

## Webinar: Tourism in Protected Areas beyond 2020

Date: August 25, 2020

### Questions & Answers

1. I would like to learn more about ecotourism and sustainable tourism. Maybe how the U.S. model and international cases could be helpful here.

The following website will provide some good background information on ecotourism and sustainable tourism:

<https://ecotourism.org/what-is-ecotourism/>

<https://greenglobaltravel.com/what-is-ecotourism-10-simple-steps-to-more-sustainable-travel/>

<https://sustainabletravel.org>

<https://www.responsibletravel.org>

<https://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/tourism/>

2. Local NGOs are concerned that tourism development will damage the national parks. How can we respond to their concerns?

While it is true the uncontrolled tourism development or ineffective public use and recreation management can lead to impacts in national parks, there are systems and tools to help manage these impacts. In my opinion, the impact of not having national and local residents engaged by prohibiting them from visiting national parks is a greater long-term risk than the short-term impacts caused by visitation. There are zoning option for visitation (ROS – Recreation Opportunity Spectrum) and long-term visitor planning frameworks (Limits of Acceptable Change) that can be used to help manage potential recreation and tourism impacts. If we want the public to vote for and provide general support to conservation and our protected areas (including national parks) there needs to be a way for them to feel like these areas are being protected for them. Well managed visitation is one of best ways we can engage the public in long-term conservation efforts.

3. Some activists are concerned ecotourism development will serve to the interests of those who want to take advantage of ecosystems to serve their business interests and destroy ecosystems.

See the answer to question #2. In addition, if we are talking about large scale businesses getting involved in tourism in protected areas, we can use carefully crafted concessions agreements to help provide some checks and balances. For a

review of how the US Forest Services conducts concessions see: [https://warnercnr.colostate.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/07/Cooperative-Public-Use-Mgmt-of-National-Forests\\_FINAL\\_for-email.pdf](https://warnercnr.colostate.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/07/Cooperative-Public-Use-Mgmt-of-National-Forests_FINAL_for-email.pdf)

4. What precaution measures the policy makers should take in promoting ecotourism keeping climate impact issues in mind in national protected areas.

Getting people to protected areas currently requires a carbon emitting activity, either air travel or driving a gas-powered vehicle, or both. That said, with the increase in electric vehicle usage, including electric buses, this will eventually change. However, despite the fact that visiting a national park right now requires creating additional carbon emissions, during this visitation we also have the opportunity to positively impact, influence, and inspire visitors to support conservation efforts more broadly, including climate change. In fact, protected areas should consider their role in educating the public about climate change. Protected areas provide a good platform for education and for conducting research to understand how climate change is impacting the park resources. In addition, protected area can and should also be examples for how their careful operations can reduce their carbon footprint. This can serve as an example for other government agencies, NGOs, businesses, and even individual homes.

5. Do we need to develop a new paradigm for funding protected areas which moves beyond tourism as the (often) primary source? What about global funding options, since conservation is ultimately a shared benefit to all humanity?

Please see the Q&A and the webinar recording from the session on Financial Resilience for Protected Areas.

6. How are the communities responding to the lockdown and closure of the parks, especially when they have lost their livelihood sources?

The answers of course depends on the specific community. In some cases, communities are requesting a quick reopening to tourism and in other cases communities are requesting that areas remain closed to help slow the spread of COVID-19. One of the most important things governments can be doing to support communities is ensuring that they have access to testing, PPE, and up-to-date scientific health information to make informed decisions. In many cases rural, nature-based tourism can reopen safely as long as distancing measures and mask wearing is closely followed.

7. To all panelists - It's 5 years from now (2025). What long-term changes (positive and/or negative) occurred to protected areas as a result of this pandemic?

Hopefully the community at large will be more aware of the positive mental and physical health benefits of nature and have a greater respect and gratitude for the important work that protected area managers do to provide these spaces, not only for biodiversity conservation, but also for the direct human health benefits they provide. Hopefully governments and funders will recognize the importance of these areas and provide greater levels of funding to support the provision of these benefits. Hopefully we will also realize that to achieve greater equity in terms of access to protected areas, we will see a movement to create more natural spaces within and near urban population centers so that people of all economic backgrounds and interests can have greater access to natural areas. There are many other changes as well that we can hope for related to staffing, legal support, climate change mitigation measures, reduction in pollution, etc. Hopefully this period of reflection can create an opportunity for a global change in recognition of the importance of protected areas as critical to the sustainability of our society.

