

Protected Areas – a balancing act between ecology and economy

eco.mont is all about research in protected areas. But what are protected areas all about?



Thomas Scheurer, the former Coordinator of the Research Council of the Swiss National Park, came to the point in the last issue of *eco.mont* when he wrote that PAs run the risk of neglecting their core mission of conservation, education and research in favour of touristic development.

Usually, the three pillars of nature protection, education and research occupy central positions in legal frameworks that safeguard protected areas. In most areas, true nature protection goals have been present since the beginning. But, before the areas achieved *protected* status, questions of economic development had to be answered in order for democratic approval to be obtained. Therefore, in practice PAs find more support, from politicians and the population alike, for actions that foster tourism and regional development. Both groups pretend to affirm the PAs' core mission but – in the reality of daily life – tend to place more emphasis on economic development.

For us managers of protected areas, it is possible to respect our core mission and the development requirements of the regions we work in. It is our responsibility to take care to distribute our means equitably, and to be committed to a prioritization of our goals. Our problem is, and possibly always will be, that measures with clear economic outputs find more support than conservation and research projects. We receive applause for short-term economic development but little recognition for long-term ecological conservation.

The current issue of *eco.mont* presents a variety of topics that PA managers have to deal with, and reflects a diversity of approaches depending on countries and type of protected area.

The paper about red deer management demonstrates how National Parks and adjacent areas could all benefit by joint deer management. The borders of strictly protected National Parks usually constitute a sharp administrative limit, which is often reflected in equally strictly differentiated attitudes on both sides of the boundaries. Joint management plans are therefore difficult to find in practice, but still represent a goal to aim for.

Biosphere Reserves are well present in this issue, in the context of several articles. By interlinking sustainable production and nature protection, these reserves are still gaining ground in many countries. MAB-management plans form a framework for municipalities and landowners, who retain direct control of their land. This makes management complex and demanding, and requires very close cooperation with local people. A new and interesting question is raised by Abraham Paulsen, Danilo Petrovich & Andrés Moreira-Muñoz who, in a report from Chile, see both possibilities and the necessity to improve the management of Biosphere Reserves by including popular religion.

Lisbeth Zechner describes bird conservation measures in a French Natural Park. As in a Biosphere Reserve, in a Natural Park a tremendous effort has to be made to convince landowners to adapt their land management practices.

Their specificities aside, all types of PA have one challenge in common: for long-term success, long-term funding is necessary. European instruments like LIFE enable PAs to get started but do not provide the means to make projects last, a fact constitutes a major unsolved problem that confronts both nature conservation and the management of protected areas.

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