their responsibilities and that the process moves forward in an orderly and efficient manner. This person would also manage any planning team budget.

### What Comes Next?

The rest of this volume describes how to prepare an EMP. Figure 1.6 is a graphic representation of this planning and management process.

Chapter 2 of this volume deals with the Diagnostic Phase of the EMP process, including how to carry out Full Site Evaluations. Chapter 3 describes the actual preparation of the EMP document — important procedural aspects as well as the format and contents. Chapter 4 presents more detailed information concerning some aspects of the Plan's content. Chapter 5 discusses the various mechanisms for measuring whether or not the EMP is accomplishing its goals.

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Chapter 2

# Step I: Site Conservation Planning and Preliminary Site Evaluation

## Introduction

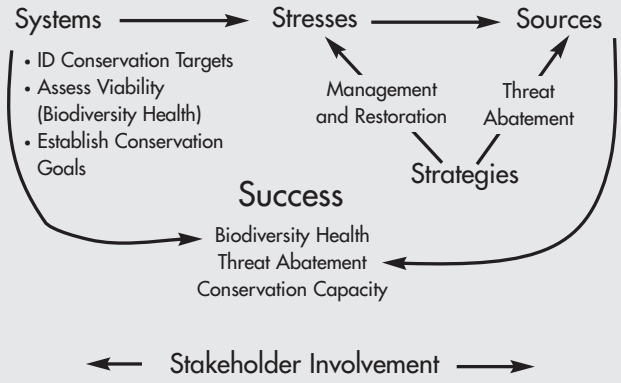
Now that you know what ecotourism is, who the potential actors are and what threats and opportunities ecotourism can present, you may feel that you want to go straight ahead and build an ecolodge or develop a trail network at your site. That, however, would be a big mistake! Ideally, you have turned to this manual series as a result of having identified ecotourism as a strategy in your Site Conservation Planning process (The Nature Conservancy, 2000). If this is not the case, then you should proceed with the development of your Site Conservation Plan (SCP) before going any further (see Box 2.1 for an introduction to the SCP process).

## Site Conservation Planning

The SCP process will identify a series of threats to the integrity of defined conservation targets and then proceed to identify strategies to address these threats. Ecotourism or an ecotourism-related activity might be one of the strategies selected to deal with one or more

**Box 2.1 Site Conservation Planning**

Site Conservation Planning provides conservationists a pragmatic framework for clear determination of what they are trying to protect ("conservation targets/systems"), how conservation is best achieved, with whom to work and necessary actions to achieve these conservation goals. The methodology organizes, focuses and prioritizes what has traditionally been an opportunistic, less coherent set of conservation activities on the ground.




As is shown in the figure, Site Conservation Planning (also termed the "5-S" Framework for biodiversity conservation) conservation targets (Systems) are first identified such that a focal list of ecological systems and communities can capture the diversity of life in the planning area. Immediately thereafter, the best available science is used to identify what is the vision of ecological integrity (biodiversity health) for these systems, assess the current status of biodiversity health and set conservation goals at the site that will bring those conservation targets to a viable state. Next, the stresses to the biodiversity are identified, as are their causes (Stresses & Sources — for example, sedimentation to a first-order headwater stream as caused by annual crop agriculture). Most importantly, these ecological and threat analyses lead to the development of focused Strategies to improve biodiversity health (viability) and abate threats and to the production of measures of conservation impact of those actions (Success). Throughout the process, the perceptions, actions (positive and negative) and involvement of "Stakeholders" are recognized and considered.

In Site Conservation Planning, conservation strategies are linked to focal biodiversity "targets" and abatement of the *most critical* threats — not the most easily diminished, most attractive or most understood problems alone. Strategies such as ecotourism are chosen because they directly abate these high priority threats to the conservation targets at the site or because they improve the viability, or ecological health, of the conservation targets through management or restoration. Site ecologists periodically evaluate the success of strategies not by indirect measures such as number of workshops held or number of park guards hired but by measuring actual improvement of biodiversity health in the landscapes we strive to protect.

adapted from The Nature Conservancy, 2000

threats. An SCP may be complementary or an alternative to the general management planning process for a protected area. A general management plan (GMP) may identify ecotourism as the main concept to guide a protected area's public use program. If so, you can assume that some degree of ecotourism implementation is appropriate. In both cases, the key elements of ecotourism management planning and development are described in detail in this manual series. See Figure 1.6 in Part II, Chapter 1 for a graphic representation of the steps in developing an ecotourism program.

In order to ensure that conservation goals established in the Site Conservation Planning process are being efficiently and effectively addressed, ecotourism management and program development should be considered only as a strategy to achieve the long-term abatement of priority, critical threats and the improvement of biodiversity health.

The SCP process provides the methodological framework for ensuring that ecotourism strategies are linked to these overarching site conservation goals. Ecotourism *should not* be a priority strategy for conservation investment at your site *unless* it is likely to improve target health and abates the most pervasive and damaging sources of stress to the biodiversity.

Ecotourism can be an appropriate priority strategy for addressing a critical threat especially when tourism practices are sources of stress to a conservation target. Table 2.1 below shows exemplary strategies for dealing with hypothetical stresses and sources to a particular conservation target.

The example in Table 2.1 shows that tourism can be both a source of stress as well as of new innovative strategies, via ecotourism, to abate sources of stress. Ecotourism strategies may be grouped into two types according to the stress and source they address:

Stresses 1 to 3 call for selection of **ecotourism management** strategies that would normally best be developed through an ecotourism management plan for a site.

Stresses 4 and 5 call for **ecotourism development** strategies to be considered. Ecotourism development begins with a Preliminary Site Evaluation (PSE) (see

**Table 2.1 Exemplary Ecotourism Strategies for Dealing with Hypothetical Stresses and Sources to the Lowland Pine Savanna Conservation Target**

| Stresses | Sources | Strategies |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Altered faunal species composition (reduced population of a key parrot species that nests in the pine savanna and is key to its regeneration) | Incompatible Tourism Practices (uncontrolled tourism at salt lick and nesting sites of the parrot species, resulting in destruction of nesting tress and disturbance during nesting periods) | 1. Improve management of visitors to the pine savanna through:<br>· Ecotourism zoning<br>· Visitor impact monitoring<br>· Visitor management guidelines and education.<br>2. Work with certain tour groups through a volunteer program to establish parrot nesting boxes to restore the parrot population to its minimum viable size. |
| 2. Altered vegetation structure | Incompatible Tourism Practices (crowding by tourists at panoramic viewpoint resulting in vegetation trampling) | Improve management of visitors to the pine savanna through:<br>· Diversification of visitor sites<br>· Visitor impact monitoring. |
| 3. Contamination (organic pollution and solid waste) | Incompatible Wastewater Treatment (poor sewage management at nature lodge) | Improve management of visitors to the pine savanna through:<br>· Ecotourism infrastructure guidelines<br>· Visitor impact monitoring. |
| 4. Altered floral species composition (reduction in populations of endemic species of orchid) | Commercial Collecting (destructive harvesting of wild flora by local community X) | 1. Develop compatible economic development opportunities for community orchid harvesters through ecotourism.<br>2. Enhance park investment in protection and enforcement through more and better-trained park guards (funds acquired through establishment of a visitor use fee and ecotourism concession systems). |
| 5. Altered faunal species composition (decreasing numbers of large mammals) | Commercial Collecting/ Poaching (poaching for skins and meat by local communities) | 1. Develop compatible economic development opportunities for community orchid harvesters through ecotourism.<br>2. Enhance park investment in protection and enforcement through more and better-trained park guards (funds acquired through establishment of a visitor use fee and ecotourism concession systems). |

Box 2.2) and integrates ecotourism management planning with ecotourism business planning.

### Evaluating Potential Strategies

Once potential strategies have been identified, they are evaluated and ranked according to three criteria:

- Benefits (in abating critical threats to conservation targets and in improving the viability of those targets);
- Feasibility/probability of success; and
- Costs of implementation.

#### *a) Benefits*

Assess the benefits that result from addressing threats, for example:

i) Reduction of threat status
- How likely is it that ecotourism zoning will check the decline of populations of key parrot species?
- Is ecotourism zoning central to the abatement of uncontrolled tourism at the salt lick?
- How likely is it that the diversification of visitor sites will reduce crowding by tourists at the panoramic viewpoint?

ii) Enhancement of biodiversity health
- How likely is it that visitor impact monitoring will enhance the viability of the parrot species?
- Will our strategy to increase parrot nesting site availability using tourism income increase the population size of this keystone species and therefore improve the health of the pine savanna?

iii) Leverage
- Will ecotourism infrastructure guidelines be catalytic and encourage conservation actions at other sites important to biodiversity conservation?

#### *b) Feasibility/Probability of Success*

Two key factors are critical to successful implementation:

- ***Lead person and institution*** — Perhaps the most important factor for success is finding the right person to take the lead for a site and the responsibility for implementing the strategy. An ecotourism project coordinator who combines tourism business experience with an understanding of conservation is key to the successful implementation of an ecotourism management plan.
- ***Complexity and influence of outside forces*** — Ecotourism **development** depends on outside factors beyond the control of site administrators such as the economic health of distant tourism markets or competition from other destinations. These outside influences are factors in the decision to adopt ecotourism development as a strategy. Ecotourism **management** activities, on the other hand, are typically non-complex strategies necessarily designed to reduce tourism-related threats.

#### *c) Costs of Implementation*

- Consider the funding required for ecotourism management planning and the probability of securing new or ongoing funds for this strategy (a successful visitor use fee or concession mechanism may cover at least the cost of the program).
- Consider the cost of failure to other conservation strategies that may be threatened.
- Ecotourism development planning will include financial feasibility assessments as part of the business planning process.

### Preliminary Site Evaluation

Ecotourism is sometimes viewed as the solution to all of a protected area's problems. However, for ecotourism to work as a viable management strategy in a given situation, certain conditions need to exist. This section is designed to help you determine whether or not ecotourism management and development are the right strategies for your particular circumstance.

Whether the decision to evaluate ecotourism's potential for a site comes from the SCP or the GMP process, a PSE is the next step. The PSE, a brief and simple process, consists of answering a few basic questions about the protected area to ascertain if indeed ecotourism has potential. The PSE should be used in conjunction with the SCP process when ecotourism is identified as a strategy for situations/threats that are not related to already existing visitor use. Using information from Table 2.1, for example, if "destructive harvesting of wild flora by local community X" is identified as a source of threat, and "develop compatible economic development opportunities for community orchid harvesters through ecotourism development" is identified as a potential strategy to deal with that threat, then PSE should definitely be used as a first-level test to evaluate that potential.

