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GLOBAL TRENDS IN PRIVATE PROTECTED AREAS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR THE NORTHERN GREAT PLAINS

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ABSTRACT—Like many parts of the world, the Northern Great Plains faces immense challenges to sustainable land use. Privately owned conservation areas have emerged as a potential solution. This article reviews five global trends in so-called private protected areas and discusses their implications for the Northern Great Plains. The trends point to five recommendations to the Northern Great Plains community: (1) act now to tap rapidly growing policy support; (2) combine many models, including private protected areas that are owned by individuals and groups, formal and informal, large and small, and are dedicated to strict protection as well as sustainable use; (3) cultivate diverse revenue streams with emphasis on carbon payments, hunting, and tourism; (4) connect spatially through private-public or private-private partnerships to generate both ecological and economic benefits; and (5) cultivate a reputation for delivering high-quality products and services. The trends and recommendations should be of interest wherever landowners, policy makers, academics, and others seek to integrate economics with ecology in the Northern Great Plains.

Key Words: ecotourism, Northern Great Plains, private protected areas

INTRODUCTION

Like many parts of the world, the Northern Great Plains faces immense challenges to sustainable land use. Several economic, social, and ecological concerns persist across the region (e.g., Drummond 2007). On the economic side, landowners are struggling to make financial ends meet in raising crops and livestock with thin profit margins and high susceptibility to external forces beyond landowners' control. On the social side, rural communities continue to shrink as the younger generation migrates to urban areas (Lu and Paull 2007). Ecologically, one of the world's great ecosystems faces a wide variety of threats (Forrest et al. 2004).

The Northern Great Plains community—defined here to span parts of five states (Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota, Wyoming, Montana) and two provinces (Saskatchewan, Alberta)—has been exploring publicly as well as privately protected natural areas as a potential solution (Sutton et al. 2005). Consisting of private lands that are managed primarily for nature conservation, so-called private protected areas continue to proliferate across much of the world (Mitchell 2005; Dudley 2008; Galloa et al. 2009). Evidence suggests that they can be

effective mechanisms for balancing the “3 P’s” of sustainability: people, planet, and profits. For example, the Third Annual Grasslands Foundation Lecture in 2008 examined this trend, focusing on Namibia’s conservancy model, in which multiple adjoining ranchers connected their ranches for wildlife conservation and tourism.

The Namibia example has opened the door to other possibilities. When looking for approaches that are relevant to the Northern Great Plains, why stop with one country and a single private conservation model? It makes sense to conduct a broader examination of international experiences with private protected areas. This paper moves in that direction, drawing examples from multiple countries and a variety of models for private protected areas. In particular, it focuses on five trends in private protected areas worldwide and their implications for the Northern Great Plains. The trends and implications can help position the region within a larger context and help inform discussions about its future.

TREND 1: INCREASING POLICY MANDATES

Recent years have witnessed dramatic proliferation in private protected areas and a high of level support for

them. This section traces their evolution to the present, highlighting key milestones. Private protected areas have existed for centuries in myriad forms and have roots in the royal hunting preserves owned by the nobility of Asia, Europe, and Africa (Runte 1979). In 1962 delegates to the First World Parks Congress approved “recommendation number 10,” which acknowledged the existence of private protected areas and advocated for more of them to be established (Adams 1962).

A global ecotourism boom occurred in the 1980s that stimulated proliferation of private protected areas throughout much of the world. This expansion went relatively unnoticed until a Yale University researcher published a landmark study on private lands used for nature tourism in Africa and Latin America (Alderman 1994). Langholz (1996) conducted a followup study that validated Alderman’s earlier findings while also breaking new ground in terms of assessing the finances of, threats to, and keys to the success of private protected areas.

The 1990s also witnessed several countries creating legal frameworks supportive of private protected areas, among them Australia, Peru, and Brazil. Costa Rica was an early innovator, creating legislation that allowed for creation of private wildlife refuges that were considered formal units in that country’s protected area system (Government of Costa Rica 1992; Boza 1993). Interestingly, one of the incentives for landowners to create a private wildlife refuge in Costa Rica was assistance from the national government if the land was occupied by an organized squatter invasion. Squatter invasions persist in many developing countries and are especially common where land is in a natural state instead of developed for commercial use. Fortunately, this is not an issue in the Northern Great Plains and other natural regions located within industrialized countries.

