

Research on the Planning and Management of National Parks: Based on the Public Engagement Mechanism

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Abstract

National Parks not only undertake the basic functions of protecting natural ecological environment, but also play a variety of functions such as the cultivation, scientific research, environmental education, natural recreation, etc. China's National Park career entered a new chapter after the third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee. It is urgent to make specific and operable research as a reference in practice. This paper takes the national parks of the US as the research object to analyze the specific methods and planning process based on the public engagement mechanism, thus improve the planning and management of national parks in China.

Keywords

National Park, Public Engagement, Ecological Protection

1. Introduction

The concept of "national park" originated in the United States. From the perspectives of conservation and utilization of nature and culture, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) classified national parks as the second of six types of protected areas, which are defined as protected areas whose main purpose is to protect ecosystems and provide recreational services [1]. The ultimate purpose of setting up national parks is to protect and preserve natural resources and to meet the needs of people [2]. The innovation of this paper is to refine the process of public participation by empirical research, so as to bring enlightenment to the construction of national parks for other countries.

Public participation originated in the West in the 1960s, it is a social movement aimed at the process of government decision-making and planning [3]. It

is a continuous and dynamic communication between the national park management department and the public on many levels in order to strengthen the public's commitment to the protection of cultural and natural heritage resources, as well as to enhance the public's understanding of the full significance of these resources. Virtual public participation is not only a policy process, but also a continuous and dynamic dialogue between NPS and the public in many dimensions. Through the process of public planning, interpretation and education programs, as well as direct maintenance of important resources, partners and communities can work together to protect those great historic heritages. Thus, public participation has gradually become an important way to delimit stakeholder boundaries and realize adaptive management of protected areas [4].

2. Public Participation in National Park Planning and Management in the United States

2.1. Subjects of Public Participation

According to the definition given in Director's Order No. 75A, public includes all individuals, organizations and other groups interested in NPS-managed parks and projects, in details, these people including leisure groups, tribes and indigenous peoples, environmental leaders, media members, and license holders. As well as franchisers, park owners, members of the portal community and special interest groups, including all domestic and foreign tourists, Internet visitors and all people who value national parks. In implementing the policy of public participation, the following principles should be followed:

1) Matching Principle: Matching tools with work. At the beginning of the process, we should test and improve the strategies of public participation in order to cope with the diversity of views; explain the process of public participation constantly; and focus on clarifying vision, goals and values. 2) Principle of fairness: to ensure that all voices are heard and to abandon dominant speech. Actively solicit and listen to diverse experiences and perspectives, and update the list of relevant contacts. 3) Principle of timeliness: Maintain a continuous relationship with all parties to ensure timely communication. 4) Principle of trust: First of all, establish mutual trust and understanding, maintain a common understanding basis, and then consider the implementation of work. 5) Openness Principle: Keep open channels of communication throughout the process of public participation to ensure that all people are aware of the newly released information.

2.2. The Key Points of Public Participation in the Planning and Management of National Parks

In order to effectively implement the policy of public participation in the planning and management of national parks, there are two important ways: one is effective public activities, the other is technical means. In reality operation, it is embodied in two important aspects: establishing the relationship with specific

population and constructing information infrastructure.

2.2.1. Establishing Relationships with Specific Populations

Good public relations are based on trust, and it takes time and effort to develop and maintain relationships. In addition to the established public participation system and procedures, it is necessary to consider specific groups of people, because different groups need different strategies and tools for their participation (Table 1).

2.2.2. Establishment of Information Infrastructure—“Planning, Environment and Public Comment” (PEPC)

PEPC is an Internet interactive platform established by NPS in 2005. The platform is integrated with information release, data management and public feedback, aiming at effectively displaying relevant information of national parks, providing decision support for the public, and improving the convenience and timeliness of public participation.

Table 1. The establishment of specialized population relations in public participation [5].