On the other hand, if "Incompatible Tourism Practices" is identified as a source of stress, then elements of ecotourism management planning such as "visitor impact monitoring" or the implementation of "visitor management guidelines" could be reasonable strategies to select. If management capacity is a prob-

**Box 2.2 Preliminary Site Evaluation**

☐ 1. Are there significant potential natural or cultural attractions in the area?
Examples might be:

- Endemic or rare species, e.g., flightless cormorant, Komodo dragon;
- Charismatic species, e.g., Toco toucan, scarlet macaw, whale shark;
- Healthy charismatic habitats, e.g., coral reef, primary rain forest;
- High indices of bird or mammal diversity, e.g., 300+ bird species, or 100+ mammal species;
- Spectacular geomorphological formations, e.g., high or voluminous waterfalls, caverns;
- Nationally or internationally important historic or contemporary cultural events, e.g., Mayan pyramids, Inti Raymi festival.

☐ 2. Can visitor access to the attractions be easily established?

☐ 3. Can the attractions be protected at an acceptable level from the impacts of visitation?

☐ 4. Is the area free of security problems that cannot be effectively controlled by the management of the area or local authorities?

☐ 5. Does the protected area have sufficient management and administrative authority to effectively manage implementation and monitoring of an ecotourism program at site level?

☐ 6. Is there a reasonable expectation that initial funding needed to develop ecotourism will be available?

☐ 7. Are the protected area managers, tour operators and communities willing to conform to ecotourism guidelines, i.e., low impact, small groups, impact monitoring, working with and actively involving communities?

☐ 8. Will visitation improve biodiversity health or reduce threats to conservation targets?

lem, ecotourism may need to be evaluated in terms of whether or not its development can provide funding, equipment and other types of support to a struggling protected area administration, through visitor use fee and concession mechanisms, for example.

To come up with an objective assessment of the answers to the questions in the PSE, it may be useful to organize a group of people who know the area and its situation, including some with tourism industry experience. The collective judgment of the group should provide an excellent guide to whether or not to proceed with the planning process.

If you answer "no" to any of these questions in Box 2.2, then you should seriously evaluate whether or not to continue planning for ecotourism. It is difficult to be objective about the areas we are involved with, especially if we might not be able to continue planning for certain activities for which we have high expectations. But it is better to be realistic about the chances for success early on than to confront failure down the road after spending a lot of time, energy and money.

You may find that some answers are prefaced by an "if." In that case, you must then assess whether there is a realistic expectation that the situation characterized by "if" can be achieved.

Even though the PSE may indicate that ecotourism is not currently an appropriate strategy, circumstances may change that allow it to be a viable option in the future.

## Reference

The Nature Conservancy. 2000. *The five-s framework for site conservation: A practitioner's handbook for site conservation planning and measuring conservation success.* Available on www.conserveonline.org

Chapter 3

# Step 2: Full Site Diagnostic (FSD)

## An Overview of the Contents of an Ecotourism Management Plan

An Ecotourism Management Plan (EMP) is a document that spells out the details of what needs to be done in order to implement an ecotourism-based public use program in a protected area or other potential ecotourism site. As a general rule, it will follow up on the recommendations made by the site's general management plan or the conclusions of the Site Conservation Plan (see Chapter 1 for more on this). The general management plan should broadly define the parameters within which all management and administrative actions must take place. It is up to subsequent planning efforts such as the EMP and annual work plans to put the general management plan recommendations into action.

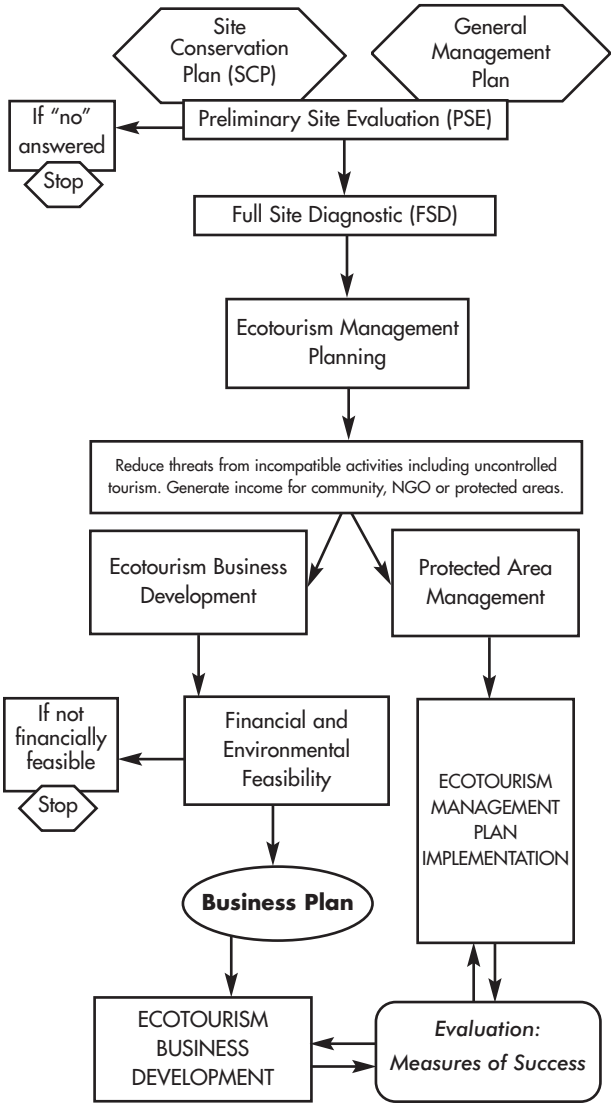
### *An EMP consists of:*

- a background section or diagnostic which describes and analyzes the present situation of the protected area and the variables which affect the implementation of an ecotourism program in that area; and,
- a section of recommendations that describes in an organized, systematic manner how to implement an ecotourism program given the situation described in the previous section. This is the section which most people would call the actual Plan, or **strategic plan**.

If the SCP and PSE processes of Step 1 indicated a "green light," then you should proceed to Step 2 — the Full Site Diagnostic, described in this chapter. This chapter focuses on *what* information to collect and *how* to collect it.

Figure 3.1 shows the different steps involved in the ecotourism management and development planning process. At the close of each step, planners must decide whether or not the circumstances warrant continuing with the Ecotourism Management and Development Planning process.

**Figure 3.1 An Overview of the Management and Development Planning Process**



## Full Site Diagnostic

If the Preliminary Site Evaluation (PSE) (see Part II, Chapter 2) was positive, then the next step is to proceed with a Full Site Diagnostic (FSD). This is what most planners would consider as the main Diagnostic Phase of the EMP. At this point, the planning team has definitely decided that ecotourism is what it wants to plan for, which means that it needs to gather a certain kind of information. Before it does that, the team should consider how it would gather information.

### *What You Need to Know*

At the end of this data gathering process, the team will be in a position to provide informed answers to the following questions:

- What are the major threats to the site/protected area and what strategies might be used in the EMP to address them?
- Where is ecotourism going to take place?
- What kinds of activities will be carried out to implement ecotourism?
- Who will be in charge of implementing these activities and what precautions need to be taken?
- By who and how will this be monitored and funded?

At first, the information gathering process may seem overwhelming. In order to organize and structure the large and diverse amounts of information needed to formulate an ecotourism plan, it is useful to classify the data into separate categories. These categories will not vary much from one situation to another. It is important to make good use of secondary sources of information (e.g., existing reports, etc.) and local experts. At least some of this information should have been gathered in Step 1, the SCP. In some cases, existing information will preclude the need to carry out some gathering of information and thus save time and money.

- Information about the **natural resources and features** that both limit and facilitate a successful ecotourism operation: important ecosystems that require significant levels of protection, endangered species, charismatic species, scenic values, natural attractions, etc.
- **Cultural variables** which will affect the ecotourism operation: local communities involved or potentially involved with ecotourism, local traditions and customs, resistance or acceptance of outside visitors, poverty and educational levels of local peoples, historical or archaeological sites, etc.
- **Protected area status.** The specific actual and projected situation of the area is important to analyze. A protected area administration must be able to adequately protect the area's boundaries and provide the administrative and economic support for a quality ecotourism operation. Management capacity must, therefore, be evaluated during the diagnostic process.
- **Tourism industry interest and participation** in the projected ecotourism operation. Without the active support of local and national tour operators and other representatives of the economic sector, an ecotourism operation in a protected area cannot be successful.
- **Visitor patterns, interests, and infrastructure** are important to recognize and evaluate in order to determine if there is sufficient basis to recommend ecotourism activities in a given situation. The following questions need to be answered about potential visitors (adapted from Ceballos-Lascuráin, 1996):

1. What types of people would be (are) interested in the attractions we have to offer? Who can we attract?
2. Who do we want to come here?
3. Where do they live?
4. What are their main interests?
5. What is their income level and how much are they willing to spend on their vacation?
6. What do they presently do as tourists? Where do they go?
7. What do they want to do?
8. How easily can they travel to this area?
9. How do they decide where they will travel and what they will do while at and en route to a vacation destination?

- **Marketing and promotion** of the ecotourism operation must be considered by evaluating similar tourism activities as well as by obtaining the opinions of interested tourism operators. How much marketing will need to be done in order for the operation to be successful? Who will be responsible for marketing?

### *Questions to Guide the Diagnostic*

Each protected area will have different specific information requirements. Planners will need to prioritize what information they should emphasize and how they will obtain it. The following questions will help in that process.

### *A. Natural Resources*

This section should focus on those natural resources (species, communities, ecosystems, physical features [mountains, rivers, lakes, etc.]) that are currently or

may be potential visitor attractions or that might be seriously affected by visitor use.

- What are the primary natural resources of the area? Are there species of plants and animals that attract visitors? Are there "flagship" or "charismatic" species in the area? Have inventories of species been conducted? If so, describe their contents.
- What are the endangered or threatened species or communities of plants/animals? Where are they located?
- What are the scenic attractions of the protected area?
- Where are the most pristine sectors of the protected area?

### *B. Cultural Resources*

This section should define the historical, archaeological or current cultural sites and events that could act as attractions or in some way affect how ecotourism would be carried out.

- Are there any significant historical sites within or adjacent to the protected area which could be utilized as tourism attractions? Do these same sites present significant difficulties for their protection?
- Are there any significant archaeological sites within or adjacent to the protected area which could be utilized as tourism attractions? Do these same sites present significant difficulties for their protection?
- Do other institutions need to be involved in order to excavate, restore, protect and interpret these sites?
- Are there local indigenous or traditional cultures that need to be considered and respected in the development of an EMP? To what extent do the aspirations and culture of local people permit their involvement with ecotourism?

