

NATURE UNBOUND

CONSERVATION, CAPITALISM AND
THE FUTURE OF PROTECTED AREAS

Dan Brockington,
Rosaleen Duffy
& Jim Igoe



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Preface

Writing about conservation is never straightforward. Describing and analysing conservation policies, and particularly the development of protected areas (national parks, game reserves, forest reserves and the like), can lead to intense argument. For some people the story of wildlife and landscape conservation is a story of progress. It is about the fight to persuade societies and governments that it is important to protect nature. This tale makes compelling reading, for while conservation legislation has made significant gains in many parts of the world, its enforcement is weaker and its failures are permanent. There are no more passenger pigeons, dodos or quagga left in the world, and we are currently facing a major extinction spasm. Conservationists are always racing against time, and often doing battle with titanic forces such as population growth or industrial development. Recording this history means following invigorating, compelling, but sometimes tragic struggles.

Some of the greatest literature in conservation is told in this way. In Roderick Nash's classic book *Wilderness and the American Mind* (2001), protected areas are firmly equated with progress. For Nash, the preservation of wilderness in national parks and protected areas is the US's greatest idea and export. Wilderness and its protection in parks is a good thing, and the historian's task is to document the success of humanity in learning about and taking up the model. Nash cheers the successes of the parks movement and decries their failures.¹ He imagines futures where people are concentrated into a relatively few places from where they can travel to vast wilderness areas (if they pass wilderness entrance exams). Similarly Weiner's account of conservation in the Soviet Union emphasizes the bravery of conservation scientists and the perfidy of their opponents. The story of protected areas' demise and revival in the Soviet Union is told as one of courage, death and resurrection (Weiner, 1988, 1999). In both Russia and the US this version of conservation's history is a popular widely received account. Protected areas and the conservation policies that support them are viewed as unquestionably good things. Anything that hinders them is bad, those who defend them are heroes.

But, alternatively, and simultaneously, the story of protected areas could be told as a tragic record of failure, error and underachievement, notwithstanding the extraordinary effort and energy selflessly devoted to it. Bill Adams, in his history of the conservation movement *Against Extinction*, observes that thus far the movement has not done well enough. He notes that the '[t]he 20th century saw conservation's creation, but nature's decline' (Adams, 2004, p231). He argues that unless conservationists can restore people's relationship to the wild then the

movement will lose its lifeblood and vigour, such that ‘even if the diverse jewels of the earth are “saved”, we will still face a gloomy trudge through the new century accompanied by the steady leaching of natural diversity on every hand’ (Adams, 2004, p231).

Combine these problems with the protests that parks and protected areas occasion in so many parts of the world and the history of protected areas does not look so good. A strong body of critical literature has arisen, which questions diverse aspects of conservation practice and history. Some authors question conservation’s colonial and imperial roots (Mackenzie, 1988; Neumann, 1998). Others portray contemporary conservation practice as a murky political enterprise rather than the struggle of a just cause (Anderson and Grove, 1987; Bonner, 1993; Duffy, 2000; Steinhart, 2006). Else they challenge the marginalization and disempowerment that rural groups experience because of conservation (Jeanrenaud, 2002; Anderson and Berglund, 2003; Walley, 2004; West, 2006) or the transformations it entails (Duffy, 2002; Igoe, 2004b). Some document the material and psychological hardships of eviction from protected areas (West and Brechin, 1991; Brockington, 2002). Many have been particularly concerned with the impact of conservation policies on indigenous peoples (Gray et al, 1998; Colchester and Erni, 1999; Spence, 1999; Jacoby, 2001; Chatty and Colchester, 2002; Colchester, 2003). Finally, some collections compile diverse concerns about all these aspects (Ghimire and Pimbert, 1997; Brechin et al, 2003).

