A regional environmental education campaign in support of World Conservation Strategy

SUMMARY

The Peak National Park Study Centre, Losehill Hall has never been short of ideas. In its position close to, but just outside, the official educational system, it can attempt to objectively assess trends, formulate policies, and, in accordance with its own conservation objectives, make a positive contribution to curriculum development and innovation in environmental education. On Wednesday, 5th March 1980, as the World Conservation Strategy (WCS) was launched in London and 30 other capital cities, the Peak Park simultaneously gave its own regional launch with a press conference at Losehill Hall. This public commitment by the National Park however needed positive action to follow. Thus Conservation Action Project (CAP) was born. It is a three year scheme to set up conservation projects which involve classroom work, outdoor studies and practical tasks. The aim is to increase students' awareness of their immediate environment and to get actively involved in its conservation. Over half the schools in the National Park now have projects which include setting up of school nature reserves and tree nurseries, tree planting, re-seeding old meadows, and wildlife monitoring. Community action has been a keynote involving local villagers, farmers, industrialists and elected officials.

Conservation Action Project—Regional environmental education campaign

INTRODUCTION

The World Conservation Strategy, the Brandt Report and Global 2000 all focused attention in 1980 on the urgent need for the conservation and planned use of our resources. In particular, World Conservation Strategy, Section 13/11 states: “School curricula should include environmental education both as an intrinsic part of other subjects (so that conservation attitudes can influence all activities) and as a separate subject... Environmental education should also be an important part of the out of school activities of children.” CAP is a local attempt to translate those lofty thoughts into positive action and started as a partnership between the Peak National Park and Derbyshire Education Authority.

National Parks in Britain are planning authorities which have statutory duties to conserve designated ‘lived-in’ landscapes. In the case of the Peak Park this amounts to approximately 150,000 hectares of privately owned moorland and small hill farms. Another duty was to provide services for visitors and such importance was attached to developing environmental education programmes that the first residential National Park Study Centre, Losehill Hall, was opened in 1972 by Princess Anne.

Derbyshire Local Education Authority on the other hand is the statutory educational body and has 38 schools (mainly small village primary schools with less than 100 children) lying within the National Park boundary. It is the authority responsible for the schools curriculum. Some priority had previously been given by the National Park to liaison with education authorities in the form of the appointment of a Youth and Schools Liaison Officer in 1973. A practical partnership of the two authorities seemed a logical way to promote an initiative as unusual as CAP.
CONSERVATION AIMS

The education of the next generation is vital. If conservation begins at home (as it must) then encouraging children to get involved in conservation projects should include the following aims:

1. To increase understanding of, thus leading to concern for, the environment.
2. To promote care for the countryside through involvement in practical projects.
3. To develop a self-help attitude towards conservation.
4. To influence the school curriculum.
5. To encourage parents and the community to actively participate.

The close proximity of a number of large cities and towns (such as Manchester and Sheffield) is normally a problem for the Peak National Park because of the high visitor pressures (an estimated 15 million day visits annually). In the field of education however this places the Park in a unique position (with eight constituent Local Education Authorities altogether) to liaise with schools and encourage them to undertake their own conservation projects.

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROPOSALS

At the very outset it was important to have a clear set of policy proposals even if they needed to be modified later. Five main proposals were outlined:

1. Primary schools in the Peak National Park to be invited to undertake projects (CAP) aimed to increase children's awareness of their immediate environment and get practically involved in its conservation.
2. The schools, in cooperation with their village community, to select, set up and run their own CAP, with advice and support from the Education Authority.
3. The Peak National Park to provide teachers with information, encouragement and limited funds.
4. A 3-year project planned to enable schools:
   - to integrate CAP within the curriculum,
   - to maximise the limited time available in the syllabus,
   - to develop links with local communities.
5. All schools to receive a certificate for their project work.

Fig. 1. A derelict field owned by the pub "The Devonshire Arms" is transformed into a Nature Reserve by children and parents of the neighbouring Peak Forest Primary School. Courtesy: Peak Park Joint Planning Board, Aldern House, Bakewell, Derbyshire.