

THE IMPACT OF PARK DEVELOPMENT ON THE LIVES OF LOCAL INHABITANTS WITHIN GROS MORNE NATIONAL PARK

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Abstract.—The creation of a national park changes the local community's relationship to the land. In 1973, Parks Canada created Gros Morne National Park around existing communities and only relocated a small number of inhabitants to nearby communities. While park creation placed some restrictions on traditional activities, compromises were made to allow the continuation of some recreational and subsistence activities normally not permitted in national parks. This study investigates the local community members' perceptions of how their lives have changed since the creation of Gros Morne National Park. In-depth interviews with 12 local residents were used to discover how the establishment of the park has affected their lives in terms of their work, recreation, social, and subsistence activities, as well as their community life. This paper focuses on three themes that emerged in the interviews: restrictions placed on traditional extractive activities; relocation; and the benefit of employment created through the park and tourism.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Before 1970, creating national parks in Canada often meant relocating residents. For example, in 1969 approximately 1,200 New Brunswick residents were relocated to other communities to create Kouchibouguac National Park, creating negative feelings among the local people (MacEachern 2001, McNamee 2002). Parks Canada changed its approach

in the case of Gros Morne National Park, established in 1973 in Newfoundland and Labrador (see Figure 1). Originally, 175 families were to be moved (MacEachern 2001), but ultimately the park boundary was drawn around six existing communities, leaving them in place and intact (McNamee 2002) (see Figure 2). This study investigates the residents' perception of how their lives have changed after the creation of Gros Morne National Park.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The creation of a park changes a community's access to the land. In many cases (e.g., Armando Bermudez National Park, Dominican Republic; Royal Chitwan National Park, Nepal) the local inhabitants are no longer able to participate in activities they had engaged in before the park's creation (Allendorf et al. 2007, Busch and Zube 1990, Fahey et al. 2002, Nepal and Spiteri 2008, Zube 1986), and thus there are frequently negative feelings towards the park (Busch and Zube 1990, More et al. 2008). Nevertheless, many studies have found that local populations perceive the existence of a park as beneficial. Benefits include safe drinking water (Fahey et al. 2002), increased economic opportunities (Fahey et al. 2002, More et al. 2008, Nepal and Spiteri 2008), and continuation of some traditional extractive activities (Nepal and Spiteri 2008, Nepal and Weber 1995, Allendorf et al. 2007). More research is needed in Canada to examine the relationship between local communities and established parks as well as potential park areas.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research was used to investigate whether the creation of Gros Morne National Park had had any impact on local inhabitants of the seven communities within the park. The researcher contacted residents she met while working at the park. Participants were also recruited through posters. Snowball sampling ensued.



Figure 1.—Geographical location of Gros Morne National Park in Newfoundland and Labrador. Source: Parks Canada (2009).



Figure 2.—Communities within Gros Morne National Park. Source: Parks Canada (2009).

The participants lived in one of the park communities at the time of the study, had lived in the park area for at least nine years before the park was created, and had lived there for most of the time since the park's creation. During in-depth interviews, participants were asked a series of questions to determine if, and how, the creation of the park had affected their lives. Interpretive analysis, including the constant comparison technique, was used to develop themes.

4.0 RESULTS

The 12 study participants (6 females and 6 males), ranged in age from 45 to 83 years. In this paper, respondents are referred to by fictitious names to protect their privacy. Five respondents were retired. Eleven of them were either employed directly by the park at some time in their life, worked in a service job that was made possible by the park, or had a family member who was employed directly or indirectly by the park. Three were employed by the park during the park's operating season as heritage presenters and trail maintenance workers.

Through the data analysis, two major themes and seven sub-themes emerged. The first major theme concerned restrictions placed on traditional land use. This theme included four sub-themes: loss of freedom; restrictions placed on traditional extractive activities; restrictions to traditional land use and recreation; and relocation. The second major theme dealt with benefits of the park and included three sub-themes: employment created through the park and tourism; protection of the natural environment and local heritage; and community development. This paper focuses on three sub-themes: restrictions placed on traditional extractive activities, relocation, and the benefit of employment created through the park and tourism.

