

DECISION-MAKING AT THE LOWER KANANASKIS RIVER: AN INVESTIGATION OF PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT FOR A RIVER RESOURCE

Megan Squires, University of Waterloo

Susan Markham-Starr, Acadia University

Introduction

The Lower Kananaskis River (LKR) in Kananaskis Country is recognised as one of the premiere Whitewater paddling locations in Southern Alberta and in recent years it has become the focus of intense debate. Serving a broad spectrum of interests, the LKR is mandated to integrate the recreation needs of commercial guiding and instructional groups, non-profit clubs and organisations, educational teaching and military groups, and private recreational users. As well, management at the LKR also integrates the operating needs of TransAlta Utilities whose principle interest is to regulate water flows for the generation of hydroelectric power.

The LKR is approximately ten kilometres long. In this short distance there are a variety of recreational facilities including two launch- and two landing-sites, a world-class kayak slalom course, an array of river features (waves, eddies, and holes) and an overnight group camping facility.

In recent years the river has come to embody the characteristics of many outdoor recreation settings throughout North America, where the amount of recreational use is significant and the demand for access to the resources for multiple purposes is a constant pressure. This research investigated recreational use at the LKR in an effort to better understand visitor experiences and the role that this information plays in policy, planning, and management decision-making at the River. The following research goals were identified:

- To develop an awareness of the river community, including both recreational and nonrecreational users;
- To engage in a three-part data collection procedure to uncover the issues affecting users' experiences, as well as their opinions about future policy, planning, and management at the LKR; and
- To formulate a series of recommendations based on the feedback received from river users', that demonstrated how planning and management at the LKR could be maintained or improved.

Research Design

A qualitative research methodology was employed in this study. One of the primary aims of this investigation was to gain insight into recreational and nonrecreational users' experiences at the LKR therefore, it was determined that a qualitative approach would be the most appropriate means of achieving the greatest level of understanding.

Within the qualitative design, three methodological strategies were used: a literature review and a field study, which included on-going participant observations (six days of direct participation and twenty-three days of observation spread over a four-month period), and twenty-five semi-structured interviews with select river stakeholders.

Verification of the research findings was achieved through triangulation of methods. Analysis was assisted by the use of NVivo computer software.

Analysis

Through the analysis process nine core themes emerged including:

- The amount of recreational use;
- The type of recreational and nonrecreational use;
- Congestion and crowding concerns;
- Timing of recreational and nonrecreational use;
- Biophysical and social carrying capacity issues;
- Changes to the biophysical and social conditions;
- Changes to the managerial conditions;
- Direct management strategies; and
- Indirect management strategies.

Conclusions and Discussion

Understanding resource and visitor use can be a complex task. A growing trend among land managing agencies is to acknowledge that impacts to the biophysical and social conditions at recreation settings can be the result of multiple factors (Hammit & Cole, 1998; McCool & Cole, 1997; Manning & Lime, 1996; Clark & Stankey, 1989)

The amount of recreational use occurring at the LKR was a significant issue identified by participants. Preliminary analysis of the field data indicated that river users ascribed a direct relationship between the amount of use at the River and subsequent impacts to the biophysical and social conditions. However, further investigation

revealed that the amount of recreational use was one of many factors affecting visitors' experiences. For example, participants also discussed the type, timing, and location of recreational use, as well as group sizes and the length of individuals' stays.

This study uncovered several key issues regarding policy, planning, and management at the LKR. In terms of policy, Bryan and Taylor (1990) maintain that most management decisions are "made in a reactive, ad hoc manner..." (p. 3). The research findings suggested that regional policy frameworks for Kananaskis Country were out of date and too broad to have any significant benefit for the River. The local policy guidelines developed for the LKR in 1997, focused entirely on commercial guiding and instructional groups, but neglected to provide guidance for private recreational use. Similarly, the policy document did not reinforce the policy objectives identified in sub-regional and regional policy documents.

An analysis of the planning framework in Kananaskis Country evolved into an exploration of public participation and its role in decision-making at the River. In 1997 the Government of Alberta and members of the river community established an advisory committee: the Lower Kananaskis River Users' Association (LKRUA). The Association's role was to provide a forum for communication among recreational, nonrecreational, and governmental interests at the river. The research findings highlighted issues that were preventing the Association from achieving its operational goals. The interview data revealed that participants were concerned that the Association was not adhering to its mandate to provide broad representation from the river community, nor was it providing adequate information to potential members about the Association's purpose or the logistics of its operation e.g. meeting times and locations.

This research revealed that a growing population of resource users and an increasing range of issues were overwhelming the management framework at the LKR. From the field study, it was evident that the management framework had remained relatively static despite rapid changes to the social and biophysical conditions at the river. Lime, McCool, and Galvin (1997) refer to this same issue in their discussion of crowding at recreation sites. These authors contend that the intersection of managerial, social, and biophysical conditions at a recreation setting can determine the quality of visitors' experiences.

Based on the research findings it was determined that management at the LKR could be improved in two ways. First, planners and managers could review established management frameworks - ROS, LAC, VIM, or VERP to assess the likelihood that select ones might help to create a more comprehensive management approach in Kananaskis Country. Second, staff could weigh different indirect and direct management strategies to identify strategies to address unacceptable biophysical and social conditions at the River.