The year 2003 marked a watershed in terms of global mandates for private protected areas. Delegates from more than 150 countries at the Fifth World Parks Congress in Durban, South Africa, formally adopted a “Private Protected Area Action Plan” (Langholz and Krug 2004). The plan provided a detailed framework for improving and expanding private protected areas globally. It also included the first broadly supported definition of a private protected area: “A land parcel of any size that is (1) predominantly managed for biodiversity conservation; (2) protected with or without formal government agency recognition; and (3) owned or otherwise secured by individuals, communities, corporations, or nongovernmental organizations” (IUCN 2004, 275). This paper uses the original World Parks Congress definition, although

Mitchell (2005) and Carter et al. (2008) have suggested variations on it.

The most significant mandate for private protected areas occurred in April 2004 when more than 150 parties to the United Nations’ Convention on Biological Diversity approved a *Programme of Work on Protected Areas* (United Nations 2004). The document calls upon states to strengthen protected natural areas through a variety of means, namely: (1) reviewing the status private protected areas; (2) promoting a broad set of protected area governance types including private protected areas; (3) promoting the international sharing of experience with governance types such as private protected areas; and (4) developing national incentive mechanisms and institutions and legislative frameworks that support establishment of private protected areas.

Unlike hortatory proclamations from the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and World Parks Congress, this high-level mandate carries considerable weight for having arisen within the context of an international treaty. What is more, the mandate also represents a watershed moment in the history of private protected areas as a conservation tool, in that the world’s highest and most authoritative biodiversity body has committed to learning about and promoting private protected areas. That said, the fact that the United States has not ratified the treaty limits its applicability in the Northern Great Plains.

In 2005 the World Conservation Union dedicated an entire issue of *PARKS* to private protected areas. The issue included examples from Australia, the United States, Europe, Central America, and elsewhere (e.g., Figgis et al. 2005). This was followed in 2008 by a formal vote at the World Conservation Congress to create a Private Protected Area Task Force to focus on incorporating private protected areas into IUCN’s protected-area category system.

The upshot of all this activity is that private protected areas have gone mainstream within protected-area policy circles. No longer the obsession of only a few academics and practitioners, private protected areas have matured into a respected mechanism for conservation and sustainable development worldwide. The implication for those in the Northern Great Plains who are current or potential owners of private protected areas is that they are not alone. They are part of a global trend toward increased attention to private options for blending economic development with nature conservation. As the first decade of the 21st century closes, private protected areas are enjoying unprecedented interest and support. A challenge to landowners and conservationists in the Northern Great Plains

is to identify existing policies that support or hinder landowners who want to operate private protected areas and to make necessary changes to facilitate this type of conservation.

TREND 2: DIVERSIFICATION OF TYPES

Private protected areas consist of multiple approaches for different niches and purposes. No single model exists, which makes generalizations problematic. On the other hand, such variation within the private-protected-area sector is probably beneficial overall in that it fosters ongoing innovation and adaptation. Langholz and Lassoie (2001) have proposed a typology for private protected areas based on management objectives. This paper takes a different approach from that typology by dividing private protected areas along several continua:

Individual vs. Group Landownership. An individual, family, or group can own a private protected area. Groups take the form of nonprofit organizations such as land trusts or for-profit entities such as corporations. They also can take the form of residential communities that integrate housing with protected natural areas (Milder 2007; Milder et al. 2008). The biggest organizations owning private protected areas are large multinational corporations and international conservation organizations. Within the Northern Great Plains, organizations such as Audubon and The Nature Conservancy already own and operate significant private protected areas.

Increasingly, affluent individuals have entered private conservation and created many flagship private protected areas worldwide. Examples include Ted Turner in the United States, Johan Eliasch in Brazil, and Doug Tompkins in Chile (e.g., Moffett 2007). While motivations and land uses vary, they often fit within a larger trend of affluent individuals giving back after attaining immense financial success. Within the Northern Great Plains, ample opportunity exists for wealthy outsiders to purchase ranches and consolidate them into private protected areas. Such acquisitions are generally good for conservation, and also provide willing buyers for those landowners seeking to cash out. But they also play into the larger trend of depopulating rural areas, and may generate social backlash when such individuals are viewed as outsiders.

