TOWARD JOINT TOURISM - RECREATION - CONSERVATION POLICY

A Paper Presented by

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Generally well known are the polarized positions usually taken by three specialized groups in America—tourism interests, conservationists and those who believe in the values of recreation. Less well known, however, are the interdependencies of functions between the fields of tourism, conservation and recreation. Seemingly conflicting ideologies actually have much in common. Furthermore, if the interlacings of tourism, conservation and recreation in the coastal zone could be molded into common policy, it would appear that many of the ills of present laissez faire development could be eliminated. Conversely, without such coastal policy, we may expect in the future even aggravated problems of congestion, degradation of natural resource assets, erosion of coastal scenery and increasingly limited access.

Conservation, Tourism, Recreation

Historically, there are many good reasons for the three forces—conservation, tourism, recreation—to be clearly discrete fields. There is ample justification for modern leaders of these three fields to think of them as absolutes.

Conservation, over time and by different supporters, has had many
meanings and colors of meanings. But, for all, it has focused primarily upon natural resource utilization for long-range good of society. Conservation, in the early history of both the United States and Canada meant efficiency—efficient use of natural resources, such as timber and minerals. Conservation, in an esthetic sense, came much later. Defense of conservation as protection of scenic beauty is a complete capitulation of frontier conservation—mastery of nature. Today, a science-ecology definition and application of conservation is in vogue. This implies that a man-nature balance is not only desirable but may be necessary for survival. Most recent, especially in this country, has been the development of conservation of cultural heritage—the protection, redevelopment and interpretation of historic sites, events and artifacts.

Certainly, the conservation of coastal resources has been of increasing concern. Several coastal states have enacted legislation placing a moratorium of development on certain coastal areas.

Tourism, although now well accepted into the language, grew out of nineteenth century society and technology. Most definitions include such components as pleasure travel, expenditures of money—and therefore economic impact—and longer than a short visit. The mobility of modern travel, greater disposable incomes and a seemingly insatiable desire to see and participate in away-from-home activities have firmly entrenched tourism as a fact of modern society. Many cities, states and countries depend upon it for their basic economy. Developed nations cherish it as a favorable economic good—export trade to offset import deficits. Undeveloped nations look toward tourism as the most ready means of building new economies.

Throughout the world, coastal attractions have been prime tourism lures
for many years. If you were to map the tourist attractions of the United States, you would find a strong clustering along waterfronts.

Recreation, as pleasurable diversionary activity, has been practiced by man for centuries. Although it has met with varying social acceptance throughout history, it has been practiced by all people everywhere.

Much of recreation had its beginnings in social movement—reaction to the drudgery, confinement and strain of work. The first parks were established as an antidote to the fumes and filth associated with industries and industrial housing. In North America, recreation has become formalized and institutionalized as a role of government. It is now accepted as public policy and is upheld by the courts. While resource use varies, all recreation interests encompass programs that have welfare goals.

Nearly all recreation activities that occur elsewhere occur on the coast. Some, however, are especially unique to the coast—coastal wildlife observation and photography, coastal fishing, shell collecting, surfing and diving among coral reefs. But, probably of greatest significance is that of coastal esthetic enjoyment. If we knew how to add up our non-monetary and monetary values, my guess is that the relatively high cost of coastal land is due to its unique esthetics.

These three forces, then, have had separate origins and specific reasons for being. Taken individually, each one espouses noble and desirable goals.

Coexistence

For a good many years, these three forces—conservation, tourism and recreation—with their separate leaderships and followings, functioned independently and without much conflict. It was a period of peaceful coexistence. Conservation was absorbed with soil-erosion control and reforestation
issues. It saw no relationship with either recreation or tourism. Tourism was seen as strictly promotional. By merely adding the proper amounts of investment and advertising, instant tourism would result. Tourism saw no relationship with either conservation or recreation. Recreation was preoccupied with program emphasis and the establishment of playgrounds and parks. Recreation saw no relationship with either tourism or conservation. While each force was tacitly aware of the other, each saw its role as completely independent. Much of this posture remains today throughout our coastal institutions.

Conflict

As all three forces—conservation, tourism and recreation—grew in stature and extent, the next expression was that of conflict.

As more parks and conservation lands were established by governments, often primarily for resource protection, they became popular for mass recreation and tourism visits. While recreation leaders and tourism exponents supported this trend, conservationists began to decry this as land and water rape. Without doubt, no other federal agency has come under more fire from conservation groups than has the National Park Service—ironically created as primarily a conservation agency.

Of special importance to conservationists has been the water's edge, both along interior lakes and along the oceans. Encroachment by many of man's uses, including recreation and tourism was seen as destroying limited and valuable natural resource assets.