8. PA has become very dependent on the income from tourism. The pandemic showed there should be found the alternative ways to support the PAs. This is a case in Georgia as well. Has there been some alternative income sources discussed for PAs?

We invite you to watch the recording of our webinar session on “financial resilience”. There were some good ideas generated in that session for alternative funding mechanisms. That said, we are only going to achieve the full potential of our protected area systems when governments recognize the whole host of benefits (services) that protected areas provide to society and provide the corresponding base budgets to support their full implementation. Revenues from tourism should be complementary to these base budgets. While this is a bit of a dream and not likely to be a reality any time soon, we can continue to find creative ways to fund our global protected area system.

9. Are other countries considering initiatives similar to the US Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) from the Great Depression era, putting people back to work on conservation projects (including protected area projects)?

This tool has not been implemented as widely as it could be. There are lots of opportunity to expand the use of Civilian Conservation Corps in the period post-pandemic when there will be a lag in economies rebounding. An example of how this has been used in Honduras is outlined in this video (in Spanish): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oYjdzq19\\_HM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oYjdzq19_HM)

10. With experience from the current COVID -19 situations would you promote international or domestic focused ecotourism.

Both are important. International ecotourism brings important financial resources from outside the country and usually helps direct those resources towards rural economies and small businesses. So the potential for positive financial impact is pretty high. That said, international ecotourism should not be prioritized over domestic focused ecotourism. Domestic ecotourism should be a primary focus for any protected area system. It is important that citizens of any given country have a close connection to their protected area system and feel like that system is being created first and foremost for them. Citizens are key stakeholders as they are the ones that will vote in the future and provide long term support or opposition to protected areas. During COVID-19 in countries with a strong domestic ecotourism market, local communities have not struggled as much to stay afloat economically as they have been able to fill the gap from international visits with local visits. In countries that have an over reliance on international ecotourism, they have felt a major economic blow with an almost total collapse in international travel.

11. COVID correlates to job losses. Has there been any increased extraction from PAs on account of this, particularly in rural areas? And what about increased illegal activity in PAs?

It appears as though there has been an increase in illegal activities throughout much of the world. This is especially the case in areas that don't have strong domestic ecotourism. As visitation has come to a halt, people have looked to other economic activities to make a living. In some countries, laws have been changed to allow increase extraction in areas that previously did not allow it to try and make up for recent economic losses. It will be critical to make sure governments take a long-term view on resource extraction and we need to hold them accountable, ensuring that resource extraction programs are only allowed in protected areas categories that permit it and with sustainability measure in mind.

12. As the economy of local communities in and around PAs is heavily impacted by Parks' closure, what evidences exist to demonstrate that opening Parks and other PAs may not have a catalyst effect on the pandemic but will contribute to a quicker post COVID-10 phase?

Much of the evidence right now is anecdotal, but more and more research is being done. In large part, opening of visitation to protected areas in the US has not led to spikes in COVID-19 cases. Here is some information from the US Forest Service and National Park Service about how they are reopening.

US National Forest Service - <https://www.fs.usda.gov/about-agency/covid19-updates>

US National Park Service - <https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/news/public-health-update.htm>

A few pandemic reports that might be of interest:

IPBES Pandemic Report: <https://ipbes.net/pandemics>

Report by 21 NGOs on nature-positive responses to the COVID pandemic: <https://tinyurl.com/y4mlj7gf>

13. Here we have the challenge of adding local communities to the tourism trade. My question for everyone is whether we have data on the economic importance of this local community involvement or well-known examples of success?

The new IUCN WCPA Best Practice Series Tourism and Visitor Management in Protected Areas has some good guidelines and case studies: <https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/47918>

14. It would be interesting to know exactly what should be our approach to have tourists in our protected areas after COVID 19 Pandemic?

Protected Areas should reopen carefully based on local conditions and recommendations by health authorities. That said, protected areas that allow for visitation should plan on a future of continued visitation. In most cases, protected areas need more visitation rather than less. In most cases protected areas are there to serve multiple purposes including the protection of environmental services, but also human well-being (which is one of those environmental services).

15. How are you helping to keep the PAs staff safe while serving their duties during these times?

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16. If we look a bit ahead, when the pandemic is one way or the other under control, what would the tourism look like for PAs, in light of climate change and the risk of another novel infectious disease? Both factors will affect travel, both domestic and international. Would there not be less travel? Should PAs be aiming for domestic visitors? And given that novel infectious diseases are linked to increased instances of animal-human contacts (direct or indirect), would that increase hazards? Is the IUCN tourism group perhaps thinking about these issues?