Public vs. Private Landownership. Contrary to popular opinion, landownership is rarely all public or all private (Geisler 2000). Even publicly protected natural areas such

as national forests have private concessions for logging, mining, and grazing. Similarly, so-called private lands often have publicly held easements for utilities, roads, and other public uses. Some private protected areas are owned by parastatal organizations that are privately chartered and held, yet funded by public monies. Other private protected area owners hold long-term, renewable leases of 100 or more years on public lands. In such cases, the protected area remains public land in name only, since management is purely private. We also can discern public versus private in terms of access. Many private protected areas allow public access to their hiking trails, even though they are not legally required to do so. An example would be the National Tallgrass Prairie Preserve in northeastern Kansas. The preserve is owned by a private organization (The Nature Conservancy), yet is considered to be a formal unit in the U.S. national system of protected areas and is managed by federal National Park Service staff.

The implication for the Northern Great Plains is that landowners and policy makers should move beyond the false dichotomy of purely public or private ownership and management, focusing instead on a wide range of potential combinations that fit local conditions. In addition to purely private ventures, landowners may want to consider public-private partnerships that provide a wide range of benefits. Creation of sufficiently large protected areas in the Northern Great Plains will require aggregating and comanaging public and private lands (see below for example Trend 4). An interesting starting point could be several million acres of school lands in the U.S. portion of the Northern Great Plains. Granted to state governments upon statehood, school lands are publicly owned but are leased to private ranchers, farmers, and others to fund public schools, universities, and other endowed institutions (e.g., Kaestle 1983; Gates et al. 1996; Parkerson and Parkerson 1998).

Strict Protection vs. Sustainable Use of Resources. Private protected areas can also be categorized according to common activities occurring on them. This can range from purely nonconsumptive uses (e.g., a strict nature reserve with no permanent human settlement or extractive activity) to primarily consumptive uses (e.g., substantial logging, mining, and grazing). Most private protected areas fall somewhere between the extremes. They embody a multiple-use approach focused on sustainable development (i.e., the balancing of protection with production). Examples include private protected areas that focus on nature-based tourism, and the rising number of eco-resi-

dential developments. Especially relevant to the Northern Great Plains are examples where private protected area owners mix wildlife with cattle. Ol Pejeta Conservancy in Kenya is a particularly good example of this. Ol Pejeta is a 30,000-hectare nonprofit wildlife conservancy that combines an extensive tourism operation, the world's largest population of black rhinos, and an ongoing cattle operation. The cattle operation is not only compatible with wildlife but may in fact improve forage quality for grazers, and it has provided an economic buffer during recent tourism lulls (R. Vigne, pers. comm. 2008).

Permanence vs. Changeability of Protected Status.

Private protected areas vary widely in terms of protected status. On one extreme lie thousands of habitat patches that landowners protect informally for a variety of market and nonmarket values. In such cases, habitat protection has been a family tradition and the landowner would be surprised to hear someone call the area a "nature preserve" or "protected area." Long-term conservation of such areas is uncertain given landowners' ability to change management objectives over time.

On the other extreme lie private protected areas that have permanent protected status. Examples include areas under a perpetual conservation easement, where land-use restrictions "run with the land" through future generations. Permanence can also come through formal government recognition of the private protected area. The Brazilian government, for example, has formally declared more than 100 private protected areas, many of them quite large (over 100,000 hectares), and all of them in perpetuity. Each private protected area must undergo a detailed screening process, have a government-approved management plan, and be formally declared by legislative or executive action (i.e., gazetted). The private protected areas also undergo periodic inspection and evaluation by the government agency with oversight responsibility. Such private protected areas are viewed as permanent units within a country's national system of protected natural areas.

In between these two extremes are lands entered into a short-term (5 to 20 years) government conservation incentive program such as the United States Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), and several others. Internationally, Costa Rican law allows formal designation of private national wildlife refuges that undergo a similar process to the one in Brazil except it is for 10-year increments instead of perpetual protection.

Northern Great Plains landowners and policy makers should work toward developing a robust private conserva-

tion sector that reflects the full range of formality levels for private protected areas. This entails using different models for different landowners instead of a one-size-fits-all approach. One possible step in this direction would be for policy makers to create a formal designation for private protected areas that entails permanent protection along the lines of the Brazil example above—an approach that does not seem to exist yet in the Northern Great Plains. Policy makers also may want to consider facilitating landowner conservancies that create economic and ecological economies of scale.