### *C. Protected Area Management Status*

- Is the area protected? If so, what is its history? When was the area declared protected? What is its protective status? Why is it considered important to protect? Is the area effectively protected? If not, what elements are missing in order to effectively protect the area?
- Who manages the area? Is it part of a protected system? If so, describe the system and its management. Is the management system effective?
- How many staff members does the protected area employ? Describe their functions. Do they work full or part-time? Are protected area personnel local residents, or do they live outside the area? Do volunteers work in the protected area? If so, what do they do? Is the current level of employees adequate to cover current and projected management responsibilities?
- Has a Site Conservation Planning process been carried out? What are the primary threats to the protected area? These may be economic development pressures such as tourism or others. Which resources are affected by these threats? How urgent and severe are these threats? What strategies are used to deal with the identified threats? Are the strategies effective? If not, why not?
- Describe the current impacts of tourists. For example, is soil compacted because of tourists? Is there more litter? Have any attempts been made to quantify impacts? Are there formal impact studies? If so, describe them. What are the projections for potential impacts?
- Is there a monitoring system in the protected area? If so, describe it. Is it effective? If not, why not?

### *D. Visitor Patterns, Activities and Infrastructure*

Since visitor interest and demand will drive any future ecotourism program, it is essential to fully understand the nature of current and potential visitor use. It is unlikely that much information will be available; in this case, some effort should be put into carrying out a visitor profile survey with either current visitors or visitors to nearby tourist attractions.

- What are the major visitor attractions in your protected area? Why do people visit? In addition to the natural resources, are there cultural resources or other attractions that bring them?
- How accessible is your site? What are the principal types of transportation: bus, canoe, car, airplane or other? What are the road conditions leading to your site? Is lack of accessibility an obstacle to tourism growth?
- What do visitors do in the protected area? How long do they stay? Do they come for specific activities? Do they come to relax or be active? What food and drinks are available in the area? Do they buy things such as souvenirs? If so, what? Describe the day of a tourist.
- Are there visitor statistics for the protected area? If so, describe the system of collection. How many people visit the protected area each month? Annually? What is the percentage of foreigners and nationals? For foreigners, what are their nationalities? What languages do they speak and read? What are the growth trends? What are the estimates for future visitor trends?
- Do most visitors arrive in groups or as individuals? If visitors arrive with groups, how big are these? Do they make reservations in advance? Once in the protected area, do people travel independently or with

guides? If guides are used, are they protected area employees or outside guides?

- Have any visitor surveys been conducted? If so, when were they done and what was the method? What did you learn about visitors? Why do they come to the protected area? What do they want to do? What are their likes and dislikes about the protected area and its facilities? Do they feel the services offered are adequate? Do they have any advice for improvements?
- What are the economic impacts of visitors to the protected area? Do they pay entrance or user fees? Do they purchase goods and services in the protected area? Are there private sector businesses in the protected area? Does the protected area have concession arrangements? If so, describe them. Do the visitors go to local communities in conjunction with their visit to the protected area? If so, which communities and what types of activities/infrastructure are offered to them? What are the communities' assessments of such visits?
- What type of tourism infrastructure does the protected area have? Is there a trail system? Are there tourist facilities? Are there research facilities? Describe each. How are these maintained? Are they in good condition or need repair? Are the facilities adequate for their demand?
- Describe the protected area's environmental education programs. Is there written interpretation on trails? Do visitors take a self-guided tour? Is there a visitor center? What materials are available? Are there guides? Do visitors take advantage of these programs? Is environmental education a high priority for the protected area? For visitors? How would you rate the effectiveness of your environmental education programs?
- In addition to nature, are there other visitor attractions in the area: cultural, heritage or other? Describe these attractions.

### *E. Tourism Plans and Policies*

- Does the protected area have a management plan? If so, does it include a section on tourism activities? If so, describe its contents. What are the existing tourism plans for the area? Is there a zoning system? Is the management plan effective? If not, why not?
- At the national level, is there a tourism plan that includes nature tourism or ecotourism? If so, describe this section. Are there other national plans that include nature tourism or ecotourism, perhaps national conservation or economic development plans?
- Are there any other government statements, laws or policies that affect tourism in your area? These may be at the national, regional or local levels. If so, describe them and their relationship to tourism.
- Do you try to influence government plans and policies related to your protected area? If so, how? Do government officials seek opinions from protected area personnel for decisions about protected areas and tourism? Are there other opportunities for you to play a role in planning and policymaking at local, regional or national levels?
- Are you satisfied with existing plans and policies related to nature tourism/ecotourism? Is there an entrance fee system? Is it effective? What happens to the money collected from entrance fees and other fees? Are there policies concerning private sector activities in the protected area? If so, describe them. If not, should there be? How would you change current plans and policies? Would you add new ones?
- Is there pending or upcoming legislation related to your protected area? If so, describe it. Is there a chance for you to get involved in this process? Would this be a good opportunity to help shape the direction of ecotourism in the area?

### *F. Communities*

Local people can have a huge influence upon any protected area management activity; this is especially true of ecotourism. Ideally, there should be a mutualistic relationship between the protected area and the communities adjoining it, each benefiting from the other. Local communities should be integrated into any ecotourism activity in the protected area and vice versa. But making this relationship function optimally is difficult and tedious. It is almost as important to have detailed information about the communities around the protected area as it is to understand the natural and cultural resources located within the protected area. Wherever possible, this information should be expressed on a map together with population density, growth and location.

- Are there communities surrounding or inside the protected area? What is their distance from the protected area? What is the size of each community? Describe the economic activities of each community. How are members organized? What is the leadership? Are there other significant characteristics of each group?
- What is the history of relations between communities and the protected area? Have there been many interactions? Have there been tensions between residents and protected area officials? Is there a history of competition for natural resources between the two? If so, describe them.

- Do local residents visit your protected area? If so, what attracts them? What do they do? Have they encountered difficulties gaining access to the site due to increased visitation?
- Are residents involved in nature tourism activities? If so, describe their involvement in general. Is this involvement recent or do they have a long history? How did they get involved? Was it a planned activity or did it just happen?
- Describe the types of tourism businesses in surrounding communities: lodges, restaurants, guide services, handicraft shops, taxi companies and others. Do these offer employment opportunities for local residents? How many residents own or manage businesses? Are tourism businesses in the area profitable? Are the products they use local or imported? How are these businesses promoted to the public?
- In addition to economic impacts, what other impacts do residents encounter in nature tourism? Have there been social changes? If so, describe them. Have there been any negative environmental changes, such as more water pollution? Have there been any positive changes, such as better conservation efforts through clean-up campaigns? In what other ways has tourism affected surrounding areas?
- What are the residents' plans for nature tourism? Are there efforts to organize, discuss and handle tourism issues? Are there any tourism associations or cooperatives to address this topic? Is there a formal planning process within communities? Do you know whether residents wish to pursue or discourage tourism in their communities?
- What is your current means for communicating with residents about tourism issues? Is there an established forum? If not, can you create a system for communication? How will you stay informed about how communities are managing tourism?

### *G. Partnerships*

- Do you have any active partnerships with local residents? For example, you may recommend a certain lodge to protected area visitors because you know the owner will provide an environmental education program for guests. Partnerships may be formal or informal. If you have partnerships, describe them. Who initiated these relationships? Are they successful?
- Do you have active partnerships with government officials? Do you have partnerships with tourism officials? For example, do you exchange information with each other? Have you agreed to accept more tourists if more environmental impact studies are conducted? Who initiated these relationships? Are they successful?
- Do you have active partnerships with academics? Can they conduct research in exchange for a free place to stay? Do they study the flora and fauna under your guidance? Do academics approach you or do you seek them out? Describe these relationships. Are they successful?
- Do you have active partnerships with the tourism industry? For example, do tour operators help promote your protected area if you give them special treatment? What is your relationship with local and international tour operators? Do you have partnerships with tourism developers? Do you have partnerships with anyone in the transportation services? Describe your relationships with members of the tourism industry.
- Do you have active partnerships with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)? These may be local or international, and specialize in conservation, community development, tourism or other topics related to nature tourism. Do you have formal contracts or informal agreements? Why and how were these partnerships formed?
- Of all your partnerships, are there any that are particularly successful? Why? Are there any that have not worked? Why not?

### *H. Marketing and Promotion*

- What are your current marketing efforts? Have you studied why visitors come to your site? Why do visitors go to nearby sites? Are you targeting special groups for travel to your area? What groups are participating in marketing activities for your site?
- Is your protected area well known or obscure? Do many nationals already know about your area? Do people outside your country know about it?
- How is your area promoted? Is your protected area promoted as part of a national or regional tourism campaign? Do international NGOs promote your site? Does the tourism industry? What are your formal means of promotion, such as brochures or videos? Is there also informal promotion, such as word of mouth from past visitors? Are there other ways to promote your protected area?

### *I. Opportunities and Obstacles*

- What new opportunities will affect your tourism numbers? Think broadly and creatively. What will change tourism demand? Consider transportation

issues. For example, is there a new airline service into the country that may provide more visitors? Was a dirt road leading to your site recently paved? What other transportation issues affect tourism?

- Have changes occurred in the status of your natural resources? Are the threats greater? Has the government recently upgraded the protective status of the area? Have you received new funds for protected area management?
- What about publicity? Was there an article recently published about your protected area in a popular magazine? Did a tour operator start running new tours to your site?
- Are there any new attractions in your area that might bring additional visitors to the country? How will this affect your site? Are there already tourists in the region visiting other sites who might be attracted to your site?
- Are there upcoming conferences in your country related to nature tourism? Will these increase exposure to your area?
- What else has happened, or is likely to happen, that will affect tourism numbers?
- Are there any obstacles to tourism growth to consider? For example, was there recent political conflict in your area, or is there potential for conflict? Is your area considered stable? Is political violence a possibility?
- Have you experienced a natural disaster, such as a hurricane, in your area? What was damaged?
- What about your country's currency? Is it considered stable on the international market? Has your national currency experienced changes that discourage visitors from coming to your country? These obstacles to tourism growth may be temporary or permanent. Depending on whether you want to increase or decrease tourism numbers, you may feel these obstacles are positive or negative.

**Box 3.1 Visitor Survey: Sierra del Lacandón National Park, Guatemala**

Sierra del Lacandón National Park, created in 1990, is located in the Peten region of Guatemala. During 1999, The Nature Conservancy and the park's administration developed an ecotourism management plan. A local graduate of a university ecotourism program was hired to prepare a diagnostic of the tourism situation of the park. While the park has many natural and cultural attractions, few tourists visit it. As part of the diagnostic process, the tourism specialist identified each of the tourism attractions and located them on a map. She also interviewed representative samples of visitors at other visitor sites in the Peten region to develop a basic visitor profile, as well as to determine if there would be any interest in visiting the park attractions should access be improved and information made available.