This research began as an investigation of visitors' experiences at the LKR, and evolved into an exploration of decision making. It was acknowledged that visitors' experiences played an important role in resource management decisions at the LKR, yet the depth of their contributions appeared limited by out-dated and inefficient policy, planning, and management frameworks. The future provision of opportunities for resource and visitor use at the LKR will require a more comprehensive attempt to integrate diverse needs into a functional decision making framework.

Future Research

River environments are among the most popular outdoor recreation destinations in North America and there are increasing pressures for these areas to provide opportunities for a diverse and somewhat incompatible range of resource interests. In Canada, provincial governments, responsible for planning and management for natural resources have the complex task of trying to meet the needs of different resource interests, while at the same time continuing to adhere to the values of protection and preservation. This research discovered that the issues affecting recreational users at the Lower Kananaskis River were symptomatic of more elusive concerns affecting the elements of decision making. Future research of recreation at the Lower Kananaskis River and other river recreation settings should focus on the elements of decision making -policy, planning, and management to gain a better understanding of the managerial factors that affect resource users and their experiences. At the same time, focusing on policy, planning, and management may be the means for translating issues uncovered through research, into meaningful actions, thus making resource planning management more consistent with the values and needs of resource users.

River resource management is a relatively new area of study in Canada. Studies like this one at the Lower Kananaskis River in Kananaskis Country, Alberta make an important contribution to developing a better understanding of resource planning and management within a Canadian context. Future research should continue to focus on Canadian issues and efforts should be made to analyse resource planning and management issues within the framework of Canadian values and beliefs. While there are opportunities to learn from international experiences, there is an even greater opportunity to benefit from the knowledge and expertise that is cultivated within Canada.

References

- Alberta Environment. (2000). *Policy guidelines for management of guiding and instructing activities at the Lower Kananaskis River facilities in Bow Valley Provincial Park*. Edmonton, AB: Queen's Printer. Alberta Forestry Resource Evaluation and Planning Division. (1986). *Kananaskis Country sub-regional integrated resource plan*. Edmonton, AB: Queen's Printer. Bryan, H., & Taylor, N. (1990). *Resource policy and outdoor*

recreation. In J.D. Hutcheson, Jr., N.P. Francis, and R.E. Snow (Eds.). *Outdoor recreation policy: Pleasure and preservation*, (pp. 3-16). New York: Greenwood Press. Clark, R.N., & Stankey, G.H. (1989). The recreation opportunity spectrum: A framework for planning, management, and research. In *Toward serving visitors and managing our resources: Proceedings of a North American workshop on visitor management perspectives of several Canadian and United States park, protected area and natural resource management agencies*, (pp. 127-158). Waterloo, ON: University of Waterloo, Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies. Hammitt, W.E., & Cole, D.N. (1998). *Wildland recreation: Ecology and management* (2nd ed.). New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Lime, D.W., McCool, S.F., & Galvin, D.P. (1997). Trends in congestion and crowding at Recreation sites. In D.W. Lime (Ed.). *Crowding and congestion in the National Park System: Guidelines for management and research*. (pp. 9-25). St Paul, MN: Department of Forest Resources and Minnesota Agricultural Experiment Station, University of Minnesota. McCool, S.F. & Cole, D.N. (1997). Experiencing limits of acceptable change: Some thoughts after a decade of implementation. In *Proceedings - limits of acceptable change and related planning processes: Progress and future directions*. (pp. 72-78). Ogden, UT: Rocky Mountain Research Station.

Megan Squires, 107 Silver Creek Mews N.W., Calgary, A T3B 5L2, Canada; Phone: (403) 286-3083; E-mail: megsquires@hotmail.com

Susan Markham-Starr, School of Recreation Management and Kinesiology, Acadia University, Wolfville, Nova Scotia BOP 1X0, Canada; Phone: (902) 585-1558; E-mail: susan.markham@acadiau.ca

ABSTRACTS

of Papers Presented at the Tenth
Canadian Congress on Leisure Research

May 22-25, 2002

Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta

Abstracts compiled and edited by
Edgar L. Jackson

CCLR-10 Programme Committee
Karen Fox
Ed Jackson
Gordon Walker



CCLR 10

Copyright © 2002 Canadian Association for

The Canadian Congress on Leisure Research
is held under the auspices of the **Canadian Association
for Leisure Studies**

Le congrès canadien de la recherche en loisir
Se tient sous les auspices de **L'association canadienne
d'études en loisir**

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS / CONSEIL D'ADMINISTRATION
1999 - 2002**

President / President

Susan Markham-Starr
Acadia University

Past President / President-sortant

Edgar L. Jackson
University of Alberta

Treasurer / Tresorier

Robert Soubrier
Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières

Secretary / Secrétaire

Linda Caldwell
Pennsylvania State University

Directors / Directeurs

Wendy Frisby, *University of British Columbia*
Tom Hinch, *University of Alberta*
Peggy Hutchison, *Brock University*
Jennifer Mactavish, *University of Manitoba*
Lisa Ostiguy, *Concordia University*
Stephane Perrault, *Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières*
Jerry Singleton, *Dalhousie University*
Bryan Smale, *University of Waterloo*
Paul Wilkinson, *York University*



Appropriate Use of Documents: Documents may be downloaded or printed (single copy only). Please note that this document is copyrighted and CREDIT MUST BE PROVIDED to the originator of the document when you quote from it. You must not sell the document or make a profit from reproducing it. You must not copy, extract, summarize or distribute downloaded documents outside of your own organization in a manner which competes with or substitutes for the distribution of the database by the Lifestyle Information Network (LIN). <http://www.lin.ca>