IUCN has created a specific COVID-19 and protected areas task force that is looking at a lot of information and will be providing recommendations and summarized information to the broader IUCN community. From the research, most types of protected area visitation will continue to be safe and low risk post pandemic. In fact, most protected area tourism is low risk right now during the pandemic and there are likely many more positive human health outcomes when we reopen protected areas safely to visitation. In the long run, protected area visitation is likely to continue to be a mix of domestic and international visitation. But hopefully places around the world will now give more consideration to domestic visitation as it is much more resilient to international travel shutdowns. Hopefully this pause in visitation helps provide a space for protected areas agencies to better prepare for potential future pandemics and prepare for the even bigger potential implications of climate change.

17. Today more than ever the general population knows the importance of conservation protected areas, how to increase the interest of governments to support protection, especially in Latin America where many budgets are increasingly reduced?

We recommend you watch our webinar on financial resilience, which we held in both English in Spanish. Recordings can be found on our website: <https://warnercnr.colostate.edu/cpam/webinar-series-seminarios-en-linea/>

18. The Covid-19 pandemic is also an opportunity to review the tourism planning and collaborative strategies for public access to protected area. How much different authorities are aware to do that review while most of them are, so far, in complete silence about their response to the current situation?

Anna Spenceley, chair of the IUCN WCPA Tourism and Protected Areas Working Group, has amassed a large collection of documents from around the world on how governments are developing strategies regarding public use of protected areas in the COVID era and it can be accessed here: <https://annaspenceley.wordpress.com/2020/07/02/visitation-to-protected-areas-in-light-of-covid-19-input-requested/>

19. In Costa Rica some of the national parks are open but there are some restrictions for the visitors, for instance the hours you can stay, on the beaches only from 6 to 9:30 a.m. My question is, what is the percentage of visitors in the national parks in your countries?

The answer will vary from country to country and in fact from protected area to protected area. One example from the US is Yellowstone National Park. This is a protected area that receives quite a bit of visitation each year from international visitors. After being closed for a period of time at the beginning of the pandemic, Yellowstone was able to reopen. However, the international visitors were no longer arriving in the same numbers. Local visitation started to fill in for the lack of international visitation. In July the visitation was down by 30% over 2019 numbers. However, in August, Yellowstone experienced more visitation than in 2019. Numbers vary by site and site, with some sites reporting a slight reduction in visitation in August over 2019. In neighboring Grand Teton National Park, local visitation has essentially made up for the loss of international visitors, creating a small increase in visitation over 2019 numbers throughout the summer months. These are specific examples from the USA where there is a very strong and well-developed outdoor recreation economy. In many countries around the world the drop off in tourism and visitation has been very dramatic and has led to a deep economic crisis.

20. How do we encourage Africans to explore more of protected area tourism within their locality?

Across the globe protected areas should continue to make sure that a domestic and local audience feel welcomed in their protected area system. It has been an issue around the globe where national governments see the potential for international revenues as a greater priority over local participation or recreation. However, protected areas systems are not going to be sustainable until they have robust local and national support. So, one first step is to make sure that Africans feel welcomed at their protected areas. What interest do the local and domestic visitors have that might differ from the international tourists? How can we make the protected areas user friendly for our local visitors without compromising the conservation values and goals of the area? This work will need to be site and context specific, but by creating user friendly protected areas and ensuring that our local constituents feel welcome, we will be taking an important first step toward ensuring long-term PA system sustainability and resilience.

21. What is the name of that Bill again?

It is the Great American Outdoors Act - <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/3422>

22. My main concern about the reopening and "building back better" as they say is the impact on local communities that have to confront big corporations and governments. Most of the time those corporations are not very kind in considering the impacts of their activities on local communities.

UNESCO has come out with interesting guidelines on this topic specifically about engaging local communities and businesses in World Heritage Sites: <http://whc.unesco.org/sustainabletourismtoolkit/guides/guide-4-engaging-local-communities-and-businesses>. Also, new global guidelines on tourism concessions in protected areas also stress the importance of having larger outside enterprises work with local entrepreneurs and communities to find win-win solutions: <https://www.cbd.int/financial/privatesector/undp-tourismconcessions.pdf> and <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/459431467995814879/pdf/105316-WP-PUBLIC-Tourism-Toolkit-19-4-16.pdf>