Tourism operators and owners of travel agencies were also interviewed to find out if they would be interested in sending clients to the park under certain conditions. All of the information was used to help define the main recommendations of the Ecotourism Management Plan for the park.

adapted from Moore et al., 2000

### *How to Obtain the Diagnostic Information*

There are several different types of activities that need to be carried out in order to obtain the needed information.

### *A. Review of Existing Written Materials*

One of the first steps of the planning team should be to collect and review all of the written materials about the protected area that are pertinent to planning for ecotourism: the general management plan, relevant legislation and policy documents, scientific studies, wildlife inventories, visitor surveys and profiles, tourism statistics for the protected area and to sites in the region, and analyses of national tourism trends (figures are usually available from the Ministry of Tourism).

### *B. Fieldwork*

Thoroughly knowing and understanding the area is fundamental to developing an EMP, which cannot be done without spending a lot of time visiting the protected area. As a first step, the team should study existing maps and become familiar with the general layout of the protected area and the location of the major natural and cultural features, as well as the actual and potential visitor sites and infrastructure. Aerial photographs and satellite images are very useful if available. Use of computerized maps with different layers of information is an ideal way to map the area, and GIS is an excellent tool to facilitate this process. The team should also become familiar with areas adjacent to the protected area where tourism activities are currently carried out or might be in the future. In particular, geographic and resource utilization links between adjacent communities and the protected area must be detected and evaluated. Information from previously conducted Human Context Analyses (HCA) should be utilized.

Several trips to the protected area should be planned, if possible organizing them as if you were a typical tourist. In this way, the team will get a visitor's perspective. But the team should also make sure it is able to visit every site in the area that has any potential whatsoever for ecotourism, remembering that an ecotourist can be a backpacker who wants to hike and camp or a senior citizen who wants to stay in a comfortable lodge or cabin.

In order to gather this information, the planning team may designate a research assistant to carry out initial site exploration. The data generated from this exploration would include photos and logistics; this data will identify key areas for further in-depth investigation and may rule out areas initially thought to have potential.

In order to do effective fieldwork, it is useful to subdivide the protected area into sectors according to problems, uses, ecosystems and any other particular situations that might exist. If there is a zoning structure set up by the general management plan, this should be a useful guideline. Particular attention should be paid to: present and potential visitor sites, other protected area infrastructure such as guard posts, shoreline areas, hills and mountain tops, trails of all sorts, camp sites, access points, lakes, streams, springs, etc.

The planning team *must* obtain a comprehensive view of the protected area and everything that could affect ecotourism development (which is just about everything). It must begin to understand how tourism will function in the protected area by asking such questions as:

- How long does it take to get from one place to another?
- Is the protected area accessible?
- Where are the potential lodging sites?
- What are the major attractions?
- What are the activities that visitors might engage in?
- What are the obstacles?
- Is it safe?

Ultimately, the planning team must put itself in the place of the visitor and visualize what he/she would like and not like. This should involve staying in the same local hotels, hiking area trails and using existing transportation.

The team must decide what information is most needed. Information gathering should be strategically organized so that only the most relevant data is obtained, otherwise the task is never ending. A complete inventory of everything is not needed. Box 3.4 includes some ideas of the information that might be gathered.

### *C. Interviews*

Formal and informal interviews with people who know the area are essential to gaining an informed opinion of what the protected area is like. Different people will have different perspectives. All of these perspectives are useful, although not always acceptable. For example, a hunter may be able to provide useful information about where certain species of interest to visitors are most likely to be found. Scientists will be able to inform the team about where special or endangered vegetation or wildlife is located. Local people who may use the area for subsistence reasons can be useful informants about trails, potential attractions and a host of other information. Protected area personnel, especially the rangers or guards who spend most of their time in the area, are an essential source of information about the resources, visitor behavior and local community relationships.

The perspective of tourism operators is also important. What they see as the challenges and opportunities for tourism in an area is valuable information. They also know the tourists and their preferences and expectations better than any other actor. An EMP must be a plan that the tourism industry can find acceptable. The team must know what operators are doing in the protected area and what they are planning to do. If little or no tourism is occurring at present, then interviews with those operators

**Box 3.2 Full Site Diagnostic at Sierra del Lacandón National Park**

Before other field trips were carried out, the EMP planning team for Sierra del Lacandón National Park in Guatemala hired a recent graduate of an Ecotourism Program at a national university to collect a large part of the data that was required. This involved preparing a Site Inventory of Ecotourism Attractions as well as developing a visitor profile. The student needed to review relevant written materials, interview park rangers and visit key sites throughout the park. This student then became a valuable member of the planning team.

Formal relationships with such programs can be a useful way to develop future professionals for protected areas. Students may do theses or special projects in the protected areas and find productive employment with those areas later on.

adapted from Moore et al., 2000

who are interested or who may be potentially interested will still be useful. Their interest in conforming to and promoting the ecotourism guidelines of low numbers, low impact and economic benefit to the protected area and local communities is important.

**Box 3.3 Stakeholder Consultation at Sierra del Lacandón National Park**

In order to prepare the EMP for Sierra del Lacandón National Park in Guatemala, two workshops were held initially, one for tour operators and the other for local NGOs and other community groups. Another joint workshop was held later to report to them on the preliminary observations to obtain stakeholder input on specific issues. A final workshop was held to present the final document. In the meantime, several of the workshop participants participated with the planning team either in fieldwork or other activities in which their contribution was useful.

adapted from Moore et al., 2000

### *D. Questionnaires and Surveys*

Written questionnaires or surveys may be a useful tool for systematizing and documenting the information obtained from interviews. They will be essential if sample sizes are so large that face-to-face interviews are impracticable. The planning team should be careful to ensure that surveys are used to obtain specific information of benefit to the EMP and that they are short, well-designed documents (including a field testing of the survey instrument). Professional help in designing a survey is recommended; if not used, survey results may not be as useful as planners had hoped for. It is important to recognize that gathering and analyzing this information requires time and money; this should be clearly factored into work plans and budgets.

### *E. Consultative Meetings and Workshops*

While field work may constitute the most important method for obtaining information, events such as workshops and other types of meetings that bring stakeholders together for constructive purposes are also extremely important for several reasons:

- They are a valuable means for obtaining information/opinions from informed individuals and organizations about the protected area and those aspects related to the EMP, e.g., what the attractions are, the difficulties in doing tourism there, who the visitors are, who the other stakeholders are that the team may not have considered, etc.
- If well designed, they are important means of involving stakeholders in the planning process and, hopefully, in the later implementation stages. Participants should be made to feel that their opinions are impor-

**Box 3.4 Ecotourism Justification and Background**

*EMP for Sierra del Lancandón National Park, Guatemala*

Preface
I. Introduction
  A. Purpose and Objectives of the Plan
  B. The Concepts and Principles which Provide the Ecotourism Framework
  C. Methodology
II. Ecotourism Development Context for the Park
  A. National and Cultural Characteristics of the Park
  B. Socio-economic Situation of the Park
  C. Tourism Policy and Legal Context
    1. Legislation
    2. Policies of the Comisión Nacional de Areas Protegidas
    3. Present role of Tourism within the Park
  D. Present Management and Administration
III. Regional and Park Level Evaluation of Tourism Situation
  A. Profile of National and Regional Tourism Indicators
    1. Regional Tourism
    2. Profile of Visitors to the Peten
  B. Present Situation of Tourism
    1. Tourism to the National Park
    2. Tourism attractions and infrastructure
  C. Present Initiatives
    1. Infrastructure and attractions
  D. Factors which Limit Ecotourism Development
    1. Visitor Safety
    2. Impact of the New Highway Tabasco-Flores
    3. Impact of the Establishment of La Técnica as a Frontier Community

Moore et al., 2000

tant and will be reflected in the EMP. There should always be follow up to a workshop or other meeting.

- They are an educational device. While meetings should not be designed exclusively for this purpose, they should be used to inform people about the protected area, its objectives and, in particular, the EMP.

### *Organizing the Diagnostic Information*

Good decisions require good information. In this phase of EMP development, planners must include all of the information they can obtain that is relevant to establishing an ecotourism program in the protected area. The purpose of this section is threefold:

- The effort of organizing and presenting this information frequently helps planners to better understand and analyze the data that they have.
- The information presented here should provide a logical support for the recommendations included in the strategic plan section; there should be a natural flow from the data to conclusions to recommendations.
- The background information constitutes a valuable resource for protected area managers and may not be easily available from other sources. As such, this section should be considered an important reference for future planning and other administrative actions.

### *Formalizing the Content of the Diagnostic Section*

After you have gathered your information, the task of putting it down on paper in an organized, systematic manner awaits. The outline in Box 3.4 provides a guideline for how this might be done. Remember that the strategies and recommendations section comes later.

## References

Ceballos-Lascuráin, H. 1996. *Tourism, ecotourism, and protected areas: The state of nature-based tourism around the world and guidelines for its development*. Gland, Switzerland: The World Conservation Union (IUCN); N. Bennington, Vermont: The Ecotourism Society.

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Chapter 4

# Step 3: Data Analysis and Preparing the Plan

This is the time when all those great ideas must be put on paper in a way that those responsible for implementation will be able to understand them and use them. This is a real challenge and one of the main reasons why many plans do not get implemented. The data collected in the Diagnostic Phase needs to be analyzed and structured in a way that will make it useful in the recommendation.

## Data Analysis Phase

Once the data has been collected, the team needs to analyze it and begin to make decisions about what the EMP will recommend. A lot of data will have been accumulated, and planners need to be able to use this information. A useful beginning point is to look at the opportunities that have presented themselves, as well as the obstacles. Is there a lot of potential interest in establishing an ecotourism program in the protected area? Are local communities already involved in ecotourism? What are they doing? Are they doing it well? What do they want to do in the future? Is there an international donor interested in providing funding? Are there potential development projects that may impact (positively or negatively) ecotourism implementation?

Another useful analytical tool is to think in terms of **critical sites**, or **critical activities**. What sites need to be tourist oriented? At what sites has tourism had a negative impact? What are the activities that must be carried out if ecotourism is to be successful?

The Site Conservation Planning process used by The Nature Conservancy provides a very useful structure for analytical work. It focuses on identifying the stresses on key biological systems in the protected area and then identifying the actual source of the stress. Planners then identify the critical threats and the strategies that mitigate or eliminate these threats (see Part II, Chapter 2). In the data analysis phase, critical threat identification should be a priority. If key biological systems have not yet been identified via the general management plan or other scientific studies, then EMP planners will need to assess this issue so that ecotourism activities can be planned accordingly. High impact or unmanaged tourism may already constitute a threat to some important environments. Ecotourism may constitute a strategy for alleviating that stress. Strategy development takes place in the next phase.

