



Aerial view of peat bog, Oulanka National Park, Finland © Wild Wonders of Europe /Widstrand / WWF

‘REVISITING LEOPOLD’: A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

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The conservation world owes a lot to the United States for inventing the superb concept of a national park, ‘America’s best idea’. In Europe, the idea was promoted by the Finnish explorer Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld who made a proposal to establish national parks in Nordic countries in 1880. The first European national parks were established in Sweden in 1909. In the 1960s and 1970s, several leading Finnish conservationists visited the United States and studied there so that the basic ideas of the *Leopold Report* were rooted deeply in the national mainstream thinking of park managers.

Thanks to such a long common history and continuing interaction, the over-arching goal of NPS resource management outlined in the updated and revised report is easy to agree with. It does not contradict any of our policies or practices, which is not surprising since the basic goal of the management of national parks should be clear and permanent. It takes into account the new results of scientific studies emphasizing continuous change, cooperation and the need of system level management. It is easy to accept the report in Northern European countries where the American ‘wilderness-like’ national park concept is prevailing, whereas in UK and Central and Southern Europe the situation may be different due to strong human impact in the parks. The report also covers those conditions better than the original *Leopold Report* by involving cultural and historical authenticity in the over-arching goal.

However, what I felt was missing from the report was an approach dealing with the prioritization and the optimal allocation of the limited human and monetary resources for scientific research and resource management. In particular:

- It would be useful to be clear about what is needed for the urgent management needs of parks, and what can contribute to the understanding of the ‘not yet fully understood concept of continuous change.
- In regard to management needs, it would be good to know how to integrate the use of scientific tools and methods in everyday parks management.
- It is also important to think about which information needs are sensibly fulfilled by the parks agencies themselves by hiring scientists, and where it is wise just to rely on the cooperation with academia in order to guarantee high scientific quality. A standing advisory panel may be helpful for a parks agency, but the money may be better-used by organizing scientific *ad hoc* events for specific purposes when needed. The scientific results are often not so strictly site-specific that they could not be generalized to the conditions in other countries. Relevant scientific information and best practices in park management should be readily available for all parks. In fact, some of the biggest bottlenecks may be in the lack of concerted actions to identify global research needs, and to globally deliver the results in an understandable form to parks practitioners rapidly enough.

Even though the revised report focuses on natural and cultural resources, I feel that the scope is somewhat too limited to natural sciences. In order to be successful in our actions, we should also know much more about the development of the other sectors of the society. How the behaviour of customers and visitors will change? How traffic, transportation and energy consumption will change? How the development of new technologies will affect the society and individual visitors, and further impact our parks? Just think about the development of Internet and the availability of huge amounts of increasingly open and accurate information. What kind of new stress, threats and opportunities for parks management will be caused by all those changes in other sectors and outside the parks? We need strategic foresight and thus both an out-of-the-box approach and relevant results from the social, economic and engineering research. This is especially crucial when we think about the increasing fragmentation of the nature and the lacking connectivity of the existing protected areas.

In Europe, Natura 2000 is the first and only regional biodiversity protected area approach in the world (Crofts, 2014), including a large number of national parks and providing another science-based view on natural resource stewardship. It emphasizes the natural values of the protected areas, their species and habitats and the maintenance of ecological quality in requiring the achievement of favourable conservation status. This approach to develop a coherent European ecological network of special areas of conservation is quite similar to that of maintaining ecological integrity, and to a lesser degree, of cultural authenticity. Natura 2000 has proved to be a great conservation success due to its transnational, regional approach, use of scientific data and its legally binding mechanisms. It has also facilitated fund-raising for conservation projects in parks, and maybe even more importantly, it has involved many new stakeholders, facilitated the use of a wider landscape approach, and built a wider constituency for conservation.

Supported by the encouraging experiences from Natura 2000 and the common environmental policy of the European Union, my last point is that we should emphasize both nationally and internationally the need of a system-level approach. Considering resource stewardship for both protected areas and the wider landscape (and seascape), instead of the more common individual park-level approach, protected areas can ensure effective use of scarce resources and the support of citizens and politicians. In spite of the fact that there is no formal global network of parks, parks agencies and managers can work together successfully by applying similar goals. The goals of the resource management of the US national parks system are feasible and worth considering in other countries and regions. The *Revisiting Leopold* report in appreciating the former work and using new knowledge is a welcome opening of discussion not only as regards to the national parks of the United States, but also in a global perspective. And, global the perspective should be!

REFERENCE

- Crofts, R. (2014). The European NATURA 2000 protected area approach: a practitioner’s perspective. *PARKS* 20.1. DOI: 10.2305/IUCN.CH.2014.PARKS-20-1.RC.en