

In Search of Better Avenues for Public Participation in Wildlife Enforcement Activities

The Tri-National Conference on Wildlife Enforcement Activities, “In Search of Better Avenues for Public Participation,” was held from 28 February–1 March 2002, in Washington, DC, under the sponsorship of the North American Wildlife Enforcement Group and the North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC). Over 60 participants from governments, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), academia and the private sector attended the conference to explore existing and potential avenues, mechanisms and partnerships for citizen participation in wildlife enforcement issues in Canada, Mexico and the United States. Presentations, discussions and small group sessions focused on thematic areas including: wildlife enforcement systems; public participation and partnership mechanisms; case studies on citizen involvement; and transboundary enforcement cooperation.

Discussions on enforcement systems within the three countries highlighted their national wildlife legislation, the roles of federal and sub-national authorities, interagency cooperation and development of enforcement priorities. Speakers and participants particularly highlighted national participatory mechanisms involving NGOs and citizens’ groups within wildlife enforcement activities, including: systems for observing, recording and reporting illegal activities; private prosecution and citizens’ suits; public outreach and education; reviews of legislation and agency performance; information gathering and data analysis of markets, transportation routes and other aspects of illegal wildlife trade; and lobbying for improved legislation and allocation of resources for wildlife enforcement activities.

Special attention was devoted to existing enforcement mechanisms, such as: the use of “tea brigades” in Canada’s Nova Scotia to increase authorities’ involvement in and understanding of community issues; Mexico’s national consultative councils for sustainable development and denunciation system where citizens can file claims regarding violation of environmental laws for investigation by federal agencies; the U.S. Pelly Amendment and Lacey Act which can be used to prosecute or pressure extra-territorial wildlife violations; and international cooperation under agreements including the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES). Participants noted a number of obstacles to effective public participation including legal barriers barring prosecution or access to information, adversarial attitudes between government authorities and NGOs, insufficient resources and lack of public familiarity with relevant laws and institutions. Regarding capacity needs, discussions highlighted awareness-raising and legal training for the public, possibly through development of social communication programs or public agendas on wildlife protection. Some speakers also noted gaps and priorities in legislation in areas of: invasive species; organized crime; impacts caused by illegal immigration in remote areas; commercialization of wildlife and increasing scales of exploitation; coastal pollution; fisheries; and timber and non-timber forests products.

The conference also provided a number of case studies and partnership models from the three countries. For Mexico, the use of community vigilance groups within the state of Oaxaca was highlighted as means to help improve control over illegal activities, promote protection and conservation measures, resolve environmental problems through self-regulatory mechanisms, and empower communities and individuals. For Canada, *zones d’exploitation contrôlées* (controlled use zones) within Quebec have been used to promote user participation, particularly of private hunting and fishing clubs, in conservation and sustainable use through game management and involvement in assessing potential yields and setting quotas. Another case highlighted a series of

resource management and sectoral legislative plans for the Muskwa-Kechika Management Area of British Columbia, which involve a range of federal and provincial authorities (e.g., conservation officers, park rangers, forestry personnel and the oil and gas commission) as well as public actors (e.g., local pilots, trappers' associations, loggers and First Nations groups). For the U.S., case studies were presented contrasting differing public reactions to wolf re-introduction programs in Wyoming and Idaho, and highlighting the role of the Nez Perce tribes in enforcement and monitoring activities. Participants noted that the most successful examples of communal resource management have well-defined parameters for resource values, geographic areas, membership, behavioral norms and punitive measures.

Given an environment of decreasing resources, the meeting highlighted the need to change from traditional enforcement practices, which are more reactionary and incident-driven, to a more proactive focus on prevention, problem solving and partnerships. Such an approach entails a process of problem identification, analysis, response and assessment, which is responsive to local needs and problems. In this regard, participants highlighted the need for understanding and addressing underlying socioeconomic and cultural factors, such as indigenous value systems or poverty, when developing management solutions.

Overall the meeting underscored the importance of enhancing partnerships incorporating different stakeholders into enforcement and implementation of relevant legislation, while also improving outreach and public understanding of wildlife issues. Regarding cooperation between the three countries, participants proposed collaborative partnerships, such as on a resource or bioregional basis and among NGOs, to improve enforcement capabilities and information-flow. Specific recommendations were also made regarding standard procedures for public comments and consultation, citizen suit provisions within wildlife laws, identification of NGO focal points within government agencies, documentation of successful public-private partnerships and further work on public and community outreach.

Follow-up activities within both organizations are presently under discussion, particularly in the areas of coordination and institutionalization of cross-border, ground-up communication networks. More information on the conference and relevant activities can be found at www.cec.org/naweg.