A key result of the analytical phase must be some conclusions about:

- what the major threats are to the site/protected area and how the EMP might address them;
- where ecotourism is going to take place;
- what kinds of activities will be carried out to implement ecotourism;
- who will be in charge of implementing these activities and what precautions need to be taken; and
- by who and how this will be monitored and funded.

In order to reach these important conclusions, the planning team will need to work together. Perhaps each person could be responsible for reaching tentative conclusions regarding one aspect of the EMP. These would then be presented in a group setting and discussed by all. At some point after the initial analysis, it may be useful to have a workshop involving the stakeholders to ask their opinions about various scenarios, e.g., if visitor site X would work better as an ecotourism site if it were restricted to groups of six people or less, or if an ecolodge run by a concessionaire would be an acceptable means of providing lodging in a distant, but touristically-important, part of the protected area.

Preparing and presenting information to a group of stakeholders on a situation, including viable alternatives, can be very productive and educational.

## Preparing the Plan

Before beginning the task of deciding exactly how ecotourism will be implemented, the planning team should agree upon the organization and format of the plan and then each person should be assigned sections to write according to their interests and expertise. A plan report coordinator should also be designated. Drafts of each section should be reviewed by other team members to ensure that all points have been covered and that extraneous ones are not. The content should be kept basic and written so that one section flows into another. A final editing job by a professional is essential.

Planners should remember that the information needs to be obtained via a well-planned process (described in the previous chapter). The level of detail included in the recommendations will depend in large part upon the amount and quality of information available, the degree of participation by concerned stakeholders and the amount of time and funding available. If the circumstances warrant, it is justifiable to postpone some decisions to a later date when more information or funding is available, i.e., planning to plan. In such cases, planners need to concentrate on defining the first steps so that implementation can begin.

A plan is only a reflection of what planners believe the best course of action should be at a given point in time under a given set of circumstances. While the general course of action should remain fairly consistent over time, the details involved in carrying it out may change significantly over time and as conditions change. Therefore, an EMP should be regarded as a dynamic document that is followed as long as its recommendations can be logically implemented within the surrounding management and tourism environment and as long as they fulfill the objectives established for the program.

The Río Usumacinta is the boundary of Sierra del Lacandón National Park and also the border between Guatemala and Chiapas, Mexico © Andy Drumm

This is the section where everything comes together, where all the hard work done by the EMP planners and other participants in the planning process results in a plan for actually carrying out an ecotourism program in the protected area. It is important that this section describes and explains everything that needs to be done for ecotourism to become a part of the protected area's management strategy. To do this, planners need to be able to present the plan in an orderly, systematic and clear way.

Presentation of the plan should consider the intended audience and its level of understanding. If most of the people who will be implementing the plan have participated in the planning process, this will facilitate their understanding of the plan's contents. If they did not participate, then the plan will need to consider this in both the level of content detail as well as the structure of its presentation. The plan must also consider that potential funders, politicians and tourism officials will also be reviewing this document, which underscores the need to make it a document easily understood by people who may not be intimately familiar with the protected area. In general, the plan's recommendations should:

- build upon what the protected area already has in terms of previous planning efforts (e.g., a general management plan), infrastructure, personnel and administration, recognizing that certain changes will need to take place;
- be consistent and integrated with the protected area's other management programs such as Protection, Environmental Education and Resource Management;
- be structured and written in a way that protected area personnel will be able to take the plan and implement it with minimum effort and maximum understanding;

**Box 4.1 Vision for Ecotourism in Sierra del Lacandón National Park**

Ecotourism in SLNP will be characterized by a relatively constant flow of low volumes of a diversity of visitor types largely falling into two general categories:

1) general interest in natural and cultural history from Europe and the US requiring relatively easy access and comfortable accommodation in an ecolodge; and
2) generally younger, more adventurous with similar general interests who will camp at designated sites within the park and stay in local communities.

All will pay an entrance fee to the park administration and will be accompanied by a trained guide from a local community. Visits will generally be split between day visitors and one and two-night stays.

Visitation will eventually rise to between 10 and 15 thousand per year. The park will generate revenues sufficient to finance ecotourism management activities and generate a surplus for additional conservation activities.

adapted from Moore et al., 2000

- contain a level of detail consistent with the types of recommendations that are made and with the technical expertise of protected area personnel and others who will be carrying out the plan.

## EMP Size

The size of a finished plan will vary according to its thoroughness, which might also be a function of time and budget availability. But a typical EMP will consist of a total of between 50 and 100 pages, including maps and tables. This will probably be divided equally between the Diagnostic results gathered in the Full Site Evaluation and the Plan of action described below.

## EMP Structure

### *A. Vision, Goals and Strategies*

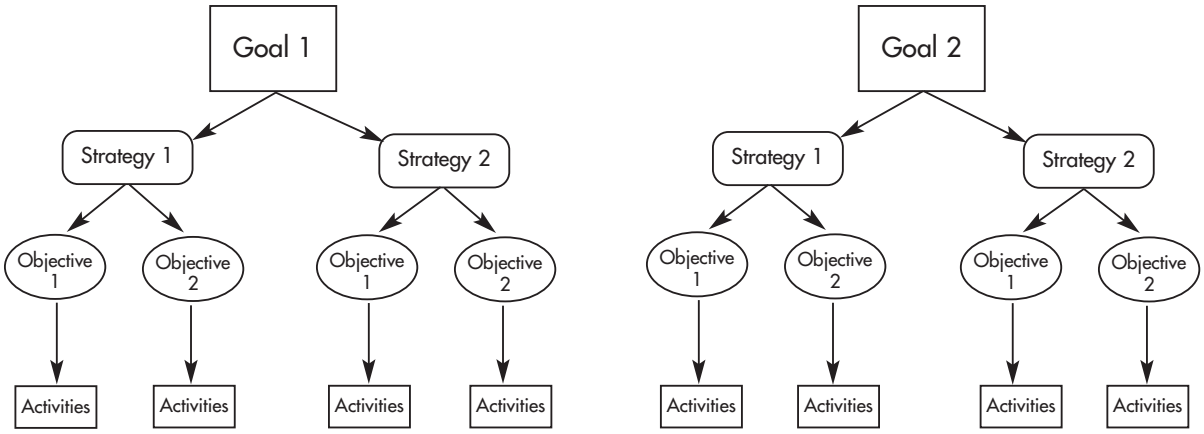
**Vision.** Planners need to present their overall vision of what ecotourism will mean to the protected area. This will usually consist of a few well-crafted paragraphs that present a concise, comprehensive projection of what the protected area will be like after several years of successful ecotourism. Particular topics that should be addressed are community involvement, levels and types of tourism activity, income generation and changes that will be made in protected area management. For example, see Box 4.2.

**Box 4.2 Goals of Sierra del Lacandón National Park EMP, Guatemala**

1. Encourage a diversified tourism program that offers opportunities and activities to different segments of the tourism market.
2. Serve as a model for the development of ecotourism activities for other Guatemalan protected areas.
3. Generate income for the conservation of Sierra del Lacandón National Park.
4. Improve the knowledge of local people, the public in general and park visitors about the area's natural and cultural resources by means of educational and interpretive activities.
5. Involve communities and local peoples both within and adjacent to the national park in order that they will benefit from ecotourism activities.

adapted from Moore et al., 2000

**Figure 4.1 The Structure of an Ecotourism Management Plan (EMP)**



**Goals.** It is also important to specify the goals for ecotourism development in the protected area. Usually these goals are derived from the basic tenets espoused by the concept of ecotourism: low impact tourism, local community benefits, conservation finance and environmental education. These goals will probably remain constant over time, though some of the activities designed to carry them out may change with circumstances.

**Strategies.** Strategy development is an essential step after defining the plan's overall Goals. It is an intermediate step between establishing Goals and defining specific Activities to carry them out (see Figure 4.1). It brings the abstract Goals to a more realistic level. The Objectives and Activities, in turn, take the Strategies to a very practical level.

Strategy development should be directed to resolving the major threats and critical situations you have defined in the analysis section, and/or in the Site Conservation Planning process, as well as to ensuring that tourism activity is really *ecotourism*. Strategies can be **Direct** or **Indirect** in their approach. An example of a Direct type of strategy would be: "Decrease negative tourism impact upon the Red River by implementing low impact technology." An Indirect approach would be: "Encourage capacity building in the communities adjacent to the protected area." A few examples of possible Strategies follow:

**Box 4.3 Ecotourism Management Strategies**

1. **Implementation Strategy**
   To allow for advancement in other areas of park management, implement ecotourism in flexible stages.
2. **Coordination/cooperation**
   Work intensively with local communities and other local groups and authorities, as well as with tourism operators, guides, NGOs, national organizations, Mexican authorities and many others, to ensure that the appropriate levels of coordination and cooperation are achieved.
3. **Funding**
   Finance implementation of this Plan from four different sources:
   - ecotourism activities,
   - private sector investment in tourism infrastructure,
   - government budget assigned to the national park, and
   - donations and loans originating from bilateral and multilateral assistance programs.

adapted from Moore et al., 2000

**Box 4.4 Structure of Subprograms**

**Subprogram Name**

A. **Subprogram Description** (what are we trying to accomplish via this subprogram?)

B. **Strategy**

C. **Specific Objectives** (a few of which should be quantifiable and measurable, e.g., entrance fees being collected at two entry points within 18 months)

D. **Major activities**; for each activity:
   1. Title
   2. Activity Description (brief description of what will be done)
   3. Implementation Responsibility (who will do this and with whose help, including organizations, communities, etc.?)
   4. Prerequisites for Implementation (what needs to be done before we can do this? what are other activities are needed, what materials, or what personnel? what meetings, etc.?)
   5. Where will this activity take place?
   6. Cost (an estimate of the project's cost, aside from personnel already contracted)

There are different approaches to presenting strategies in an EMP. The approach that you choose needs to consider the people who will be using this plan as well as the administrative setup of the protected area. *The ultimate consideration is that the people in charge of the Ecotourism Program be able to take this Plan and implement it with a minimum of difficulty.*

Strategies for an Ecotourism Program can also be grouped into Subprograms (see Box 4.4) such as Infrastructure Development, Tour Guide System, Environmental Education, Community Relations, Environmental Interpretation, Fee System (or Income Generation), Concession Management and Administration. For each Strategy within a Subprogram, specific Objectives should be prepared and then Activities organized to implement these Strategies and Objectives.

The main objective should be to present all of the needed information in a manner which site/protected area managers will find accessible and usable. Generally speaking, the questions of What, Who, Where and How must be answered here. It is also important to define objectives that can be used later to measure your progress in implementing the plan.

