



Ridgeline - ARC Protected Area Management Research Report

December 2007

Preamble

This newsletter is the third of what has become a regular communication mechanism for the partner organisations involved in the ARC project titled “*Building capacity for adaptive management in protected areas through improved systems for monitoring and evaluation*”.

The ARC project partners, one of whom has a new parent organisation, include:

- Parks Victoria
- NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change
- Director of National Parks
- Department of ~~Environment and Heritage/Environment and Water Resources~~ the Environment, Water Heritage and the Arts (Parks Australia)

The aim of the project is to improve State of the Parks (SoP) assessment and reporting and the apply the findings from monitoring and evaluation to improve protected area management. Four key objectives guide the research:

1. Examine the factors that affect management effectiveness (*Josie Kelman (PhD candidate) and Grant Wardell-Johnson*).
2. Assess the reliability of the SoP evaluation instrument and recommend improvements to it (*Carly Cook, PhD candidate*).
3. Develop and test procedures for integrating SoP information in to decision making at multiple organisational scales (*Chris Jacobson, Marc Hockings and Bill Carter*).

4. Share findings and incorporate others’ examples of best practice in protected areas evaluation (*Marc Hockings, Chris Jacobson and Bill Carter*).

Our research approach is inherently collaborative. The purpose of this newsletter is to contribute to continued open communication with our project partners and other interested stakeholders.

6-month brief

Over the course of the year, substantial progress has been made on each objective.

Objective 1: Factors affecting management effectiveness (Josie)

Since the last Ridgeline, I have been quietly working away at analysing data from both NSW and Victorian State of the Parks Surveys (2005). I have also completed the first hurdle in my PhD (yay!), the confirmation process, where research directions are set, justified and peer reviewed [and she did a great job too! ☺]. In the coming six months I will be working on writing up my findings from the analyses and developing a metric which enables a comparative analysis of management effectiveness across the park management framework steps for key action areas. I am pleased to have had so much interest, support and encouragement for my part of the ARC project over the last six months! Thanks very much everyone.

Objective 2: State of the Parks reliability (Carly)

The second half of 2007 has been a time of intensive data collection for me. Since July I have spent four and a half of the past five months out in parks in NSW. I visited 28 parks across NSW and measured vegetation condition information and the abundance of blackberry. This information will be matched to estimates made by park managers of these same parks. It will provide some insight into how well park managers' perceptions match the situation in the parks. I'll be examining how the amount of information park managers have, and whether assessments completed in isolation or as part of a group, influences their reliability.

In November I gave a presentation to the Ecological Society of Australia in the Vegetation Condition symposium held there. My talk focused on the relationship between qualitative and quantitative estimates of vegetation condition, based on some data collected by Parks Victoria and the University of Ballarat. This presentation was well received and I hope to extend it into a more detailed publication.

I have also been starting to analyse data coming in from the questionnaire I sent out in May of 2007 about how park managers define sufficient information for planning and decision-making. I hope to have the last few survey responses in from NSW early in the New Year.

In early 2008 I hope to circulate a draft of a manuscript (for publication) about the sources of information that park managers use to support their State of the Parks assessments. This will provide a great opportunity for me to engage with the partners and to gain useful insights into how these data are being interpreted within Parks Victoria and NSW DECC. I'm excited about discussing my results and getting feedback from the States.

I would like to thank all of the partners for their substantial contributions to my project over the past 12 months. I am very appreciative of how supportive you have been and the time you have invested in helping me achieve my aims. I look forward to working closely with you in 2008. Until then, have a safe and happy holiday season.



Partners sharing their experiences at the 2007 meeting on Bribe Island

Objective 3: Integrating SoP into decision making

Since the last newsletter, our focus for this objective has been on working with our partners to identify barriers at different stages of the information transfer process and potential solutions to them.

In December, we began our first workshops with NSW Senior Management Teams to explore influences on management decision making, and the affects of decisions made on other levels of the management hierarchy. We hope to run similar workshops at lower management levels in NSW, and in Victoria, in 2008. These workshops will enable us to identify how and when to best support the integration of management effectiveness information at different organisational levels. Thanks to everyone for supporting these workshops.

Objective 4: Sharing our experiences

In August and September, we visited State and Territory protected area management agencies to explore management effectiveness assessment and reporting. In order to determine the status of assessment, we developed criteria associated with system content and design. We also explored influences on system design.

A report on this work has been completed. The results indicate that most emphasis is placed on evaluating management context, and least on the inputs to management. In addition, network assessment systems do well at linking values and threats to values, and at ensuring an inclusive process. They do less well at being explicit about the information that is used to inform assessment and at having an explicit process for responding to this type of information. We suggested that attention to evaluation content (i.e., evaluation of inputs, processes and outputs) will enable managers to identify what components of management require adaptation. Buy-in and capacity issues are likely to affect these things and therefore also require attention. We hope to continue this work in 2008 to keep track of new developments in management effectiveness evaluation, and are grateful that each agency made time to talk with us.



Tackling problems and solutions for facilitating use of State of the Parks information



Partners involved in small group discussion

Bribie Island Partner's meeting

Our second combined partners meeting was held on December 3rd and 4th at Bribie Island. Each of our partners presented an update of where they were up to in their management effectiveness evaluation programmes, the UQ team presented some preliminary findings of each of our research, and we had time for discussing emerging issues, including the sessions that the team (led by our NSW partners) will be running on management effectiveness at the Wold Conservation Congress next year.

Thanks to everyone for bringing your enthusiasm to the table for the two days.



Our next partners meeting will help us to prepare for the World Conservation Congress in Barcelona

Key achievements and our partner agenda for the rest of the year

Past six months:

- Josie successfully defended her research proposal and is now a confirmed PhD candidate (this is a gruelling process which she handled with ease!)
- Josie has completed an initial numerical-taxonomic analysis of the Victorian State of the Parks dataset, in addition to the full data analysis of 2004 & 2005 NSW data analysis she undertook earlier in the year. Both data analyses confirm that resources and the landscape context in which parks exist are key drivers in management effectiveness
- Carly completed a successful field season and is now analysing data on how well park managers' perceptions of vegetation condition and weed abundance match the situation in the parks
- Carly presented a paper at the Ecological Society of Australasia annual conference in Perth
- Observation of the NSW SoP training and of the Victorian SoP results delivery and interpretation sessions.
- Visits to State and Territory park management agencies to discuss how they assess management effectiveness

- Work towards Booderee National Park management effectiveness evaluation system
- New project website: ([Http://www.uq.edu.au/alpa](http://www.uq.edu.au/alpa)).

Up-coming:

- World Conservation Congress in Barcelona, October
- NSW SoP report 2008
- Review of Victorian State of the Parks process
- Victorian *Signs of Healthy Parks* initiative to identify indicators requiring measurement
- Booderee National Park new management plan
- Article on the development of the State of the Parks process
- Article on the status of management effectiveness evaluation across Australia
- NSW regional level workshops on decision making influences

Next partner meeting

Our project partners will be involved in two sessions at the World Conservation Congress in Barcelona in October. Our next partner's meeting will held July/August to allow us to prepare for the congress.

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In February, Grant is moving to the Department of Environmental Biology at Curtin University of Technology in WA. He will continue to be involved in a supervisory role for Carly and Josie.

Our partner agency key contacts

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Wishing you a Merry Christmas from the
ARC team!