



Ridgeline - ARC Protected Area Management Research Report December 2008

Preamble

This newsletter is the fifth for the Australian Research Council (ARC) linkage project titled “*Building capacity for adaptive management in protected areas through improved systems for monitoring and evaluation*”.

The project partners include:

- Parks Victoria
- NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change
- Director of National Parks
- Department of 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 apply the findings from monitoring and evaluation to improve protected area management. Four objectives guide the research:

1. Examine the factors that affect management effectiveness (*Josie Kelman - PhD candidate*)
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 into 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 update

A brief update on achievements and findings over the past six months.

Objective 1: Factors affecting management effectiveness (Josie)

I am continuing with the analysis of the NSW data and have run a comparison between 2005 and 2007 data. The main drivers for both sets of data remain the same (phew!). I have also been working on a method to communicate my results in a more meaningful way. The maze of information from State of the Parks assessments is difficult to comprehend as a spreadsheet. To overcome this problem I have imported the information into ArcGIS. I developed a typology of park types which is designed to allow comparison of parks within similar contexts. This will mean that very small parks will not be compared to very large parks and remote parks will not be compared to urban parks. I hope that the recognition of contextual constraints and the use of GIS will enable staff to more readily access and understand results. Thanks to all those who continue to support and help with my component of the project.

Objective 2: State of the Parks reliability (Carly)

2008 has been a great year. I have made lots of progress on my thesis and been to the World Conservation Congress in Barcelona with a number of other members of the ARC team! In Barcelona, I enjoyed the Spanish

wine and food in addition to conducting a series of interviews with management effectiveness gurus from around the world. The results of these interviews confirm that NSW and Victoria are the first agencies in the world to investigate the quality of the data from management effectiveness evaluations. This is a very exciting result for the ARC project as it shows that we are conducting world-leading research.

With only six months left to go until I reach the 3 year mark (official hand in date), I have been highly focused on writing-up the results of analyses and now have an almost complete draft of my thesis. Other than writing, writing, writing, I now have preliminary results from my attempts to model the accuracy of State of the Parks data. The models are producing some interesting results – often quite unexpected – so watch this space!

I presented a brief summary of the findings from my research (minus the modelling data) at the Australian Protected Areas Congress in November where I received a good response. If you would like a copy of the presentation, you can email me directly: cook@uq.edu.au

Objective 3: Integrating evaluation information into decision making (Chris, Bill and Marc)

In the last 6 month report, we reported on workshops held with NSW Regional and Area level managers on interpreting State of the Parks information. We have now completed these workshops. Managers reported an increase in the perceived value of information as a result of these workshops. We had hoped to identify which questions were of most value. While we have some ideas of this, most managers were interested in the combination of a range of different State of the Parks question responses, depending on their context. The value of information appears to be dependent on the number of parks and staff managed, years spent within a locale, and whether or not parks are managed as a whole or by precinct.

Produced by University of Queensland ARC Linkage project on Adaptive Management of Protected Areas.

Managers also reported a range of cues for adaptation depending on the result combination provided (for example, see Figure 1).

	Impacts negligible	Impacts decreasing	Impacts unchanged	Impacts increasing
Comprehensive approach taken	Is too much effort occurring in this park?	Good; could resources be spent elsewhere without affecting mgmt success?		Why are results poor?
Planned approach taken				
Reactive approach taken		Mgmt is OK, but could be improved.		This is an emerging issue. Managers should consider prioritising it.
No active mgmt	This is probably appropriate, but needs to be watched.			

Figure 1: Adaptation cue example – combining responses to ‘approach to management’ and ‘impacts on values’ questions.

We are currently conducting a survey with NSW Branch, Region and Area managers and Regional Operations Co-ordinators to test ideas about the interaction between information sufficiency for decision-making, expectations of information use and the utility of different types of information. Results will help support targeted delivery of different types of information. Thanks to all those who participated in this study. We hope to circulate results in February.

With the help of our research assistant, Michelle Noel, work has begun on a review of the Victorian State of the Parks system. The first part of this involves interviews with managers from a range of levels to explore existing monitoring and evaluation processes (with the possibility of linking State of the Parks to these), expectations of a performance evaluation system, a review of the existing State of the Parks system and a review of use of evaluation information resulting from the last assessment.

We plan to provide a summary of the results in the next Ridgeline.