**Box 4.5 Criteria for Defining Objectives**

- **Impact oriented.** Represents desired changes in critical threat factors that affect project goals.
- **Measurable.** Definable in relation to some standard scale (numbers, percentages, fractions, or all/nothing states).
- **Time limited.** Achievable within a specific period of time.
- **Specific.** Clearly defined so that all people in the project have the same understanding of what the terms in the objective mean.
- **Practical.** Achievable and appropriate within the context of the project site and the management authority's possibilities.

adapted from Margoluis and Salafsky, 1998

### *B. Objectives*

For each strategy you should develop a series of specific, programmatic objectives that must be met if your efforts are to be considered successful. Objectives are specific statements detailing the desired accomplishments or outcomes of a project or program. If the project is well conceptualized and designed, realization of a project's objectives should lead to the fulfillment of the project's goals. A good objective meets the criteria in Box 4.5.

Defining an objective that meets all of these criteria is not as difficult as it may seem.

Some examples of good objectives are the following:

- After three years, two interpretive trails will be designed, constructed and in use.
- By the end of year five, incomes of those households participating in the handicraft production project will have increased by at least 25%.
- After two years, the amount of trash collected on the Green Mountain interpretive trail will have decreased by 75%.
- By the end of year one, two tourism operators will be active participants in the Ecotourism Advisory Committee.
- During the first six months, the park should form an Ecotourism Program Advisory Committee for the purpose of assisting the program director to implement program activities, evaluate the program's progress, and provide advice concerning how best to deal with the private sector and other institutions.
- The interpretive trail at Blue Mountain should be built and fully implemented by the end of year two; the interpretive trail at Rapid River will be built and fully implemented by the end of year three.
- Local entrepreneur income will have increased by 50% at the end of year three.
- Five tour guides from local communities will be trained and working by the end of year one.

### *C. Activities*

Now that you have some objectives, you must develop activities to implement the objectives. Activities should meet the criteria in Box 4.6

Some examples of activities:

***Objective 1.*** After three years, two interpretive trails will be designed, constructed and in use.

***Activity 1.*** Work with local community and specialist to select specific site and develop a site plan for the trails, including interpretive signs and texts, to be implemented at Green River and Rocky Cliffs. A budget for each trail must be prepared as well.

***Activity 2.*** Contract local community laborers to clear the trail routes and prepare the trail surfaces.

***Activity 3.*** Contract the construction of trail signage and interpretive pamphlets.

**Box 4.6 Criteria for Activity Development**

1. **Linked.** Activities should always be linked to a specific objective or objectives. There should be several for each objective.
2. **Focused.** Unlike objectives, which need to be impact oriented, activities need to be clearly process oriented. Activities should be written as focused statements of actions that the project/program is going to undertake. They must include information about how you are going to do the activity (which tasks need to be undertaken), who is responsible for carrying out these tasks, when they will be completed and where they will be undertaken.
3. **Feasible.** As you start to develop activities, you might notice that for any given objective there is practically an infinite combination of activities that could be undertaken to achieve the objective. You need to select the activities that are the most feasible. In particular, you need to select the ones that make the most sense given the program's available and projected resources and constraints.
4. **Appropriate.** Are the activities appropriate considering the local context? Is it appropriate to organize a guide cooperative if there are only two guides or if there is no interest at present?

Margoluis and Salafsky, 1998

### *D. Zoning*

Zoning is a system for properly allocating different uses of a protected area in different parts of its territory. Tourism activities will be carried out in varying ways and intensity, and zoning should reflect this. See Volume II, Part I, Chapter 2 for detailed information about zoning.

### *E. Facilitating Implementation*

In the previous sections, a large number of activities will have been described, but typically managers will have a hard time deciding where to begin and what to do first. Below are outlined three methods for facilitating implementation of the EMP.

*1. Timeline*

Planners should place the Activities into an organized, systematic framework which will make it easy for managers to determine what needs to be done and when. A typical way to do this is to decide the time period during which the EMP should be implemented and then divide that period into several stages. These stages could be one-year periods. However, due to the usual delays that occur in implementation, it is perhaps more realistic to use three or four implementation stages without a specific timeframe associated with them. All planned activities must be assigned to one of these stages. This will provide managers with some basic reference about the sequence in which activities need to be carried out.

Typically, protected area managers will be anxious to begin implementation but will be unsure about what exactly they need to do first. It is useful for planners to prepare a brief section that describes in great detail what needs to be done during the first six months to a year of the Program. This is particularly valuable when the person hired to direct the Ecotourism Program does not have the experience to carry out the Program from inception. With some initial detailed instructions, the task becomes much easier.

*2. Site specific plans*

Another important method for facilitating the EMP's implementation is the preparation of individual site plans for the major visitor sites. These site plans should contain details of all the actions needed to develop these sites and their order of implementation. If possible, detailed maps should be prepared to indicate where the proposed infrastructure should be located.

*3. Ecotourism advisory committee*

Another option for facilitating the EMP's implementation is to create an Ecotourism Advisory Committee that will meet frequently to advise the Ecotourism Program coordinator. Ideally, the members of this Committee will be individuals who are familiar with ecotourism and protected areas and who may have participated in the planning process. They can be invaluable allies in achieving Program objectives.

*4. Monitoring and evaluation*

The EMP should recommend procedures and mechanisms for evaluating progress towards achieving the plan's goals and objectives. It should also suggest ways to monitor the impact that tourism is having on the area's physical and cultural resources, as well as economic factors and visitor expectation levels. See Volume II, Part I, Chapter 6 for more information.

### *F. Annexes*

A lot of data will be accumulated in the process of gathering information for the planning process and development of the EMP. Though only the most pertinent, synthesized information should be presented in the body of the EMP, planners may wish to preserve much of the data that they have gathered in the Annexes of the EMP. This way, the information is still available but does not interrupt the flow of the EMP with unnecessary detail. Examples of what might belong here are:

- results of surveys carried out in the diagnostic phase;
- visitation statistics;
- lists of animal/plant species found in the protected area;
- lists of ecotourism projects encountered in communities related to the protected area; and
- marketing studies.

### *G. Maps and Other Graphics*

Maps and other graphics including charts and tables are an important part of the EMP since visual representations are more readily understood by most readers. Maps should be used to indicate:

- location of the protected area, both in the region and the country;
- natural and cultural attractions within and adjacent to the protected area;
- zoning system;
- location and details of individual visitor sites;
- human populations; and
- infrastructure (roads, trails, guard stations, hotels, etc.).

Other graphics should demonstrate:

- visitation statistics;
- development schedules for individual visitor sites;
- visitor preferences; and
- transportation and accommodation capacities of existing infrastructure.

### Publicizing and Distributing the Plan

Before publication, the final draft should be submitted to those stakeholders who have shown the most interest in order to obtain their opinions and to detect any errors that may have crept into the document. This will also help achieve their buy-in to the EMP, which is essential if it is to be implemented.

After finishing the EMP, it must be publicized and distributed to those who need to know about it: tourism operators, tour guides, tourism agencies, international donors, national planning ministry, national tourism ministry or agency, universities, local governments and communities, etc.

There is a lot of competition in the provision of essentially similar ecotourism experiences. Ecotourism in protected areas usually needs to be promoted and marketed if it is to be successful. A well-made and designed EMP is a good first step in that direction. It is not only a management tool for protected area administrators, it is also a publicity/fundraising tool.

**Box 4.7 Checklist for Strategic Planning and Recommendations Section of the EMP**

Have you:

- ☐ Defined a **vision** for your Ecotourism Management Plan?
- ☐ Determined a few major **goals** that you wish to guide your plan?
- ☐ Allocated ecotourism activities within your site according to a **zoning** scheme and/or adjusted a previous scheme to coincide with the ecotourism activity you are proposing?
- ☐ Created a series of **ecotourism subprograms** that reflect the different types of activities that will need managerial/administrative supervision?
- ☐ Within each subprogram, developed a series of **strategies** that will be followed to guide implementation?
- ☐ For each strategy, developed a series of detailed activities to implement the **objectives**?
- ☐ Developed a **timeline** that places Activities to be carried out on a sequential list placed according to a Yearly or Phase format?
- ☐ Developed detailed **site plans** for those sites to be used extensively by ecotourists?
- ☐ Recommended the creation of an **Ecotourism Advisory Committee** to assist the site's administration with the implementation and evaluation of the EMP?
- ☐ Recommended how the EMP will be **monitored and evaluated**?

### References

Margoluis, R. and N. Salafsky. 1998. *Measures of success: Designing, managing, and monitoring conservation and development projects*. Washington D.C.: Island Press.

Moore, A., A. Drumm, and J. Beavers. 2000. *Plan de manejo para el desarrollo del ecoturismo en el Parque Nacional Sierra del Lacandón*. Serie de Coediciones Técnicas No. 15. Consejo Nacional de Areas Protegidas (CONAP), Fundación Defensores de la Naturaleza, The Nature Conservancy.

### Resource

PROARCA/CAPAS www.capas.org/guide.htm

*This excellent web site makes available many examples of protected area management plans including ones relating to tourism. This project is part of the Regional Environmental Program for Central America and operates regionally in Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama. The objective of PROARCA/CAPAS is to provide financial, technical and policy assistance for the management of protected areas and the conservation of biodiversity in Central America.*

Chapter 5

# Step 4: Implementation of the Ecotourism Management Plan

Now that you have an Ecotourism Management Plan (EMP), it is time to begin implementation. Starting off on the right foot is frequently the most difficult part of the entire process. Several factors are key to program success, and they can be divided into two categories: personnel-related factors and programmatic factors.

## Personnel-related Factors

***A. Head of Ecotourism Program.*** The Ecotourism Program should have a qualified person whose only responsibility is to implement the EMP. This person, who in this document will be called the "Head," is the *key* to a successful ecotourism program. The Head should have experience with both the tourism industry as well as in conservation of natural areas. It would be even better if the Head has personnel management and business experience. The Head is responsible for ensuring that all ecotourism activities are carried out according to the EMP and that they all conform to the ecotourism concept. The Head is also responsible for ensuring that the Program is appropriately integrated with the rest of the protected area's management structure, e.g., the Resource Management and Protection programs. The Head will also need to ensure that all of the personnel assigned to the Ecotourism Program receives appropriate training.

***B. Ecotourism Program Personnel.*** In addition to the Head of the Program, there should be a number of other staff members who work either part time or full time implementing the EMP recommendations. These staff members will range from rangers or wardens who work collecting entrance fees and supervising visitor behavior, to specialists in environmental interpretation and education. There may also be a need for staff to supervise concessions and other private sector involvement at the site. If ecotourism is bringing in significant sums of money, the area's administration may need an accountant to properly manage this money.

***C. Training.*** Ecotourism is a relatively new management strategy and one that requires intensive and well-focused management to be successful. In most cases, the staff members available for implementing an EMP will not have the appropriate background required to do a good job. Most of the staff, however, can be trained to do the job correctly, which should be arranged by the site/protected area administration. Training needs will vary from a general course on ecotourism to more specific training on concession management. Other training needs may include: environmental interpretation and education; trail design and maintenance; impact monitoring techniques, including Limits of Acceptable Change; visitor management techniques; communication and human relations skills; accounting; fundraising and public relations; and extension techniques.

