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Peer reviewed

**Review: Parks in Peril: People, Politics and Protected Areas**

By Katrina Brandon, Kent H. Redford, and Steven E. Sanderson (Eds.)

Reviewed by Elery Hamilton-Smith

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Brandon, Katrina, Kent H. Redford, & Steven E. Sanderson (Eds.). *Parks in Peril: People, Politics and Protected Areas*. Washington, DC: Island Press for the Nature Conservancy, 1998. 519 pp. ISBN 1-55963-607-6 (cloth); 1-55963-608-4 (paperback). US\$50.00 cloth; US\$30.00 paperback

Just as in most countries of the world, parks in Latin America are seriously threatened. On one hand, parks have been established usually with a very limited recognition of the governmental responsibility that must accompany most (perhaps all) park establishment. Dominant global paradigms of greed and consumption are in conflict with principles of resource protection and biodiversity. Accordingly, a series of relatively mindless euphemisms such as "conservation beyond parks," "sustainable use," and "tourism-based conservation" have become fashionable and threaten the integrity of the park environment.

The Parks in Peril program was established as a response to the high number of parks established without effective management (indeed, sometimes with no management) and yet at the same time facing a plethora of threats. It is both an action program to build the strength of the parks included and a research program, setting out to challenge the euphemisms, examine their impact, and identify the issues that demand further attention.

I can only say how delighted I am to see the tools of social science applied to conservation. Rather than endless attention to eco-system structures and processes, this work focuses upon the inherently political nature of conservation, confronts the stupidity of the naive assumption that consumption and protection can proceed hand-in-hand, argues for an understanding of the social context, and demands a new level of conceptual rigour in the conservation of biodiversity. The book contains an introductory overview, comprehensive case studies of nine parks in eight countries, and a final overview and summary of the results.

It is a truly important book and deserves attention in all continents, not merely its own base in Latin America. It challenges us all to think much more clearly about our own assumptions and our vocabulary of ideas and concepts. I have two major criticisms. The first is that the authors of the overview and summary chapters have given little or no attention to similar programs in other continents and the principles which have evolved out of

these; this could have located their work in the wider context and made it far more potent. The second is that there is generally a focus on in-country action and middle-level support through (generally non-governmental) aid programs. There is certainly some recognition that many of the problems arise out of global events and pressures, but little discussion of the extent to which these also require a global response.

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