As tourism grew, states and cities became more and more competitive. As each state created and funded a tourism agency, it felt compelled to outdo the last. As millions of public dollars were expended for advertising, the
competition for those limited tax dollars increased. In addition, more and more public moneys were spent on hard construction. New Orleans, for example, felt that it could no longer compete with Houston for convention tourist business and invested many millions of tax moneys in an even larger "Astrodome" of its own.

Very early, it was discovered that tourism, as an economic good, needed large volumes of visitors. As areas were developed and promoted, both conservation and recreation groups were often accused of building roadblocks to progress. Because tourism depended heavily upon the business sector, it saw the massing of public recreation and conservation lands as depleting the stock of desirable business locations.

As these ideologies came into greater and greater conflict with one another, two separate publics became increasingly frustrated, especially along coasts.

The visitor public--the tourist, conventioneer, recreator--met with frustrations of learning about the attractions, how to get to them and the many conflicting rules governing his behavior when he got there. The fragmentation of jurisdictions, ownerships and regulations forced him to fight his way through the maze in order to have his fun. He soon discovered that no one in an area could give him more than limited and often biased information. Frequently, such guidance was exclusively commercial or governmental--a kind of ownership knowledge in which the visitor has little interest.

As an example, I recently visited the very well planned and designed Mission Bay development in San Diego. The entrance drive leads one directly to a striking information center. However, no sign, no clerk and no informational literature gave me any clue to the very important fact that the entire
4600-acre tract is owned and operated by the city parks department. Furthermore, 75% of this area is devoted to public access for picnicking, swimming and beach use. Only 25% is leased to private enterprise and yet all the information one can get is for these business places.

It has been by personal experience in traveling across the country that even official tourist information centers, sponsored by cities and states, often give out misleading or inaccurate information. Certainly, this is not intentional but results from a narrow bias of the agency's ideologies rather than from an understanding of needed service to the public.

The second public to become frustrated is that living in and around the locality of the recreational destination, especially along coasts. While one segment of the local public sees economic opportunity of developing a major marina, another segment sees long-range advantages of protecting the existing salt flat marshlands for conservation, or for other forms of recreation and education in the future. While one business segment sees opportunity of building services and sales along the waterfront, another business segment sees this as unwanted competition, especially if they are located some distance from the shore. As a local sailing club sees opportunity for much worthwhile recreation activity along the city's waterfront, it becomes frustrated by the waterfront dominance of services for outside tourists. Often, coastal counties spend great amounts of public funds upon waterfront development. As a result, taxpayers in the outback region of the county feel short-changed.

The net result of this conflict is that the decision-making groups themselves become frustrated and the entire machinery gets bogged down. Land use issues become ideological issues. Soon all become embroiled in arguments that increasingly have little to do with the real functions of coastal deve-
lopment. This, in turn, delays or completely foregoes action that might be desirable for all publics.

Symbiosis

Conflict within and between the forces of tourism, recreation and conservation sets up a smoke screen that obscures the reality of functional interdependency. Increasingly, the functions of land development and use demonstrate the growing mutual benefit between these three forces.

Tourism cannot function without attractions. Little understood by conservationists is the fact that the storehouse of attractions today results primarily from conservation efforts. The millions of visits to conservation and historic areas generate the need for thousands of motels, restaurants, service stations and shops. While there has been an increase in visits to man-made attractions in recent years, it is the natural- and cultural resource-based areas that remain most popular. And, even the man-made attractions are located within regions strong in natural and cultural resource assets. Although tourism and recreation are not identical in meaning, the bulk of tourism activities fit professional definitions of recreation. Tourism, as an ideology, could not survive without conservation and recreation.

Recreation, although ideologically program oriented, finds itself expressed physically in land development. For most recreation activities today, lands, structures, facilities and products play a critical role. Many forms of recreation have changed dramatically in recent years due to technological advances, such as increased boating due to availability of fiberglass boat hulls. Recreation expenditures are a large part of tourism economics. And, conservation programs now include massive capital investments and operational budgets for recreation. Recreation, as an ideology, could not survive without
the support of both tourism and conservation.

Although proponents of conservation often argue otherwise, their causes are often supported by tourism and recreation efforts. Since conservation efforts require public support and money, both recreation and tourism supporters and fundings are of benefit to the cause of conservation. Most "conservation" lands today would not have been created if the public did not believe they could have either real or vicarious access. Even so-called wilderness lands (still a small fraction of conservation lands) come about from support of potential wilderness users—tourists and recreationists. It is now being recognized that the largest conservation agencies of North America—the national park services of the United States and Canada—could not survive for long without complementary investment and management by touristic and recreational facilities and services. Conservation, as an ideology, and as it is practiced today, could not succeed for long without the complementarity of tourism and recreation.