***D. Ecotourism Advisory Committee.*** The EMP should have been prepared using a participatory process, and its implementation should also involve the participation of the various stakeholders. This Committee has three main roles: (1) advising the Head of the Ecotourism Program concerning implementation of the EMP, especially with regard to technical and tourism industry concerns, (2) providing actual support, both in the field and in the office when it is needed, and (3) providing a communication link to the respective spheres of influence, e.g., tourism industry or communities. For example, members of the Committee should be involved in providing logistical support and training assistance when needed. They should be enthusiastic supporters of ecotourism and of the particular site/protected area. These individuals should be selected based upon their participation in the EMP planning process. They should represent a cross-section of the tourism industry, especially locally, as well as of government agencies and local communities involved with tourism activities and the ecotourism site.

## Programmatic Factors

***E. Monitoring.*** It is impossible to overemphasize the importance of frequent monitoring of program impacts. **Monitoring** usually refers to the measurement of the

economic, socio-cultural or ecological impact of a program or an activity upon the ecotourism site's natural or human environment. Measurement usually consists of setting indicators and standards for various parameters which are representative of the potential impacts. These must then be monitored on a regular basis to determine whether or not these standards are being met. If they are not, then management must change its approach to rectify the situation. These indicators and standards should be defined at least partially in the EMP. If they are not, then technical assistance may be required in order to set up a monitoring plan. There is more information about monitoring in Volume II, Part I.

***F. Evaluation*** refers to the regular review of the Program's progress towards accomplishing the goals and objectives set out in the EMP and annual work plan. This should be a formal process, usually conducted annually, in which all staff and stakeholders meet to discuss how the project is going and to evaluate each of the Program's activities. Sometimes it is useful to contract an external, objective evaluator to manage this process. Results of the Program's evaluation should be used to mold the following year's work plan, as well as to update the EMP when the time comes. There is more information about evaluation in Chapter 6, "Step 5: Measures of Success."

***G. Annual Work Plans*** for implementing the ecotourism program should be prepared every year based upon the EMP. Work plans are important to keep the program on course. They should be detailed with regard to who will do what, where, when and with what resources. Depending upon the administrative system in place, the annual work plan will also need to be translated into a monthly or quarterly work plan.

***H. Reporting Systems*** are also an important element of any administrative system, especially one as important as an ecotourism program. Those staff members with supervisory or other important responsibilities should report periodically *in writing,* to the Head of the Program with regard to their activities and achievement of program goals and objectives. While many will chafe at this requirement, it is fundamental to the responsible and professional management of an important program. Without a written record of what has happened, the Head cannot make important decisions for the future nor justify changes that may need to be made. Some especially important reports concern financial matters, such as entrance fee collection, and/or activity implementation, such as trail maintenance or monitoring of critical indicators.

### Site Plans

Site plans are essential for any ecotourism program that involves a concentration of tourism activity, such as significant infrastructures (e.g., an ecolodge and associated trails, a visitor center or a campground). If the plans were not done for the EMP, they will need to be developed during the implementation phase. Site plans are detailed, large-scale maps of the specific site where ecotourism activities will occur. They are important because they allow planners to:

- precisely locate infrastructure in a way that will minimize impact upon the site's natural resources, and
- visualize the best design for optimizing the relationship between the different infrastructure elements at the site.

They also permit ecotourism program managers to supervise and plan for the construction of the needed infrastructure.

Site plans need to be prepared by professionals and technicians specialized in site mapping, GPS and ecotourism infrastructure design. There is more information on site planning in Volume II, Part I.

### Stakeholder Analysis

In most ecotourism sites, working effectively with local communities is essential for program success. This is generally considered the most difficult task that the Ecotourism Program needs to accomplish. The EMP will have described what needs to be done to involve local people and communities. What may be lacking is the type of strategic information needed to actually carry out the EMP's recommendations which requires one to:

- identify and describe existing community organization mechanisms;
- identify formal and informal community leaders;
- identify existing and potential abilities and skills in the local population related to ecotourism activities; and
- identify attitudes, values and beliefs that might favor or inhibit development of ecotourism activities in local communities.

This Community Stakeholder Analysis study should be carried out by a sociologist or anthropologist who can obtain the required information in an impartial, neutral manner. It is important that they not raise expectations among local people regarding tourism potential.

**Figure 5.1 EMP Implementation Checklist**

| EMP Implementation Factor | yes/no |
|---|---|
| A. Is there a Head of the Ecotourism Program? | |
| B. Is there sufficient personnel to carry out the EMP? | |
| C. Does the personnel have the training needed to carry out the EMP? | |
| D. Is there an Ecotourism Advisory Committee in place and functioning? | |
| E. Is there a Monitoring Program in place to monitor indicators representing the most likely and important tourism impacts? | |
| F. Does the Ecotourism Program administration annually evaluate progress towards accomplishing program objectives? | |
| G. Does the Ecotourism Program prepare Annual Work Plans based upon the EMP? | |
| H. Is there a Reporting System in place that adequately represents what staff members are doing? | |
| I. Are there detailed Site Plans available for the sites where ecotourism activities occur? | |
| J. Has a Community Stakeholder Analysis been carried out of the important local communities? | |

## Adaptive Management Implementation[1]

In most conservation projects, and EMP implementation is no exception, the work is never really done. No matter how well you plan the project or program, it never goes exactly as you intend it to. This uncertainty is not necessarily a bad thing. In many ways, the most interesting results, the findings that lead to true advances in understanding, are the ones you never expected to get. You will only benefit from these unexpected results, however, if you are ready to look for them and act on them. To borrow a phrase from Albert Einstein, "Chance favors the prepared mind."

Changing conditions at your site/protected area and unexpected outcomes of project activities mean that you must always be prepared to respond to new situations to keep your project on track. Adaptation is a constant process. In order to reach your project goals and objectives, you must continually change and modify your EMP according to available information. However, important changes should never be made unilaterally; relevant stakeholders should always be consulted. You should take advantage of the Ecotourism Advisory Committee to help you in this process.

If something in your EMP is not working, change it! If you do not, chances are the project will suffer. Success is usually a moving target. You will find that the only way to attain it is by being flexible and open to change.

## Reference

Margoluis, R. and N. Salafsky. 1998. *Measures of Success: Designing, managing, and monitoring conservation and development projects.* Washington D.C.: Island Press.

## Resources

Moore, A., A. Drumm, and J. Beavers. 2000. *Plan de manejo para el desarrollo del ecoturismo en el Parque Nacional Sierra del Lacandón.* Serie de Coediciones Técnicas No. 15. Consejo Nacional de Areas Protegidas (CONAP), Fundación Defensores de la Naturaleza, The Nature Conservancy.

PROARCA/CAPAS www.capas.org/guide.htm
*This excellent web site makes available many examples of protected area management plans including ones relating to tourism. This project is part of the Regional Environmental Program for Central America and operates regionally in Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama. The objective of PROARCA/CAPAS is to provide financial, technical and policy assistance for the management of protected areas and the conservation of biodiversity in Central America.*

1 This section adapted from Margoluis and Salafsky, 1998.

## Chapter 6

# Step 5: Measures of Success

### Introduction

As we move slowly from "works-in-progress" toward "demonstration sites" of ecotourism, it is important to identify indicators of success. We need to keep track of where we are and whether or not we are on track in implementing the Ecotourism Management Plan (EMP) and accomplishing our goals and objectives. Program evaluation should be a part of a site's routine management. Unfortunately, many managers do not systematically evaluate how they are doing with regard to carrying out planning recommendations and in making the decisions necessary to keep them on track. In order to do this, they need guidance, or indicators, to help them make these decisions.

There are three primary goals that should be achieved if ecotourism is to be successful:

1. Threats to conservation targets are reduced.
2. Income is generated for conservation.
3. Local communities are benefited.

Ecotourism is more than an economic activity. It must also aid in reducing the threats to conservation of the site whether they are caused by uncontrolled tourism or from other activities that impact negatively upon the site's natural resources. Are programs in place to mitigate problems with flora and fauna? Are cultural impacts with communities monitored? Have residents maintained access to their local protected areas? Are tourism facilities following low-impact principles? Are natural resources better protected through having visitors? Is conservation moving forward? Conversely, we should be asking if the critical threats identified in the planning process are being abated in some way by implementing the EMP.

Additionally, ecotourism should be generating significant income for both the ecotourism site as well as local communities. Is revenue coming in to the protected area or ecotourism site administration? Is that income being used for conservation purposes? Are local communities receiving economic benefits? How much?

Are jobs being created in communities? What kind? Are these jobs helping to diversify and strengthen the local economy or making it vulnerable as ecotourism becomes the dominant industry? What is the long-term economic picture for this area? It is critical to track ecotourism's economic strengths and weaknesses over time.

In order to measure the success of an EMP, indicators should be established for periodical evaluation which reflect the above-mentioned priorities. A primary indicator is progress towards completion of established goals and objectives. Additionally, monitoring program impacts using the Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) methodology is a powerful tool to ensure that pre-established goals are being achieved.

Both of these methods provide guidelines for adjusting management decisions but look at project implementation results in different ways. The LAC methodology involves predicting certain types of impact resulting from ecotourism and monitoring those impacts to ensure that they do not surpass standards established by the respective stakeholders.

Typically, both methods involve collecting information from two different environments: the socio-cultural environment and the ecological environment. Ecotourism development has impacts on both of these. Both methods also involve both quantitative and qualitative information.

**Quantitative** methods produce data that are easily represented as numbers, such as answers to formal surveys, visitor entrance fee records and enterprise financial records.

**Qualitative** methods produce data that are not easily summarized in numerical form, such as minutes from community meetings and general notes from observations. Qualitative data normally describe people's knowledge, attitudes and behaviors.

Combining quantitative and qualitative approaches in monitoring will help ensure that the data that you are collecting will give you as complete a picture as possible of your site. There is also a crossover effect between quantitative and qualitative techniques. Carefully conducted qualitative methods can produce quantifiable results, and well-designed quantitative studies can provide insight into typically qualitative topics such as attitudes and opinions.

- The LAC methodology should be fully implemented by year four, with indicators and standards established for monitoring visitor impacts in the three major visitor sites, as well as for evaluating visitor satisfaction with their experience in the park.
- During the first six months, the park should form an Ecotourism Program Advisory Committee for the purpose of assisting the program director to implement program activities, evaluate the program's progress and provide advice concerning how best to deal with the private sector and other institutions.
- The interpretive trail at Blue Mountain should be built and fully implemented by the end of year two; the interpretive trail at Rapid River will be built and fully implemented by the end of year three.
- Local entrepreneur income will have increased by 50% at the end of year three.
- Five tour guides obtained from local communities will be trained and working by the end of year one.
- Illegal hunting will be decreased by 90 percent after two years.