TREND 3: DIVERSIFICATION OF REVENUE STREAMS

Private protected areas exhibit an increasingly wide range of approaches for generating income and form part of a larger trend toward harnessing market forces for biodiversity conservation (Freese 2008). Revenue sources fall into two major categories: those originating outside the private protected area (external), and those that are self-generated by the private protected area (internal). Primary external sources include government budgets and programs, allocation of tax revenues (local, state, national), and private voluntary donations from foundations, corporations, and individuals. Primary internal revenue sources include sustainable resource extraction (e.g., livestock, crops, forestry, hunting, bioprospecting), nature-based tourism, and payments for environmental services such as provision of water, pollination, and carbon sequestration.

When it comes to generating revenue in a private protected area, landowners have demonstrated great creativity. They often finance operations through the sale of local products. Product examples include, but are not limited to, native plant seeds and seedlings, jams and jellies, woodworking, handicrafts, organic produce, bottled water, essential oils, silk, honey, fruit and herbal medicines, butterfly ranching, wildlife and wildlife products, and residential home sites. Private-protected-area owners often create special attractions to generate tourism. Examples of special attractions include canopy walkways and zip lines, wildlife rehabilitation centers, caving, birding, hiking, rafting, horseback riding, fishing, spiritual retreats, astronomy, cultural tours, and scientific research.

The Big Three private-protected-area revenue options for the Northern Great Plains are probably ecotourism, hunting, and carbon payments. Ecotourism is by far the most popular revenue option used by known private

protected areas worldwide. An important key to success is offering a wide variety of activities for tourists (Langholz 1996). Data on profitability suggest that ecotourism can be quite lucrative at private protected areas, especially compared to alternative land uses such as grazing and agriculture (Sims-Castley et al. 2005). Researchers have paid increased attention to rural tourism in the Northern Great Plains (e.g., Henderson 2004; Hodur et al. 2008). The downside of ecotourism is its susceptibility to market fluctuations. Examples abound of private protected areas struggling during global economic recessions or episodic events such as political violence or a natural disaster.

In addition to ecotourism, hunting is an especially suitable option for private protected areas in the Northern Great Plains. One could argue that today's hunting market in the Northern Great Plains is but a small fraction of its future potential. An important key would be to provide landowners with incentives to invest in wildlife populations occurring on their lands. Examples exist in southern Africa and elsewhere where public policies have motivated landowners to invest in wildlife to the point that they hold auctions to buy and sell surplus animals such as zebras, giraffes, and antelope. Creating an equally thriving nature-based economy in the Northern Great Plains is not unrealistic. The essential first step would be to give landowners stronger ownership rights to elk, buffalo, and other economically viable wildlife species so that they have a long-term incentive to invest.

A third suitable revenue source for landowners in the Northern Great Plains would be carbon payments. The world is rapidly moving toward a system whereby those who pollute the atmosphere with excess carbon take responsibility for getting carbon out of the atmosphere. Northern Great Plains landowners can benefit from these carbon payments by maintaining land in a natural state instead of tilling it (reduced emissions) as well as removing carbon from the atmosphere (carbon sequestration). Carbon payments are not currently a major funding source for owners of private protected areas in the Northern Great Plains but may become one in the near future.

TREND 4: CONNECTING SPATIALLY

Being physically adjacent to other protected natural areas can create ecological and economic advantages for the landowner. Economic advantages include sharing of marketing, enforcement, equipment, and know-how. Ecological benefits accrue to the extent that wildlife can cross property borders, megafauna can be supported, population fluctuations can be accommodated, and

species are allowed to make range shifts in the face of climate change.

Globally, private protected areas have connected spatially through private-public partnerships and private-private partnerships. The first type (private-public) consists of being directly adjacent to a national park or other large, government-protected areas. The private protected area plays three possible roles in such cases: (1) inholder, owning private land that lies within the boundaries of the government park; (2) buffer zone, owning land that lies directly adjacent to the government park; or (3) corridor, owning land that lies between two government parks. Data from Alderman (1994) and Langholz (1996) show that more than 50% of private protected areas were directly adjacent to a national park or other government-protected area. A noteworthy example is Kruger National Park in South Africa, where more than 70 private protected areas adjoin the park's western flank. The quality of protection in several of these private protected areas was sufficiently high that park officials dropped the fence separating the national park and several of the private protected areas, allowing free movement of wildlife back and forth. The pattern of private-public partnerships repeats across much of the world.