4.1 Restrictions Placed on Traditional Extractive Activities

One of the rights that local inhabitants felt they had lost was the ability to access and use the land for traditional activities. Chester went as far as to say that the restriction on these activities "discourages

some people from even participating in the traditional things they used to do, as far as hunting and fishing is concerned." Hunting has been most strongly affected; there is no hunting within the park boundary so the inhabitants have to go elsewhere to hunt moose, caribou, rabbit, or ptarmigan. As Isaac said, people are "not allowed to hunt rabbits in the park...[or] big game in the park...such as moose. And you're not allowed...to trap...animals like foxes and lynx and beaver...inside the park because they're all protected." Blanche said, "you have to go farther now to hunt; you got to keep out of the park boundaries, right. It sometimes makes it a little more difficult." Chester felt that hunting had "changed somewhat, because it's only certain areas now that you can hunt. You're limited to the space that you got now."

The one exception to the hunting ban is that the local people are allowed to snare snowshoe hare in their woodcutting areas, which are located within the park. Fred felt that the one allowance about snowshoe hares was not enough stating:

Now you got to keep...on that side of the boundary line. But it's not the same. I mean up Pond, years ago people would go up there for weeks, get enough rabbits, you know, but now you're not allowed.

Residents are also not allowed to catch rabbits in the quantity they once did. Chester mentioned that the one method allowed to catch the rabbits is not effective:

You can't take a firearm back there and harvest snowshoe hare; you got to use a snare, a wire... I'm just guessing this; they have to use special wire now. And that's in effect for everywhere, and the wire is very, very weak. People were saying, "Well we don't catch very many rabbits because they break the wire."

There are also restrictions on fishing within the park boundary including how fish can be caught, where fishing can occur, and limits on the number of fish that can be taken. Isaac, an avid angler, commented that "for fishing outside the park in the province, you're allowed three lines for fishing... and in the park you're

allowed one fishing line.” Georgina said “in certain parts of the river you have to have a license to fish,” and Chester commented that “you got to have that permit to go in the park to fish, and probably have to have a park pass.”

Only local residents are allowed to cut wood and pick berries in the park. Some residents like Alan see this continued access as a benefit:

For people that are living here we can still cut our firewood, the same as we always did. My generation of course, the next generation won't.

There are also restrictions on the location, amount of wood, and time of year that residents can cut. Fred commented:

Well once they put the restrictions on, they put signs up: 'no cutting,' 'you got to get a permit to cut here'... And what I find about the park, worst I find about it... There's hundreds of cords of wood blowed down there alongside that road. And they wouldn't let you cut it... It was in the park. I mean they turn around and they go half a kilometer from the inner cutting blocks and give you good timber to cut. And that was perfect timber that was blowed down... I mean the rules and the regulations they got... I don't know. I mean why, if wood blowed down along the road, why didn't they cut it?... Then up the pond, if you wanted to go up the head of the two ponds there, and cut wood...pick-up wood around the beach, or anything at all, you'd go up there and do it. But you can't do it, not allowed up there. And you got to get a permit to go to bed now.

Berry-picking is much simpler; the residents are allowed to pick berries within the park when they are in season. As with all the other activities, however, they must have a park pass to pick berries. Daisy felt that this requirement was an unfortunate constraint to berry-picking:

Now that's something that [has] affected the local people... The hiking trails and all that stuff... If I wanted to go down there, like we used to go down and go to Western Brook Pond, go in

on the bogs in there, you go berry picking. Now you can't go in there without a pass.

4.2 Relocation

All participants agreed that one negative aspect of the park's creation was the relocation of a number of households in the Gros Morne area. When the park was being planned, the federal and provincial governments decided not to relocate six communities within the proposed park boundary. However, other households and small communities within the proposed park boundary were required to move to one of the six communities. Sally's Cove, a community that was slated for relocation, still exists as a park enclave. Daisy commented, “People still lives there today because some of [the residents] refused to move.” Other communities were not as fortunate and “their land was... expropriated, and they had to move. So... actually, some of those places were wiped right off the earth” (Chester).