Objective 4: Sharing our experiences

World Conservation Congress

In October, The World Conservation Congress was held in Barcelona with more than 8000 participants from around the globe. There was a busy Forum program over four days with over 800 events including 240 workshops. NSW DECC led a workshop on State of the Parks assessments in conjunction with protected area agencies from Canada, Finland, India, South Korea and Western Africa. The ARC project featured strongly in this workshop and in the companion “Knowledge Café” that NSW DECC also facilitated. The ARC project also featured in the IUCN Management Effectiveness Workshop chaired by Marc Hockings. Carly Cook used the Congress to interview many experts in management effectiveness evaluation and hence place her research in a global context – confirming that the work being done on validation of SoP data is indeed at the cutting edge. Thanks to Peter Stathis, Andrew Growcock (NSW DECC) and Carly Cook for making these events a success and profiling the project to a global audience.

Following on from the event at the World Conservation Congress, our NSW partners have posted the summary PowerPoint presentations from all the speakers as well as answers to questions posed by the audience during the session on the Protected Area Learning Network web page. The intent of this website is to create a longer lasting source for the information presented there – particularly since there was a terrific group of people on the interview panel that had a diversity of experience in management effectiveness programs in protected areas.

If you are not already familiar with the site, it can be found at:

<http://www.parksnet.org/index.php>

Click on the Forums hyperlink (top left hand side under ‘community’ and select the topic Andrew Growcock has been posting under (Implementing management effectiveness programs...))

Feel free to register yourself to the website and post any more questions or thoughts you may have. Andrew will periodically check the page and encourage responses from relevant people.

Australian Protected Areas Congress

University of Queensland staff were involved in APAC in many ways. Our own Marc Hockings and Fiona Leverington (who has been working on a Global Management Effectiveness Evaluation study) were involved in the organising committee. In addition, both Marc and Chris gave individual talks. Last but by no means least, the ARC project hosted a workshop on ‘wacky Wednesday’. Despite the competition, we had around 40 come to what by all accounts was a fruitful discussion! The morning session was completed with a series of themed round-table discussions by partners and Katia Lemos-Kosta, a PhD student working on management standards. The afternoon included a series of presentations by the UQ team, NSW and Victoria with guest appearances from Tom Hughson (Western Australian Conservation Commission) and Ingrid Seiler (Parks Forum).

Thank you to everyone who contributed their ideas, reflections and energy to the day. Our partners are currently exploring how to continue this cross-the-border dialogue. We will compile a CD-ROM with workshop notes, presentations and revised management effectiveness assessment indicator selection guidelines in the new year. *Please let Chris know if you would like a copy!*

At APAC, the federal government released the consultation draft of Australia's strategy for the National Reserve System 2008-2030. It was great to see that the principles for management effectiveness evaluation developed by this project have been endorsed. The draft puts an important emphasis on landscape context (something Josie's results highlight) on the need for systems to be robust (Carly's area of expertise) and on the need for adaptive management. For copies of the draft, contact Peter Taylor

peter.taylor@environment.gov.au

New book on adaptive management

Chris and Peter Stahis (NSW) have been involved in preparing contributions to a book *Adaptive environmental management: a practical guide* edited by Catherine Allan and George Stankey. This book has examples of adaptive management from conservation, wildlife, forestry and water management, as well as chapters about what makes managers adaptive and is due for release in 2009 by Springer.

The chapter we co-authored is called *Institutionalising adaptive management: creating a culture of learning in the New South Wales Parks and Wildlife Service*. The contribution focuses on the role of evaluation as a starting point in the adaptive management cycle and the ways in which institutions themselves need to adapt to build capacity for learning-oriented approaches to management. Key practice-related lessons include: the benefit of having a management framework that links processes (e.g. planning) across work areas (e.g. biodiversity) and management levels (e.g. Region, Area) and incorporates corporate systems and processes (e.g. standard operating processes); the need to demonstrate practical reasons why adapting management is prudent, and the support for evaluation that can be gained from being responsive to staff ideas and concerns.

And the award goes to...

We are now all in the company of an award winner! In Barcelona, Marc received the Kenton Miller Award for his contributions to protected area management internationally. The ARC is one of many projects Marc is involved in. Others include work with GBRMPA, monitoring impacts of horse-riding in parks in S.E. Queensland, the development of management effectiveness assessments in Africa, South America, and Asia and a global synthesis of management effectiveness assessments. *Well done Marc!*

Up-coming:

- Interviews with Victorian managers about monitoring and evaluation systems. Please contact Michelle Noel m.noel@uq.edu.au if you would like to participate but have not yet arranged a time to speak to us.
- Workshops with senior management, NSW, on results of State of the Parks data analyses and how these might be used to inform decision-making. These workshops will incorporate Josie's new analyses. Please email Chris c.jacobson@uq.edu.au if you would like to be involved.
- Review of Victorian State of the Parks System
- NRS case study completion

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