

ONTARIO PARKS: POLICY AND PLANNING CONTEXT

DAN PALECZNY

Resource Management Coordinator

Ontario Parks (currently on leave)

c/o IUCN-The World Conservation Union

Wadi El Rayan Protected Area

Egyptian Italian Environmental Cooperation Program

Fayoum, Egypt

Phone: 010 2507468 (mobile)

E-Mail: dan.paleczny@iucn.org

ABSTRACT

Enhanced collaboration between Ontario Parks and Parks Canada in the field of monitoring and adaptive management requires an understanding of the current and evolving policy and planning context for Ontario Parks. This paper provides an overview of the Ontario Parks organization and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR) planning system. It describes current monitoring and adaptive management requirements in the policy and planning context, and identifies evolving opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to provide an overview of the Ontario Parks policy and planning context in which to consider needs for monitoring and adaptive management by Ontario Parks and possible collaboration with Parks Canada. While the need for monitoring has long been recognized, the focus for information collection in the 1970s, 80s and much of the 90s was on carrying out standard inventory of the resources. With enhanced funding arising in response to through the *Ontario Living Legacy* initiative (OMNR, 1999), important advancements in the area of monitoring have occurred. At the same time, Ontario Parks has faced several challenging resource management issues and has gained additional experience with the concept of adaptive management and monitoring.

DEFINITIONS

According to the International Centre for Protected Landscapes (ICPL) (2001: 1.14) adaptive management is: "...based on an approach where managers focus on monitoring and evaluation to enable them to learn both from their own, and other managers, past success and mistakes." MacDonald *et al.* (1999: 1) define adaptive management as: "...a process for addressing the uncertainties of resource management policies by implementing the policies experimentally and documenting the results." They illustrate the process as a cycle (Figure 1). In support of these definitions, Hocking and Phillips' (1999: 6) view of protected area management, "...is that it is circular, not a linear process, and that evaluation is about using information concerning the past to enhance the way management is conducted in future – helping management to adapt through a learning process." These definitions rely on a foundation of information, derived through inventory, research and monitoring.

ONTARIO PARKS IN THE MINISTRY OF NATURAL RESOURCES (OMNR) ORGANIZATION

Ontario Parks is a branch organization within the OMNR's *Natural Resources Management Division*. However, it operates differently from other branches in that it has line management responsibility for the field level operation of provincial parks, whereas other branches deliver programs at district level through the *Field Services Division*. In addition, Ontario Parks maintains a special purpose account in which general revenues from park operations are retained and used to manage the park system. Within Ontario Parks, the *Planning and Research Section* is responsible for program coordination and development for provincial parks and conservation reserves, through its two units, one that focuses on policy and planning, and another on science and information. These program areas are implemented through the six administrative zones for provincial parks, and 23 districts for conservation reserves.

Figure 1: *The Adaptive Management Process (adapted from MacDonald et al., 1999).*



OMNR PLANNING SYSTEM

OMNR's planning system is hierarchical, with four basic levels, as follows:

- 1) Legislation and strategic level corporate direction, which includes cabinet approved policy and OMNR strategic directions;
- 2) Broad land use planning, which includes the identification of protected areas through systems planning and the allocation of these lands through public land use planning;
- 3) Site specific planning, which includes management plans or other interim plans. Management can be passive or active, depending upon the situational needs; and,
- 4) Project level implementation activities that are planned and evaluated in accordance with the *Environmental Assessment Act (EAA)* (Government of Canada, 1992).

These levels of policy and planning require monitoring and adaptive management, to assess and determine the degree of compliance (did we act on our plans?), the positive or negative effects of our actions, the overall effectiveness of initiatives, and the state of the protected area (e.g., the stresses affecting the area, the condition or health of the ecosystems, human or natural responses).