There are still many negative feelings towards the park because of these forced relocations. Many participants felt that moving people out of their homes was unjust and unnecessary. Alan said, “Moving people out of Sally's Cove and moving people out of Lomond were mistakes.” Eddie commented that there is a lot of wilderness in the interior of the park, and that “people, except on the Avalon Peninsula, lives along the coast line...” He did not understand why the people had to be moved just to create the park, and this was a common feeling among the participants.

4.3 Employment Created Through Tourism and the Park

Although many of the participants were unhappy about the restrictions placed on their traditional activities, most said that the park brought benefits to the local community. The fishing and the logging industries were dying long before the park was created, so many residents had left the region to seek employment elsewhere (Newfoundland Historical Society 2008). The creation of the park offered new employment opportunities, which the participants perceived as a significant benefit.

A few participants are, or have been, employed by the park and many others commented that the park did employ some local inhabitants directly. When asked about the changes the park had caused in his life, Isaac commented: "I see positive things because I've been working with them [Parks Canada], for 22 years." Chester, who also works for the park, said: "it's the best job I ever had." Many others commented that the park brings in tourists, and that many tourism jobs have been created since the park was established. Alan commented:

There's a lot of tourism jobs... I'd say, probably... something like 40 percent of the people, the working-aged people in our community, are working in tourism right now. Whether it be with Parks Canada directly, or in a little shop... or in a B&B or a restaurant or whatever.

However, a couple of participants felt that there was not enough employment created for the local people and that more local people should be employed directly with the park. Blanche agreed that the park had created employment opportunities but acknowledged that some people had a different view:

Now a lot of the income of people is based on income from tourism. But still sometimes you get people who figures there's not enough employment directly with the park.

Daisy commented:

"There was no employment here for us, or our family, they all had to leave home, my husband had to leave home to go to work." She thought that the park would have created more jobs for the local people but found that "the park didn't employ too many people around here. Few laborers, summertime, some of them got seasonal work. But there wasn't too many that got permanent employment in the park."

Eddie also felt that the park should have employed more local people:

There's probably, one third [of people] moved out now, between Trout River and Parson's Pond. And I don't see any employment. I mean the majority of people employed is not local people, you know.

5.0 DISCUSSION

The creation of Gros Morne National Park limited residents' access to the land for traditional activities. This was the source of study participants' most significant objections to the park. Older participants had more objections to the restrictions and changes than did the younger participants.

In the establishment of Kouchibouguac National Park, large scale relocation was protested emphatically, and negative feelings were unanimous among residents (MacEachern 2001). In the creation of Gros Morne National Park, many residents were allowed to stay in their homes and were not asked to relocate. Of the 12 participants interviewed, 2 were relocated, and 2 were residents of Sally's Cove whose families refused to move. The participants who were relocated felt very strongly that this was a mistake, and this feeling was echoed by all other study participants who were not relocated.

Many study participants experienced benefits related to the creation and existence of the park. As with other studies, the main identified benefit was economic: parks create new employment opportunities for local people. The creation of Gros Morne National Park attracted tourists from all over the world and tourism has provided the local people with new employment opportunities in the service industry. There were also some residents employed directly by the park. There were only two residents who did not feel that the park provided economic benefits. Both lived in a community that has no park infrastructure and very few amenities for visitors. These participants did acknowledge that the park provided some economic benefit to other communities within the park but felt that their community did not benefit directly.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

Local residents identified a number of positive and negative impacts that the establishment of Gros Morne National Park had had on their lives and their communities. Residents expressed negative perceptions about the relocation of a number of residents from small communities to the larger centres. Many participants stated that they were unhappy with restrictions placed on traditional land use and extractive activities. However, most felt that in general park creation was a good thing for their communities. Employment was the most commonly perceived benefit; eleven out of twelve people said that the park had at one time or another provided employment for himself, herself, or a family member. Overall, for most study participants the benefits of the park outweighed the negative feelings caused by restrictions.

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