Piedras Negras archeological site, Sierra del Lacandón National Park, Guatemala © Andy Drumm

### Completion of Goals and Objectives

The primary goals of threat reduction, income generation and community benefits established in the EMP process (see Part II, Chapter 4) have specific strategies and objectives. These objectives should be measurable and capable of being accomplished within a given, stated period of time. They should provide the basis for evaluating the success of the EMP's implementation. The following are some further examples of specific objectives that have been used to evaluate EMP progress:

- Within two years, a visitor center will be constructed at Aguas Calientes.
- Within three months, a Director of Ecotourism should be hired.
- During year two of the plan's implementation, three park guards should be trained in ecotourism and visitor management.

Designing good objectives is only the first step however. Managers must also systematically collect data that document progress toward accomplishing these goals. It is not sufficient to sit down at the end of a year and esti-

mate how much of an objective has been achieved. Specific data should indicate exactly how much has been accomplished. A methodology for documenting progress toward objective accomplishment should be a part of your EMP. For example, to determine whether or not local entrepreneur income is increasing at the desired rate may require periodic questionnaires. These questionnaires may be administered by the site's managers or delegated to a local business association or a university.

To determine whether or not illegal hunting is decreasing at the desired rate will require constant monitoring of key sites and excellent record keeping by site/protected area personnel.

Margoluis and Salafsky's *Measures of Success: Designing, Managing, and Monitoring Conservation and Development Projects* (1998) presents an excellent discussion of how to prepare measurable objectives and how to monitor their implementation.

### Limits of Acceptable Change

If EMP planners have used the LAC methodology for establishing a system for monitoring tourism impacts, there should be several indicators and standards that may be used to evaluate progress of the EMP's implementation. LAC is a specific system for measuring tourism impacts and should be applied to assess whether or not objectives for reducing or mitigating tourism impacts are effective.

LAC responds to the fact that change is inevitable and sets limits on how much change is acceptable. It focuses on desired conditions in a given site. These conditions must be determined by site users, both current and potential, together with managers. Once desired conditions are established, indicators and corresponding standards must be defined which describe detailed aspects of those conditions. This allows site personnel and others to monitor these indicators to ensure that the desired conditions are being met (see Volume II, Part I, Chapter 6 for more on the LAC process).

Most of the indicators derived from the LAC process will provide managers with indirect data concerning their progress with implementing more direct interventions such as visitor management, infrastructure development and environmental education programs. Some of the more common indicators that might be used for this purpose are:

- levels of visitor satisfaction with their visit to the protected area, to a particular visitor site or facility, or with staff members that they have been in contact with;
- number of *E. coli* bacteria found in the water near an area of visitor concentration;
- numbers of a specific species of wildlife in a given site;
- incidence of poaching or other such illegal activity;
- number of complaints about a tour operator or concessionaire in a given period of time;
- number of encounters that visitors have had with other visitors in a wilderness setting.

**Standards** are created when indicators are given a specific quantitative value, e.g., visitors in the wilderness zone should not encounter more than one other group during a two-day stay.

When monitoring determines that standards are not being met and that thresholds have been surpassed, managers must make adjustments to their EMP and their corresponding management activities to bring visitor impact back to the desired levels.

### The Process of Measuring Success

As you may have noticed, public participation in the process of preparing your EMP has been singled out as fundamental to its success; it is also important for evaluating achievement of project objectives and in establishing the indicators and standards for the Limits to Acceptable Change process. It should not be surprising then to discover that evaluating where you are in terms of implementing the EMP should also involve the pertinent stakeholders: protected area personnel, community entrepreneurs and leaders, tourism industry representatives (especially those working in and around the protected area) and other relevant government representatives.

It is a relatively simple process to look at an EMP that has established easily quantifiable objectives to be achieved in a given time frame and determine what has been accomplished and what has not. What is not so simple is determining why a particular objective has not been met and what can be done to overcome whatever obstacles may have hindered carrying out appropriate activities. The answers to these questions are best answered by a group of involved stakeholders, the evaluation team, not by one or two protected area staff members who may lack the perspective that a more diverse group would have. Many of these stakeholders may have participated in the planning process and/or be a part of an advisory committee for the ecotourism program.

The evaluation team will need to review all of the objectives and activities in the EMP's Strategic Plan and determine what has and what has not been done. Major questions to be answered are:

- Are the major players fulfilling the roles that have been assigned to them?
- Has the proper legal context needed to achieve ecotourism goals been established?
- Has the funding for ecotourism projects been forthcoming?
- Is the EMP too ambitious given available human and economic resources?
- Have stakeholders done all they can to find sufficient resources?
- Is the technical support needed to implement ecotourism projects available?
- What can be done to improve logistical arrangements that might facilitate project implementation?
- Are other protected area management actions coordinated with the ecotourism program?
- Do we need to change program objectives and/or activities in the face of changing conditions, or do we need to do a better job doing what is already planned?

With regard to LAC and public participation, the relevant stakeholders must be a part of all of the steps in the decision-making process, including establishment of the indicators and standards that will be used to monitor tourism impact. For example, assume that we have decided that the presence of a species of bird found in a particular visitor site is an important indicator of tourism impact. A standard then must be set which represents a consensus regarding the number of these birds to expect in an appropriate number, given a well-managed visitor site. In making this determination, it is only reasonable to involve tour guides, site personnel, biologists and probably others who will have a huge stake in making sure this standard is met.

## Resources


The Ecotourism Society. 1993. *Directrices para el ecoturismo. Una guía para los operadores de turismo naturalista.* N. Bennington, Vermont: The Ecotourism Society.

The Ecotourism Society. 1993. *Ecotourism guidelines for nature tour operators.* N. Bennington, Vermont: The Ecotourism Society.

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Parks in Peril Program, The Nature Conservancy
www.parksinperil.org

# Glossary

**Community**: Community refers to a heterogeneous group of people who share residence in the same geographic area and access a set of local natural resources. The degree of social cohesion and differentiation, strength of common beliefs and institutions, cultural diversity and other factors vary widely within and among communities (Schmink, 1999).

**Concession:** A service provided by the private sector to visitors within a protected area/ecotourism site. It is one cornerstone of a revenue generation program at an ecotourism site.

**Concessionaire:** Holder of the permit or license to sell goods or services provided by the protected area.

**Ecotourism Advisory Committee:** A group of private and public stakeholders who have an interest, economic or otherwise, in the efficient and effective functioning of the ecotourism program at the ecotourism site. They will provide advice and support to the Head of the Ecotourism Program.

**Ecotourism Management Plan:** An ecotourism management plan (EMP) is a tool to guide the development of tourism in a protected area in a way that seeks to synthesize and represent the vision of all the stakeholders whilst fulfilling the conservation objectives for the site. Typically, an EMP will be a detailed continuation of general guidelines established in a general management plan or SCP.

**Ecotourism Site:** A location, large or small, where ecotourism activity or activities occur. In this document, may be used interchangeably with "protected area" or "site". However site usually refers to a location where the activity is focused and is small in extent.

**Ecotourism Management Plan (EMP):** A specific plan directed at guiding the development of ecotourism in a specific site/protected area. It should follow from larger scale plans such as a general management plan or Site Conservation Plan.

**Full Site Diagnostic:** A phase of the planning process during which planners gather the information needed to make good decisions regarding, in this case, ecotourism development in the protected area. This constitutes a prefeasibility study for ecotourism development at a site.

**General Management Plan:** A planning document which evaluates all the information available for a given protected area or ecotourism site, and defines overall management objectives, goals and strategies. Ecotourism may be identified as a management strategy for appropriate management. If so, then an Ecotourism Management Plan may be recommended.

**Human Context Assessment/Analysis (HCA):** An analysis of the static relationships and dynamic interactions of humans at a site. The HCA emphasizes the dynamic relationship between the biological (ecological) systems and the social systems. Gathering social and economic information for SCP includes compiling and synthesizing information on the relationships between people and the conservation of the site within the economic, sociocultural and political context.

**Inbound Operator:** A tourism operator who organizes the services provided to a visitor within the country that is being visited.

**Limits of Acceptable Change:** A methodology for measuring specific visitor impacts by establishing indicators and standards applicable to specific situations. A standard indicates a specific level beyond which stakeholders have determined that an impact is unacceptable and management action must be taken.

**Nature Tourism:** Tourism directed primarily at natural features but does not necessarily embrace the concepts of ecotourism: low impact, economic benefits for conservation and local people, and education.

**Outbound Operator:** A tourism operator who organizes tours and transportation for visitors who are going to another country. Will usually partner with an inbound operator in the destination country.

**Preliminary Site Evaluation:** A process, consisting of a few basic questions, by which planners can determine whether a particular site is appropriate for ecotourism development. A first filter for determining the viability of ecotourism.

**Protected Area:** A large, legally protected expanse of territory, usually administered by a government entity with specific conservation objectives, but whose day to day management may be delegated to the nongovernmental or private sector or a coalition of government and private interests.

**Site Conservation Planning (SCP):** A process developed by The Nature Conservancy which is used to identify primary conservation targets for a particular conservation site, then determines the major threats, sources of threats and strategies for mitigating those threats.

**Site Plan:** A very detailed drawing which locates all significant natural and cultural features of a site where intensive ecotourism activity will take place, and then determines where infrastructure will be located.

**Stakeholders:** Social actors who have a direct or indirect involvement in an activity that affects the biodiversity systems of a site. This involvement may arise from geographical proximity, historical association, economic activity, institutional mandate, social interest, cultural traditions or a variety of other reasons.

**Stakeholder Analysis or Human Context Analysis:** This is a study which identifies key information about communities near an ecotourism site pertinent to ecotourism development within the community and in the adjacent ecotourism site. It is essential for a full implementation of an Ecotourism Management Plan.

**Stakeholder Analysis:** The TNC stakeholder analysis prioritizes stakeholders linked to critical threats, and profiles a number of key characteristics about the activities in which stakeholders are engaged.

**Sustainable Development:** Defined by the United Nations Brundtland Report "Our Common Future" as "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

**Visitor Site:** A relatively small location where intensive use and management occurs within a larger ecotourism/conservation context.

**Zoning:** Zoning is a mechanism for assigning overall management objectives and priorities to different geographic areas (zones) within a protected area or other ecotourism site. By assigning objectives and priorities to these zones, planners are also defining what uses will be allowed, and which ones will not be allowed. These parameters are usually based upon the characteristics of the natural and cultural resource base, protected area objectives (determined previously), and other factors.