MONITORING AND ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT REQUIREMENTS

Some elements of the planning system, as it relates to protected areas, have explicit requirements for moni-

toring and/or adaptive management (Table 1). For example, in the park management planning process, the sixth and final step, review and amend, includes options for full plan review or ongoing amendments. In this sense, the direction exists to apply monitoring and adaptive management, however this practice is not fully applied. In the recently approved *Class Environmental Assessment for Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves* (OMNR, 2005a), all category B, C and D evaluations, that is, projects having potential for negative impacts, must consider the need for monitoring. In addition, a process for reviewing and adjusting projects, based on monitoring information is described. In more complex situations involving adaptive management, a monitoring plan should be prepared and should demonstrate a thoughtful approach to monitoring that will provide appropriate information to assess the effectiveness of the management interventions. The plan may include the following elements:

- *Purpose*: why monitoring, what are the potential effects;
- *Acceptable Outcomes*: predicted effects to be monitored and range of acceptable outcomes;
- *Methods*: techniques, equipment, indicators, measurements, duration, frequency;
- *Results*: description of the results related to the acceptable outcomes;
- *Remedial Action*: actions to mitigate a problem and related monitoring; and,
- *Reporting*: when and how, adjustments to projects to reflect learnings.

Reporting would include an overall analysis of the effectiveness and any environmental effects of the project and adjustments to the project arising from the results of monitoring. Specifically, reporting would include:

- *Results*: a description and assessment of the results with respect to the acceptable outcomes, and any recommendations; and,
- *Remedial Action*: additional recommended actions that may be required to mitigate a problem, including any related monitoring.

Land use planning and policy development processes do not have explicit requirements for monitoring or adaptive management, however examples do exist where monitoring, reviews and adjustments have been carried out. OMNR’s new strategic directions, *Our Sustainable Future*, include a stewardship principle concerning adaptive management: “*The planning for and management of natural resources should strive for continuous improvement and effectiveness through adaptive management of natural resources.*” (OMNR, 2005b: 7).

Table 1. Requirements in the OMNR protected area planning system for monitoring and adaptive management.

| LEVEL | EFFECTS | EFFECTIVENESS | REVIEW | ADJUST |
|---|---------|---------------|--------|--------|
| Legislation, Corporate Strategy | — | — | — | yes |
| Land Use Planning | — | — | — | yes |
| Policy | — | — | — | yes |
| Management Planning | — | — | yes | yes |
| Project Evaluation (Environmental Assessment) | — | — | yes | yes |

OPPORTUNITIES AND NEEDS

Important improvements have occurred in recent years with respect to monitoring and adaptive management. Additional initiatives are needed to provide direction and the necessary tools to support staff. In general, a cultural shift is still required, wherein staff think, plan and act in an adaptive management manner at the range of scales including legislation, strategic planning, land use planning, policy development, management planning and project evaluations. More specifically, there is a need for:

- A general policy on adaptive management to establish broad direction for its application;
- A review date should be included in policies and directives, and include measurable indicators of effectiveness;
- Guidelines and staff training on how to apply adaptive management approaches – when the Ontario management planning manual is revised it should explicitly recognize and describe the adaptive management concept as it applies to this level;
- Monitoring protocols for environmental assessment evaluations – this should include guidance on setting objectives and identifying indicators; and,
- Continued opportunities for sharing experiences, both successful and unsuccessful efforts – this should include closer collaboration with Parks Canada.

SUMMARY

With the continued improvements in the design and application of monitoring approaches and adaptive management, Ontario Parks can look forward to greater effectiveness in its efforts. More work is required to design and apply these concepts. Closer collaboration with Parks Canada in this field can be expected to yield important benefits and synergies.

REFERENCES

- Government of Canada. 1992. *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*. C. 37.
- Hocking, M. and A. Phillips. 1999. How well are we doing? - some thoughts on the effectiveness of protected areas. *Parks*, 9(2): 5-14.
- International Centre for Protected Landscapes (ICPL). 2001. *The Management Challenge: Management Plans and Management Systems*. University of Greenwich: London, U.K.
- MacDonald G.B., J. Fraser, and P.A. Gray. 1999. *Adaptive Management Forum: Linking Management and Science to Achieve Ecological Sustainability*. Proceedings of the 1998 Provincial Science Forum. Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources: Peterborough, Ontario.
- Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR). 1999. *Ontario's Living Legacy Land Use Strategy*. Available Online: <http://crownlanduseatlas.mnr.gov.on.ca/supportingdocs/alus/contents.htm> [Accessed December 22, 2005]
- Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR). 2005a. *Class Environmental Assessment for Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves*. Queen's Printer for Ontario: Peterborough, Ontario.
- Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR). 2005b. *Our Sustainable Future*. Queen's Printer for Ontario: Peterborough, Ontario.