

Special Section: Insights on MPAs and Indigenous Peoples — Part Two

Last month, in *Part One* of a two-part study, MPA News offered insights from two experts on the relationship between indigenous peoples and MPAs. This month, we provide summaries of four MPAs planned and managed with the significant involvement of indigenous peoples.

Indigenous Involvement Often Influenced by Culture and Regional Circumstances: Four Examples

In most areas of the world, indigenous peoples can be important stakeholders in the planning and management of marine protected areas, often offering detailed ecological knowledge of the sea, honed over centuries. Such traditional knowledge, however, is often not fully recognized and acted upon by the non-indigenous government entities that generally designate MPAs. With governmental recognition of traditional ecological knowledge sometimes slow in coming, the closure of marine areas can be an alienating experience for indigenous peoples. As a result, indigenous support for the sites can be low.

For MPA practitioners interested in incorporating indigenous knowledge, it may be useful to look to MPAs where the active participation of indigenous societies is an integral part of planning and management. While the following examples demonstrate what is now occurring with indigenous involvement in MPAs, there appears no general pattern of institution -- each case has developed uniquely to the indigenous culture and the area. Yet each is clearly based on respect for indigenous knowledge.

1. Cayos Miskitos and Franja Costera Marine Biological Reserve, Nicaragua

The Cayos Miskitos and Franja Costera Marine Biological Reserve is located on the northeast coast of Nicaragua, in a territory inhabited largely by the Miskito people. Bounded to the north and east by the Caribbean Sea, the reserve covers almost 13,000 km² and features a range of ecosystems including coral reefs, seagrass pastures, mangroves, and estuaries. The reserve was formally designated in 1991 as part of a cooperative agreement between 38 Miskito communities and the Nicaraguan Ministry of the Environment (MARENA). An inter-institutional commission -- composed of governmental and Miskito representatives -- was set up to plan and manage the reserve.

The reserve's first management plan, crafted in 1995, identified several key management issues. Among these were the definitive demarcation of communal territories, and regulation of the extraction of marine resources, particularly lobster -- the focus of an intensive, multinational fishery in the region. To aid in addressing these issues, new local management committees have been established to focus on planning and implementing key actions -- such as fishing regulations -- at selected pilot sites within the reserve.

Cooperation between the central government and the Miskito people has faced its share of challenges. Repeated attempts in the past century by various Nicaraguan political regimes to impose control over the Miskitos have engendered a lack of trust of the government by the tribe. Also, the Miskito communities have traditionally controlled access to non-privately owned land and marine resources in the region, and have been reluctant to share this power with the government. Nonetheless, the local management committees appear to offer promise for improving collaborative management.

A detailed description of the role of the Miskito people in the reserve's management is provided in a case study in the 2000 WWF/IUCN report *Indigenous and Traditional Peoples and Protected Areas: Principles, Guidelines and Case Studies* available online in PDF format at <http://wcpa.iucn.org/pubs/publications.html> (further details on the report are in a box at the end of this article).

2. Ulunikoro Marine Conservation Area, Fiji

Fiji's Ulunikoro Marine Conservation Area, designated in 2000, provides a case of bottom-up protection efforts initiated by a local indigenous community. Consisting of coral reef and measuring 0.2 km² in area, the small MPA represents the adaptation

of traditional Fijian marine-tenure concepts to modern-day fishing concerns.

Three decades ago, the waters around the village of Waisomo supported a thriving fishery. But as catches and fish size dwindled through the 1980s, the local community grew concerned that the resource was disappearing. Convinced by the village headman that a marine protected area would bring back the fish, the village then persuaded neighboring communities to join in pursuing MPA designation from the federal government.

Central to its adoption by the local villages, the modern concept of no-take marine reserves echoes the traditional Pacific-island concept of "tabu", in which local authorities place areas of the sea off-limits to fishing. The Ulunikoro MPA is now a no-take area. The Fijian government has empowered selected villagers to serve as enforcement officials at the site.

An account of the process by which local villagers pursued designation for the MPA is online, at <http://www.wwfpacific.org.fj/livingexamplefiji.htm>.

3. Gwaii Haanas Marine Conservation Area (proposed), Canada

Gwaii Haanas, an archipelago of 138 islands in Canada's Pacific coast province of British Columbia, has been populated by indigenous peoples for more than 10,000 years, and is now home to about 2000 members of the Haida people. The terrestrial Gwaii Haanas National Park/Haida Heritage Site -- composed of the islands but stopping at the high tide line of each -- involves a collaborative management regime to ensure equal input from the Haida and the federal government in managing the region's land-based resources. A four-member Archipelago Management Board, established in 1993 and consisting of two representatives each from the Council of the Haida Nation and the Canadian government (represented by the Parks Canada agency), oversees all planning and management of the archipelago. So far, the board has reached consensus on every regional matter it has faced.

Now, Parks Canada seeks to designate an MPA -- the Gwaii Haanas Marine Conservation Area -- in the waters surrounding the islands, and to establish a similar collaborative management system to manage it.

Designation of the MPA, first proposed in 1988, has encountered a number of obstacles, among them the repeated delay in passage of legislation to establish a national marine conservation area program. In the meantime, another federal agency -- the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) -- has jurisdiction over the area's marine resources. Incidentally, DFO will retain responsibility for conservation of fish stocks even if/when the MPA is created for Parks Canada.

The Gwaii Haanas National Park website provides information on the current collaborative management regime for the park, as well as the underlying management agreement between the Haida community and the government of Canada: <http://parkscan.harbour.com/gwaii/>.

4. Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve, USA

In December 2000, US President Clinton designated a vast, 340,000-km² marine protected area around the coral-laden Northwestern Hawaiian Islands ([MPA News 2:6](#)). Clinton's executive order contained measures to restrict some activities throughout the reserve, and to establish zones (Reserve Preservation Areas) around certain islands, atolls and banks where all consumptive or extractive uses would be prohibited. Following a period of public comment, Clinton issued a second executive order in January 2001 to revise certain conservation measures in the reserve and make permanent the Reserve Preservation Areas.

The US Office of National Marine Sanctuaries is now working to draft an operations plan for the reserve (available for public comment in early 2002), in consultation with state and federal officials and with recommendations from a reserve advisory council. The 15-member council includes three Native Hawaiian representatives and a citizen-at-large who also happens to be a Native Hawaiian.

Although the islands in the reserve are largely uninhabited, physical remnants of ancestral places, including burial sites, attest to the historic use of the islands by Native Hawaiians. KAHEA (www.kahea.org), a local alliance of Native Hawaiian cultural practitioners and environmental activists, was instrumental in laying the groundwork for the current reserve, through recommending specific policies, coordinating the response of other environmental groups, and generating public support. KAHEA refers to the reserve as a "Pu'uhonua," a place of safety, refuge and recovery.

The official reserve website provides the executive orders, maps, a record of public comment, and more at <http://hawaiiireef.noaa.gov/>.

Box: Report on indigenous peoples, protected areas available online

Indigenous and Traditional Peoples and Protected Areas: Principles, Guidelines and Case Studies a 133-page report published by WWF International and the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas, is available online in PDF format at <http://wcpa.iucn.org/pubs/publications.html>. English and Spanish versions of the document are available.

The report provides a set of five principles upon which protected area planners can develop partnerships with indigenous peoples. The principles -- based upon conclusions from the Fourth World Congress on National Parks and Protected Areas, held in 1992 in Caracas, Venezuela -- may be adapted to suit particular situations, legislation, and national policies.

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