Contrary to the conflicting ideologies of tourism, recreation and conservation, a strong symbiotic relationship is now being demonstrated by actual land development and use.

Inferences

From this discussion I would like to draw some inferences that may be useful in future policy development for coastal tourism, recreation and conservation—as a single mix.

1. Sole Institutional Policy-Making is Obsolete.

It seems to me that there is ample evidence to demonstrate that polarized and separate institutional policy-making among the various sectors on the
coast is an obsolete way of getting the job done. While each one has primary roles that are bound by law, by tradition and by ideology, there is need for each to look beyond such narrow confines. Functionally, as development becomes more intensive, the three sectors—tourism, recreation and conservation—have too much in common to continue to perform in this manner. Both society and the environment are being cheated as each sector tries to perpetuate its ideological boundaries.

2. **Policy Collaboration and Cooperation is Possible**

Gradually, we are beginning to find examples of instances in which these three sectors are developing collaborative policy. Although the following examples are not in the coastal zone, I believe that the principle of bringing conflicting ideologies together for common policy development could apply equally well to the coast. My first two examples are in Canada and the third is in Texas.

The provincial park system of Ontario comes under the Ontario Minister of Natural Resources. As such there is a built-in bias toward natural resource management. However, this park agency has learned that people do love and use their parks and therefore the many types of recreational use, from vacation homes to wilderness backpacking, must be incorporated into their policy. Furthermore, the economic realities of timber production and tourism employment cannot be denied.

Recently, a policy designating several categories of parks and delineating development and use zones within each park reflect a dramatic change in park thinking. Algonquin Provincial Park today has portions that are regularly logged by timber interests; has highly protected conservation areas that can be penetrated only on foot; has intensively used areas such as for resort
lodges, museums, and for camping. Each one of these zones represents long
and careful interface discussions with special interest groups in Canada.
All three—tourism, recreation and conservation—have had a role in the forma-
tion of Ontario's provincial park policy.

Also in Ontario are two major canal waterways that now demonstrate the
ability of the several sectors to work together. The Trent-Severn Waterway,
running 240 miles from Lake Ontario to Georgian Bay was created over 100 years
ago to avoid conflict with the Iroquois and the Americans. No longer needed
for commerce, this unique waterway, containing over 40 locks, has been con-
verted to recreational use. A similar, though shorter lock and canal system
has been developed along the Rideau River between Kingston on Lake Ontario
and the capitol, Ottawa.

As early as 1967, it became apparent that many elements of tourism, re-
creation and conservation were involved. Furthermore the many cities, counties
and jurisdictional entities along these corridors had developed separate and
often conflicting rules for development. As a consequence the CORTS Committee—
an acronym for the Canada-Ontario-Rideau-Trent-Severn Committee—was created.
Representatives of fifteen separate federal and provincial agencies together
with delegates from local groups have a voice in the development of policy
through the action of this committee. At present, until regional plans can
be developed, a moratorium on development along a ribbon 5 miles either side
of the canals is in effect. Joint policy-development is in process.

The San Antonio River Walk, a single entity for recreation, conservation
and tourism in the heart of San Antonio is now a huge success in spite of
its origins from ideological conflict. It was a conservation group that ori-
ginally stopped the paving of the horseshoe-shaped river bend. Now, a success-
ful mix of conservation, recreation and tourism results from the joint policy of over six major agencies and organizations.

Personally, I see no reason why these same principles of joint effort cannot be developed along the coastal zone of the United States.

3. Needed is a Catalyst.

The main reason that these issues are not being resolved more generally along our coasts is that too frequently no catalyst has appeared to bring the separate forces together.

It is quite natural for each to maintain its own integrity and, I argue, this is desirable. In my opinion, it would be undesirable to create another and possibly competitive agency. Instead, when the separate entities discover that their own individual goals can be fostered by collaboration rather than competing with each other, there is little difficulty in bringing them together on development of common policy. My experience on the Texas Gulf coast suggests that if the integrity of each individual agency and organization is not threatened, there is a very open and willing attitude of collaboration.

Conclusion

The conclusion I draw from this is that new recreational coastal management policy is very possible if one major obstacle can be removed—that of polarized support of conflicting ideologies. It is not so much new legislation, new agencies or new technology that is needed. Rather, a catalytic force is needed to demonstrate that individual integrity can be maintained at the same time that common coastal policy governing many mutually related functions can be agreed upon.

Instead of conflict between tourism, recreation and conservation, it is possible that we will see not only more symbiosis but even a new synergism
between these very important forces.
REFERENCES


