Integrating Human Dimensions into Conservation Planning

Participants

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Summary

The aim of this working group session was to explore how we can more systematically gather and integrate information about human dimensions into the conservation process. While conservation planning incorporates multiple dimensions of biological data, the influence of the human dimension on conservation is often underestimated. To achieve success in the conservation of species in a human-dominated landscape, conservation planning would be more effective with data from social scientists early in the planning process (including gathering data on stakeholder's values, attitudes, perceptions and stakeholder wants and needs). Beyond the input of social science data, conservation planning could also benefit greatly from strategically planned education initiatives and public relations efforts.

Introduction

The introduction to the working group started with the idea that integrating human dimensions into conservation projects from the start is essential to producing more ecologically effective and socially just conservation results. Conservation projects often tend to be biologically driven, typically focusing on securing or improving habitat, stabilizing or growing the population concern, or mitigating threats to a population. Too often it seems that underlying these actions are the assumptions that humans will not infringe on the habitat, will not be needed to supplement or manage the population, and will never themselves be a direct threat to the species. However, these assumptions are incorrect in more and more instances – humans have a huge impact on the natural world and our impact will only increase as human populations continue to increase and expand. Sarah Long presented the case of red wolves, a critically endangered species in the southeastern U.S., to highlight the various challenges to conservation efforts when the human dimension is underestimated: in addition to small population dynamics, the recovery of the red wolf is hampered by human-caused mortality (gunshots, automobiles), hybridization with coyotes, conflicts over access to private lands, and negative public sentiment surrounding the intensive management of wolves, coyotes, and effects on other species.

Some initial insights that were discussed focused on the relationship between conservationists and human stakeholders in a conservation effort. Some common characteristics of conservationists were viewed as a stumbling block to fully integrating all stakeholders into conservation projects. For example, the common self-image of conservationists as the experts or "saviors" reduces local people or other stakeholders to only spectators rather than actors with agency of their own. Also, wildlife biologists can neglect to examine the human needs in a species' recovery area, and therefore may not have a full understanding of the motivations or perceptions that can affect the success of a recovery project. Conflicts and inefficiencies can be avoided by better understanding motivations, attitudes, and needs of humans that are connected to the conservation of a species (i.e., live in the same environment or would be affected by conservation actions). Furthermore, many scientists may not have the "people skills" that are useful in engaging stakeholders, facilitating complex and often contentious discussions, and avoiding

or resolving conflicts. Working group participants presented many good examples of conservation projects that successfully integrated local people / stakeholders (e.g., Henry Doorly Zoo's projects in Madagascar which made contracts with local villages).

The conclusion that social skills are necessary for understanding and integrating the social dimension in conservation projects led the working group to discuss the question of who would be providing this role – should we train conservationists (e.g., wildlife biologists) in facilitation skills, or bring in social scientist experts? Also, the group acknowledged that there are many disciplines of social science and social scientists' areas of expertise and the roles they can play need to be better understood by those planning conservation projects. The group decided there were some basic questions relating to the role of social science experts in conservation that we needed to answer:

Q1 - Do we need to bring social scientists in?
Q2 - Why and what do we want them for?
Q3 - Who from the social science community / social scientists / practitioners do we need to bring in?
Q4 - How to bring them in?
Q5 - Who will bring them in?
Q6 - Where do they come from?

1) Do we need to bring a social scientist in?

- decide on a case by case basis
  - yes if issues are complex
  - yes if you need somebody who can ask questions from an unusual angle
  - no if you immerse yourself (as conservationist) in the local stakeholder's community
  - no if some issues (elephant ivory, rhino horns) have drivers outside local communities
- maybe use an advance rapid assessment (pretend workshop in 3 hours) to work out whether it is necessary
- keep a "pet" or friendly social science expert nearby

2) Why and what do we want them for?

- understand local perception of the conservation issue?
- assess willingness with which changes would be acceptable?
- assess what needs locals have (outside the conservation issue)?
- if the social / people skills of the conservation team are inadequate to assess these issues?
  - At the micro level: local community(ies)
  - At the meso level: state/country level
  - At the macro level: national, perhaps global

3) Who from the social science community / social scientists / practitioners do we need to bring in? and 6) Where do they come from?

- "social science community experts", examples are:
  - social scientists if data collection is relevant

- conservation psychologists (understand how to change people's behavior toward conservation) – have an individual perspective – if understanding is required
- social practice theorists: community, group, society perspective – if understanding is required

❖ If closely interacting with locals
- speaks local language / dialect / accent
- may provide other benefits (e.g. "social scientist veterinarian")

❖ "Pet" or friendly neighborhood CBSG experts
- Mark Barone (mbarone@engenderhealth.org)
- Sarah Bexell (Sarah.Bexell@du.edu)
- Sarah Thomas (sarah.thomas@zsl.org)
- Education departments of zoos
- Public relations departments of zoos
- Social Science Working Group of the Society for Conservation Biology

4) How to bring them in?

❖ hire a social expert as staff!

❖ requires collaborative practice in larger organizations (e.g.: education + conservation departments)

❖ Tactical issues with regard to conservation project
- early rather than too late, not as an afterthought
- together with conservationists or separate from them?
  - ➢ If at the beginning, then together, so they can be a unified force
  - ➢ If there is already a controversy with stakeholders, then separately

Key actions/next steps

- Develop a list of social science resources and contact information for the CBSG community (Sarah Bexel, Sarah Thomas, Stephanie Sanderson)
- Develop a "wish list" of social science needs in our conservation projects and reach out to experts and academics to form potential partnerships
- Build social scientist capacity where possible to utilize in conservation projects – e.g., connect with grad students in academic departments, hire a social scientist in your zoo/organization
- Collate a catalogue of stumbling blocks (social barriers) that arose in past conservation exercises (e.g., PHVAs, etc.) (Phil Miller)
- Prepare a list of training options to handle the communication, education, outreach needs of conservation projections, e.g. the "human wildlife conflict collaboration course" (Stephanie, *et al*)