**Book Reviews**


On a tour of Celestún Biosphere Reserve, one of the endangered natural areas discussed in *Parks in Peril*, our tour guide operator kills his engine and floats his boat until we are close to a colony of flamingos. Suddenly he starts up the engine and roars toward the center of the flock. This is for our touristic pleasure, so that we can see the birds in flight. Under the biosphere park model, we the tourists, the endangered birds, and the local boat operator are all intended beneficiaries of Celestún. As this volume points out, protected areas have been handed a heavy burden: to preserve biological and cultural diversity and at the same time to promote sustainable development. *Parks in Peril* presents and analyzes nine case studies of parks involved in the Parks in Peril Program sponsored by USAID and the Nature Conservancy, examining their possible roles and actual limitations as stewards of endangered ecosystems and peoples and as loci of sustainable development.

Although the authors are committed to the park concept itself, they raise the question: If parks, as bounded entities, cannot change the larger political, social, legal, and historical conditions that contribute to ecological deterioration, then what strategies should policy makers be emphasizing beyond a narrow focus on park creation? As Brandon *et al.* note in their Introduction, development discourse promotes “win-win” situations, where the phrase “sustainable development” places a mask of preservation over use, including destructive uses. Although the authors are careful not to challenge USAID itself, the agency which funds the Parks in Peril Program, they suggest that the “powerful groups” that are the driving forces behind the global economic forces of development relegate “the environment” to parks and thereby relieve everybody except park managers of responsibility for the resulting environmental destruction.
The Parks in Peril Program provides material and technical support to the goal of converting Latin America’s “paper parks,” where park boundaries are designated but not protected, into viable biosphere reserves. The central problem explored in the volume is what constitutes viability, and how to meet the ambitious challenge presented by the biosphere model itself, which charges parks with the large and onerous responsibility of protecting global biological and cultural diversity within very small and fragile spaces. What activities are sustainable in a particular park? In cases where parks are failing, what groups, forces and institutions are most responsible for their destruction? What should be the role of public/state agencies and private funders and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in confronting these problems?

Large edited volumes can be daunting to read, and the three introductory chapters of this book may not invite. But *Parks in Peril* is carefully organized and consistent in its themes. Part one introduces these themes, explains the Parks in Peril Program as a whole, including the context of its genesis, the conservation goals of the program, and the social and political contexts of park management. In part two, each of the nine case studies presents the same set of common problems facing parks, but focuses on a different protected area: Ría Celestún and Ría Lagartos Special Biosphere Reserves in Mexico (chapter 4), Sierra de las Minas Biosphere Reserve in Guatemala (chapter 5), Corcovado National Park in Costa Rica (chapter 6), Del Este National Park in the Dominican Republic (chapter 7), Río Bravo Conservation and Management Area in Belize (chapter 8), Machalilla and Podocarpus National Parks in Ecuador (chapters 9 and 10), Amboró National Park in Bolivia (chapter 11), and Yanachaga-Chemillén National Park in Peru (chapter 12). Part three summarizes and analyzes the findings from each of the nine case studies.

Each of the case studies discusses the following identical issues: park establishment and management, land and resource tenure, resource use, organizational roles, linkages between park and buffer areas, conflict management and resolution, large scale threats, and the national policy framework. Each case includes a “postscript” to update the reader on events that have taken place between 1995, when the research was carried out, and 1998 when the book was published. Taken as a whole, the studies point to a number of general trends of serious concern. In each park studied, there are conflicts between conservation and a range of development agendas: these may include the need to provide employment for local inhabitants, and national policies that encourage tourism or support large scale development (roadbuilding, logging, mining). In almost every case, there are substantial inconsistencies between national environmental policies, the realities of often confused or ambiguous land tenure arrangements, and national development priorities.