Private-private spatial connection most commonly takes the form of landowner conservancies. Conservancies are especially popular in southern Africa, where anywhere from 5 to 50 ranchers join forces to create a large private protected area that is collaboratively managed for conservation and development.

The main implications for Northern Great Plains landowners and policy makers is that "connecting the dots" spatially would help maximize ecological and economic benefits. Key questions to answer are: (1) To what extent are Northern Great Plains landowners already piggybacking geographically on national wildlife refuges and other public protected areas? (2) What prospects exist for creating new, large, publicly protected natural areas in the Northern Great Plains (e.g., a national park) capable of driving the local economy to new heights and stimulating nearby private conservation? (3) What is the current status of existing land conservancies in the Northern Great Plains and what is needed in order to expand them into the future?

TREND 5: CONCERNS ABOUT QUALITY

Concomitant with the proliferation of private protected areas has been mounting concern about the quality of the conservation they provide. Anecdotal evidence

suggests that whereas owners of early private protected areas entered the niche for conservation motivations, many later entrants have created private protected areas primarily in order to make money. These newcomers seem more willing to cut corners when it comes to quality of land stewardship.

In visiting more than 100 private protected areas around the world, I have noticed several questionable conservation practices. Examples include (1) overstocking wildlife to enhance opportunities for viewing and shooting; (2) introducing exotic species outside their normal range; (3) altering animals' natural behavior through feeding, breeding, and other activities; (4) maintaining animals in unnatural or abusive conditions (e.g., private zoos); and (5) offering canned hunting opportunities that violate the principle of fair chase. As increasing numbers of landowners develop private protected areas, it seems likely that questionable practices will expand.

A possible solution lies in certification of private protected areas. Certification is a natural evolution in the development of private sector products and services, and such systems exist for numerous items ranging from organic produce to computer technicians to massage therapists. To maximize effectiveness, certification systems must be voluntary, fairly constructed, consistently applied, and based on independent monitoring and verification of compliance.

In the private-protected-area sector, at least two certification systems are currently under development. One is a global system based in California and being developed by the Monterey Institute of International Studies and its affiliates. A second certification system is being developed by the Northern Great Plains Program of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and is specific to Northern Great Plains landowners (see description in Freese et al., this issue). The diversity of types of private protected area (see "Trend 2" section above) poses difficulties for developing widely applicable guidelines for recognizing or certifying private protected areas. Nevertheless, certification could potentially help owners of private protected areas in the Northern Great Plains and beyond to differentiate themselves in the market. Certification may also help owners qualify for economic opportunities such as payments for carbon sequestration.

CONCLUSION

Major developments are underway in private conservation that have significant implications for Northern Great Plains policy makers and landowners. The five

trends described above each point to a specific recommendation:

Act now. The timing for private-protected-area initiatives is superb given the global movement and increasing policy support.

Combine many models. These include private protected areas owned by individuals and groups, formal and informal, large and small, and dedicated to strict protection as well as sustainable use.

Diversify the revenue stream. This entails cultivating multiple sources of financing private protected areas, with emphasis on carbon payments, hunting, and tourism.

Connect spatially. Bigger is definitely better. Owners can benefit ecologically as well as economically from efficiencies of scale.

Emphasize quality. Owners of private protected areas in the Northern Great Plains should cultivate a reputation for high-quality products and services, which will lead to greater revenue opportunities. Landowners should stay abreast of proposed certification systems and consider becoming certified.

Landowners and policy makers in the Northern Great Plains face a major opportunity to participate in a global movement. A major evolution is occurring worldwide in which private protected areas are becoming established as viable mechanisms for balancing conservation, commerce, and communities. Every indication is that the trend will continue to expand into the future. It is up to individuals and organizations in the Northern Great Plains to engage this trend to create exciting new opportunities for landowners. Doing so requires considerable innovation and experimentation with new land uses, with an eye toward trying new things, observing the results, and pursuing those that look promising.

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