These criticisms have occasionally been met with anger (e.g. Spinage, 1998), but more often bewilderment – how can a good thing like conservation be subject to these criticisms? The conservation movement has often had particular difficulty incorporating criticisms of the negative social consequences of protected areas. One prominent conservationist, after reading a critique that grouped biodiversity conservation together with the extractive industry as ‘culture-wrecking institutions’, wondered out loud:

One must ask by what alchemy have the names of those who see themselves as defenders of the planet’s biological heritage come to be linked in the same breath with the names of those who are more appropriately seen as its degraders.

(Agrawal and Redford, 2007, p.12)

Equally critics of parks, including ourselves, are often indignant at the wrongs being done in the name of a good cause, and voices quickly become shrill. As we shall see below this often means that the argument about, for example, the effectiveness of parks or community conservation has not asked the right questions. The debate risks getting bogged down in asking whether parks ‘work’ or not, rather than asking what are the social and ecological gains and losses that result from the changes that parks bring about, who experiences these gains and losses, and in what ways?

We have been among the critical voices above, but our purpose here is not to justify those views, or criticize conservation's defenders. This book is not intended as another brick in the wall dividing two camps. Rather it has been heartening to see in the last five years an increasing rapprochement between conservation advocates and their critics. Old polarizations have broken down. Social scientists have proliferated in conservation meetings, and publish in conservation journals. Amongst conservation's critics there are senior voices calling for constructive engagement with conservationists (Brosius, 2006), just as there are senior conservationists calling for a better engagement with social scientists (Chan et al, 2007).

This book is intended as a contribution to that process. Accordingly we do not take a stand as critics or fans of protected areas here. Rather we ask how they have distributed fortune and misfortune between different groups and we compare the versions of these histories that the winners circulate, and those the losers remember. We ask by what means are conservation goals achieved, the broader processes with which it is intertwined, and the consequences, often unexpected, of these interactions. Addressing these issues will give us a better idea of what a conserved world would look like, and who will enjoy living in it.

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Note

- 1 In the fourth edition of his celebrated book Nash writes: ‘I will veer away from the hallowed (if always somewhat hollow) traditions of academic objectivity. I have tenure now; in fact I am retired! I don’t have to conform to those canons of impartiality that my graduate school mentors valued so highly. So I can come out of the closet. I like wilderness, and although I wrote as a scholar about its history, I’m also a fan and an advocate.’ Nash, R. (2001) *Wilderness and the American Mind*. New Haven: Yale University Press. *Nota bene*: hollow indeed, why not declare your stance from the start?

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ANGAP	Association Nationale pour la Gestion des Aires Protégées
ANWR	Arctic National Wildlife Refuge
ATREE	Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment
AWF	African Wildlife Fund
BI	Birdlife International
BINGO	big international non-governmental organization
CAMPFIRE	Communal Areas Management Plan for Indigenous Resources
CAR	comprehensive, adequate, representative (protection)
CBD	Convention on Biodiversity
CBNRM	Community Based Natural Resource Management
CBT	community-based tourism
CCAD	Central American Commission on Environment and Development
CC Africa	Conservation Corporation Africa
CI	Conservation International
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
COP	Conference of the Parties
CPR	common pool resource
CPR	common property regime
DDT	dichlorodiphenyl trichloroethane
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
FSC	Forest Stewardship Council
GCF	Global Conservation Fund
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GIS	geographic information system
ICD	Integrated Conservation with Development
IDCP	Integrated Development with Conservation Projects
IFI	International financial institution
IFRI	International Forestry Resources and Institutions
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPA	Indigenous Protected Area
IPCC	Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change
IPZ	Intensive Protection Zone

IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
MBRS	Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System Project
MNC	multinational corporations
NEAP	National Environmental Action Plan
NES	National Eco-tourism Strategy
NGO	non-governmental organization
PEC	Problem Elephant Control
PEFC	Pan European Forest Certification
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SERG	Society and Environment Research Group
SPWFE	Society for the Preservation of the Wild Fauna of the Empire
TFCA	Transfrontier Conservation Area
TNC	The Nature Conservancy
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas
WCMC	World Conservation Monitoring Centre
WCS	Wildlife Conservation Society
WDPA	World Database of Protected Areas
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature