

Mountain protected areas in Pakistan: The case of the national parks

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Abstract

In the last 20 years, Pakistan has gazetted three northern mountain areas as national parks. Chitral Gol National Park, in Chitral District of the North-west Frontier Province (NWFP), comprises the 7,750-hectare watershed of the Chitral Gol, immediately west of Chitral town. Khunjerab National Park, in Gilgit District of the Northern Areas, comprises 2,269 square kilometers in the Gojal tehsil on either side of the Karakoram Highway (KKH) from Dih to the Pakistan-China border at the Khunjerab Pass. The Central Karakoram National Park is mostly in Skardu District of the Northern Areas, but also includes area within the Gilgit District. The park's area has not been surveyed, but comprises the Baltoro, Panmah, Biafo and Hispar glaciers and their tributary glaciers. Each park has a separate history, but all share a fundamental gap between usage and control. This basic inequity underlies the unique problems of each national park. When ownership and usage are separate, there is a resulting lack of sufficient control over resources by either party (Romm 1987). Until this conflict is resolved, effective management remains impossible.

Prior to the full incorporation of the Northern Areas and Chitral into Pakistan between 1969 and 1974, the areas that are now designated as Chitral Gol, Khunjerab, and Central Karakoram national parks were part of the local princely states; Chitral, Hunza, and Shigar. Chitral and Hunza were independent states under the suzerainty of the Maharaja of Kashmir (IOR R/1/1/3688(2):33). Shigar became a vassal state of the Raja of Skardu in the late 16th century, and Skardu then became part of the Kashmir state in 1884 (Hasrat 1995:251).

In Chitral, Mehtar Aman ul Mulk declared Chitral Gol as his private hunting preserve in 1880. Markhor (*Capra falconeri cashmiriensis*) were the prized game. The Mehtar maintained several bungalows for his use and for guests, as well as cultivating some land and orchards. The Mehtar allowed nearby villagers to collect firewood, graze some livestock in areas away from his hunting bungalows, and cut some wood for timber.

The Khunjerab grasslands came under the control of the Mir of Hunza in the late 18th century. The Mir allocated grazing rights to villagers, and in turn received from them a tax consisting of livestock and livestock products. The Mir controlled hunting in the area, as well as any trans-border trade with China. The Mir's livestock grazed in the Khunjerab pastures, tended by designated shepherds, who sent livestock when ordered and livestock products to the Mir at his palace in Baltit, Hunza (IOR R/2 (1079/253): 60-67).

In Baltistan, the pastures along the Biafo and Baltoro glaciers were grazing grounds for villagers of the upper Braldu Valley who were subjects of the Raja of Shigar. However, the Raja exerted little control over the remote Braldu Valley. The villagers of the Braldu were effectively left alone to tend their livestock in summer pastures along the glaciers (K.I. MacDonald, personal communication).

These situations of usage can be characterized as ranging from closely controlled, but still shared usage in the case of Chitral, to more loosely controlled shared usage in the case of Hunza, to locally controlled and used in the case of Baltistan and the Braldu Valley. The degree of control exerted by the ruling prince over each area corresponds to the distance of the royal residence from the area.

These relatively stable situations changed when the princely states were merged into Pakistan in the early 1970s. Lands previously controlled by the rulers were declared to be state property. However, local people interpreted the abolition of princely rule as allowing them to cut wood and graze animals where they wished. The loss of control by local rulers also led to an increase in hunting. When wildlife biologist Dr. George Schaller came to Pakistan in 1974 to survey wildlife, he became alarmed at the low numbers of unique species, and recommended the establishment of protected areas to preserve them (Schaller 1979). To protect the Markhor in Chitral Gol and Marco Polo sheep (*Ovis ammon poli*) in Khunjerab, Chitral Gol was declared a wildlife sanctuary in 1971 and Khunjerab a national park in 1975. Chitral Gol was declared a national park in 1984. Interestingly, Schaller did not recommend the Central Karakoram to be a national park because it had comparatively low numbers of wildlife.

These areas also became increasingly more accessible. The KKH, highways, and link roads were constructed and air service increased (Kreutzmann 1991). All three areas have experienced an increase in the number of visitors, both foreign and domestic. Hunza and Gilgit are major tourist destinations, as well as trade centers; Skardu is a world-class mountaineering destination, as well as an important military center, and Chitral draws over 3,000 foreign tourists each year, as well as many domestic tourists.

With this increase in access, the mountain pastures, valleys, and wildlife habitats, previously valued for centuries as grasslands and woodlands, have now become the objects of desire of a number of competing interests - resort hotels, adventure tourism, big game hunting, mountaineering, conservation organizations, and the military, to name a few (Mock 1989,1995; Kreutzmann 1993). Each group is interested in maximizing its return from usage of the area. The traditional usage of the villagers also figures into the equation. Each group of users vies to exert control over the areas, and each group has its own ideas as to how the areas should be managed. The relevant point for management is that effective management must take into account the needs of all user groups and develop strategies for cooperation between them (Renard and Hudson 1992). For example, in Pakistan, parks have largely been concerned with protection. Yet protected area managers throughout the developing world have realized that protected area management must be coupled with social and economic development if biodiversity is to be conserved (Wells, Brandon, & Hannah 1992). This approach to management is only just beginning to find a foothold in Pakistan.

In addition, the rigid, prescriptive structure of Pakistan's national parks precludes any direct role in planning and implementation for local people. The existing legislative basis for national parks excludes many types of usage. Pakistan's 1975 national park legislation is similar to the 1978 definition formulated by IUCN - The World Conservation Union. Although the IUCN definition has since changed considerably to incorporate new thinking on park management, the Pakistan definition remains unchanged (see Table I - Existing Legislative Basis for National Parks in Pakistan). The park structure presently in place in Pakistan actually amplifies conflict, as exemplified by the history of court cases in Chitral Gol (see Table II - History of Court Cases Involving Chitral Gol National Park) and in Khunjerab (see Table III - History of Khunjerab National Park). In Chitral, there is an ongoing 20-year history of litigation between the government and the ex-Mehtar of Chitral, Saiful Mulk Nasir (Malik 1985). The ex-Mehtar claims Chitral Gol is his private property, whereas the government claims it is state property. Local people have now joined the law suit claiming their right to Chitral Gol. The case, as of June 1995, is still before the courts. In Khunjerab, the government attempted to ban traditional grazing, but failed to offer sufficient compensation to local communities (Wegge 1989; Mock 1990; Bell 1991; Slavin 1991; Knudsen 1992). Villagers obtained a court order in October 1990 to permit them to continue grazing. But in 1991, the Khunjerab Security Force (KSF), a police organization, forcibly evicted them from the park. These lawsuits and police actions are symptomatic of the gap between usage and control, as well as of the distance between decision makers in Pakistan's capital, Islamabad, and the actual protected areas.

Recent developments in Khunjerab may point to a way ahead. The management plan currently under review by the federal government follows an approach termed co-management. Co-management implies that all involved

parties work together as equal partners in decision making as well as implementation. This requires the government to share power and responsibility for protected area management with local communities and other user groups (Sneed 1992). This approach holds forth the possibility of harmonizing the issue of usage and control. Co-management does not require authorities to give up or transfer legal jurisdiction, but it does demand that they equally share decision making power with all other user groups, including local communities, and respect and enhance the rights, aspirations, knowledge, skills and resources of all user groups.

Of course, the burden also falls on the users. They can no longer simply be users, but must take responsibility for the results of their use, learn how to participate in the management of the area and how to work with other users. The Central Karakoram National Park, established in late 1993 (Notification No. Admin - III - II (28/93), hopefully will not be plagued by the set of problems of Chitral Gol and Khunjerab. IUCN, a main proponent of the park, has declared that local people are at the heart of this park. A workshop was held in Skardu in September 1994 to discuss management planning (IUCN- Pakistan 1995). But at the workshop, government representatives refused to make a commitment to share potential revenue from park entrance fees with the surrounding villages.

It seems unlikely that the exercise of government control over these mountain parks will resolve conflicts resulting from multiple users. It seems equally unlikely that the exercise of private control can resolve the conflicts, or bring to bear the needed resources and expertise to effectively manage these areas. Given the competing interests of today's multiple user groups, a traditional village-based common property regime is also impractical. Rather, a joining together of all user groups and individuals, together with the government, in a co-managed approach that links conservation with development appears to be the best approach for managing these areas today. The sad result of an unwillingness or inability to do so will be the loss of unique ecosystems and species - a loss for Pakistan and for the world.

Table I - Existing Legislative Basis for National Parks in Pakistan

Northern Areas Wildlife Preservation Act (1975) Section 2.k.

"National Park" means comparatively large areas of outstanding scenic merit and natural interest with the primary object of protection and preservation of scenery, flora and fauna in the natural state to which access for public recreation, education and research may be allowed.

Section 7. Acts restricted in a national park. No person shall:
(i) Reside in a national park;

(ii) Hunt, kill or capture, or be found in circumstance showing that it is his intention to hunt, kill or capture any animal in a national park;

(iii) Carry any fire arm or other hunting weapon in a national park;

(iv) Introduce any domestic animal or allow any domestic animal to stray into a national park. Any domestic animal found in a national park may be destroyed or seized by, or on the orders of an authorized office, shall be disposed of in accordance with the instruction of the Chief Wildlife Warden;

(v) cause any bush or grass fire (except at designated places) or cut, destroy, injure or damage in any way any tree or other vegetation in a national park;

(vi) Cultivate any land in a national park;

(vii) Pollute any water in, or flowing in a national park;

(viii) Introduce any exotic animal or plant into a national park;

(ix) Pick any flower or remove any plant, animal, stone or other natural object from a national park;

(x) Write on, cut, carve, or otherwise deface any building, monument, notice board, tree, rock or other object, whether natural or otherwise, in a national park;

(xi) Fail to comply with the lawful orders of an officer while in a national park; and

(xii) Discard any paper, tin, bottle, or litter of any sort in a national park except in a receptacle provided for the purpose.

North-West Frontier Province Wild-Life Protection, Preservation, Conservation and Management Act (1975)

Section 16.

National Park

(1) With a view to the protection and preservation of scenery, flora and fauna in the natural estate, Government may, by notification in the official Gazette, declare any area which is the property of Government or over which Government has proprietary rights to be a national park and may demarcate it in such manner as may be prescribed.

(2) A national park shall be accessible to public for recreation, education and research subject to such restrictions as Government may impose.

(3) Provision for access roads to and construction of rest houses, hostels and other buildings in the national park along with amenities for public may be so made and the forest therein shall be so managed and forest produce obtained as not to impair the object of the establishment of the national park.

(4) The following acts shall be prohibited in a national park:

(i) Hunting, shooting, trapping, killing or capturing of any wild animal in a national park or within three miles radius of its boundary;

(ii) Firing any gun or doing any other act which may disturb any animal or bird or doing any act which interferes with the breeding places;

- (iii) felling, tapping, burning or in any way damaging or destroying, taking, collecting or removing any plant or tree there from;
 - (iv) Clearing or breaking up any land for cultivation, mining or for any other purpose; and
 - (v) Polluting any water flowing in and through the national park.
- IUCN Categories of Protected Areas (1978)

II. National Park

To protect outstanding natural and scenic areas of national and international significance for scientific, educational, and recreational use. These are relatively large natural areas not materially altered by human activity, and where commercial extractive uses are not permitted.

IUCN Categories of Protected Areas (1994)

II. National Park

Protected area managed mainly for ecosystem protection and recreation. Natural area or land and/or sea, designated to:

- (a) protect the ecological integrity of one or more ecosystems for present and future generations;
- (b) Exclude exploitation or occupation inimical to the purposes of designation of the area; and
- (c) Provide a foundation for spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational and visitor opportunities, all of which must be environmentally and culturally compatible.

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Notes to readers

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