Specific population	Role	Strategies
Educators	Important links	1) In addition to field visits, teachers can visit virtual parks through the Internet and invite park staff to demonstrate or discuss in class. 2) Employing educators to help formulate curriculum plans required by schools;
Teenagers	Beneficiaries	1) Carry out extracurricular investigation, internship and summer work. 2) Create youth advisory committees or councils to provide young people with more voice and project ownership.
Visitors	Examiner	1) Diversified recruitment. Review and redesign the interpretation and education programs to reach different audiences better; 2) Use urban parks as portals to encourage children and families to discover national parks, to hold annual meetings in parks, and promote off-season visits.
Neighbouring communities	Inseparable and share the same future	1) Enhance attraction and make people willing to live near National parks; 2) Local governments should actively participate in community activities and meetings, and seek opportunities for cooperation. 3) Enhance communication with schools.
Major cooperative groups and stakeholders	Builders	Some partners or stakeholders are strategically important, or their tasks are more closely related to the park’s mission. Formal agreements, such as cooperation agreements, can be signed.
Volunteers	Park Ambassadors	Volunteers can interact with the public on behalf of the park and in some cases provide interpretation services. In this “quasi-employee” role, they need to understand the public participation efforts and principles of the park and receive training.
Friendly group and Cooperative Association	Friendship Groups are non-profit organizations. The Cooperative Association will benefit from its operation.	1) Friendship groups provide volunteer services to assist in resource management, conservation and fund-raising. 2) Cooperative associations provide programs and financial support for core programs in education and research fields, and generate revenue through sales of related products; 3) Friendship groups and cooperative associations have different policy guidance and operate through different NPS regulations.

PEPC mainly includes four parts: 1) Park documents: visitors can browse and download all national park management plans and related documents required by NEPA, including management plans, special plans, EA, EIS, etc. 2) Policy and reference materials: Provide effective park planning and resource compliance, project tracking and public participation information to support collaboration and scientific decision-making. Including resources and information links related to the planning and environmental impact analysis process of the National Park Authority and relevant reference materials, such as Director's Order 12, Management Policy 2006 and other important documents appear in this section. 3) Park planning: This section integrates the relevant information of park planning in detail, including NPS system plan, basic documents, special research and other important planning. 4) Public feedback: Visitors can easily find the contact mode of the relevant office on each page, and feedback opinions and suggestions at any time through telephone, e-mail, website message, etc. Staff will collect and respond to feedback information.

3. Realization of Public Participation in the Planning Process of National Parks in the US

The achievements of National Park in the United States are not only own to the leadership and efforts of government departments, but also the result of long-term research, enthusiastic participation and joint efforts of scientific researchers, nature enthusiasts, entrepreneurs and volunteers. National parks have the characteristics of public welfare, nationality and scientificity. The planning and management of national parks need generous participation and broad support of the public, thus to create excellent visiting experience for the public.

In order to demonstrate the value of national parks and realize the original intention of setting up national parks, NPS has established a planning framework of "General Management Planning - Strategic Planning - Implementation Plan - Annual Work Plan and Report". The Park Planning and Special Studies Division of the National Office Area provides the overall strategy for park planning, and is responsible for planning products and technical assistance to the park. Denver Service Center Planning Division provides additional production planning and planning services. NPS runs the mechanism of public participation through the establishment, planning and decision-making, management and operation of national parks, and through Civic Engagement and Public Involvement and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the public can participate in at least three stages: scope definition, draft EIA and final EIA [6].

The overall management plan of the Olympic National Park was completed in August 2008 to provide management guidance for the Olympic National Park in the next 15 to 20 years. The current major planning projects of Olympic National Park include wilderness management planning, goat management planning, magic Valley cabin environmental assessment and so on, these planning projects are all guided by the GMP (**Table 2**).

Table 2. Public participation in the GMP of Olympic National Park (2001.6-2008.8) [7].

Stages	Means	Purpose and role	Results
Planning approval	Press releases and public meetings	Make the public aware of and participate in the planning process	Develop a list of communications, including federal, state and local government agencies, organizations, legislators, the media and citizens
Letter of Intention for Environmental Impact Report	Publishing press briefings and public open days	Encourage the public to present their ideas and suggestions on specific documents and issues	Collect and respond to more than 500 public opinions on resource conservation, wilderness management, visitor use and partnerships
Overall management plan promulgated	Public seminars and announcements	Collect public suggestions and questions for 90 days	Publish the draft concept of alternative park management in the third notice, and issue the update notice of planning process to determine the final planning plan.
Publish final GMP report/EIS Report	Exchange meetings	The NPS Planning Team will provide a 30-day waiting period for a comprehensive assessment on the draft plan.	Response to substantive comments, and issue final GMP and EIS report. After 30-days' waiting period, NPS Western Pacific Regional Director will sign decision record of the final planning.

4. Public Participation in Park Operation

National parks in the United States are rich in activities to promote public experience, and have a variety of ways to form a relatively mature mechanism. NPS maintains 879 tourist centers and contact points, receiving 37 million visitors in 2015. More than 500,000 visitors participated in special events and ranger programs, and more than 660,000 children participated in the “Junior ranger” program.

4.1. Interpretation and Educational Services Is the Best Embodiment of Public Participation

Center for Media Services set up a unified standard for the interpretation media of national parks, departments of the parks carry out the planning and design of the interpretation media on the basis of this standard. The publications, Museum products, audio-visual products, signs of the parks have detailed indicators. In the Internet era, the environmental interpretation of national parks has already gone beyond the park boundary, not only with on-site interpretation, but also with environmental education at any time outside the park.

Teton Science School (TSS) is one of the most important partners of the Grand Teton National Park. Since 1967, TSS has been teaching courses related to nature and the Yellowstone Ecosystem. TSS is deeply rooted outdoors, through learning about nature and local education, it has educated and inspired tens of thousands of people. Through the study of TSS, we can summarize several important ways of education: 1) educational practice—wildlife exploration, summer field camps, volunteer activities; 2) core courses and scientific research—online courses, college courses, community classes; 3) award and development—scholarship mechanism, alumni alliance, professional development guidance and opportunities [8].

4.2. Volunteer Service System is the Guarantee of the Operation of Parks

Volunteer service is the most direct and dynamic manifestation of public partic-

ipation of American national parks. It is also an important tradition in the construction and management of the parks. Individual volunteers, community organizations and local agencies play a key role in park management. According to the data released by NPS in 2016, about 440 volunteers assisted park site planning and management in 2015, which greatly exceeded the number of 22,000 formal NPS employees and contributed 7.9 million hours of working time.

American National Park Volunteer Service is not only a form of participation in projects in the name of individuals, but also based on public welfare organizations or volunteer projects to protect and explain the natural ecological environment and historical resources of the country. Volunteer service has long been rooted in the national park management system, and is a magic weapon for the operation of parks under the condition of limited budget.

4.3. Community Participation Is the Driving Force of Sustainable Development of National Parks and Communities

According to the national park service organization law and other NPS legislation and policies, managers share the same ideas within the scope of NPS park management and land ownership, which is also the fundamental basis for community participation. Apart from the value orientation and public participation policy advocacy of public parks, another important reason is that land ownership plays a direct role in promoting community participation. In many cases, NPS is not the largest landowner in the park. Private landowners, non-profit organizations and governments can play a direct role in park management. Complex land ownership patterns are common in some parks, such as the San Monica Mountain National Recreation Area in California, where NPS shares management responsibilities with 153,000 acres of public and private landowners on the western edge of Los Angeles, California.

According to NPS statistics, within an average of 60 miles of community per national park, tourists contribute about \$32 billion a year, providing jobs for 295,000 local residents. NPS strives to seek and improve opportunities for urban and rural communities, as well as more diverse visitor participation. In over 400 units, staffs began to change their functions and become community counseling managers [9]. This model enables park managers view themselves as a larger community, ecosystem or cultural landscape entirety, emphasizing partnerships with communities and adjacent landowners, building common goals among stakeholders, and participating in complementary projects and initiatives.

5. Conclusions

The planning and management of national parks are to show the value of national parks and realize the mission of national parks through a series of means. American experience tells us that in the process we should form a system, effectively listen to public opinions, and gradually eliminate the arbitrariness, extensiveness and blindness in the management of national parks. The future of Chi-

na's national parks lies in the establishment of diversified ways of public participation, the promotion of awareness of park management, and the use of public participation tools. They should make more effective use of investments, technical assistance and partner support.

National parks offer everyone the chance to experience the unique grandeur, beauty, and wonder of natural features and to connect with shared human experience in cultural landscapes. Government departments and relevant institutions must constantly base themselves on public services and strengthen public trust, not only to meet the legal requirements of public participation in decision-making process, but to require regular, natural and sustained interaction between National Park planners and the public, which in turn will enhance the significance of national park planning and the ability to achieve its mission. The future is bright as more and more people love parks and collaborate with NPS staff to make their ideas part of the visitors' experience.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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