



Rocky Mountain National Park and Tatra National Parks: Collaborating Between Continents and Cultures

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Introduction

In 2007 Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP) established a formal sister-park relationship with Tatra National Park (Republic of Poland - TPN) and Tatra National Park (Slovakia - TANAP). All three parks share similar environments (high elevation coniferous forest, alpine tundra, and wetland habitat) with many closely related genera and species. All three parks are challenged by high visitor use (approximately 3 million visitors a year in RMNP; approximately 6 million a year combined in the Tatra parks). To date, parks have had staff and information exchanges focused on monitoring climate change, managing human waste in remote areas, trail construction techniques, restoring and managing culturally important landscapes, employee professionalization, volunteer programs, wilderness values, forestry practices, biodiversity protection, and more. Colorado State University, University of Northern Colorado, and Jagiellonian University (Krakow, Poland) faculty have also joined the collaboration. Future plans include park staff exchanges, graduate student exchanges, a web-based high school program for comparing parks, and a 2010 resource stewardship meeting. By making this connection, Rocky Mountain National Park has learned about European approaches that can inform our way of doing things in a globalized world. One measure of success – based on observations of this partnership, other Polish national parks are also now seeking US sister park relationships.

Background

Sister Park - History of Events:



- Park staff from TANAP have spent time at Rocky Mountain National Park learning about park management and management issues (October 2006, VIP Slovakian guests, (former TANAP, Fall 2007 & April 2008)
- Park staff from TPN have spent time at Rocky Mountain National Park learning about park management and management issues (October 2008)
- Park staff from Rocky Mountain National Park have spent time in both Tatra parks learning about park management and management issues (September 2007, April 2009)
- A Sister Park Arrangement between the two Tatra National Parks and Rocky Mountain National Park was entered into on September 12, 2007. This arrangement includes the exchange of information and expertise in a number of program areas, including resource management, science, environmental education, "friends" support groups, volunteer programs, recreation and ecotourism management and information exchange.



U.S. State Department Involvement:

The U.S. Embassy in Warsaw and the U.S. Consulate in Krakow are very supportive of the sister park relationship. Consular staff have assisted in organization of conferences including the provision of simultaneous translation. The US Embassy in Poland posted a summary of the conference on the Embassy's web site (Krakow.usconsulate.gov/).

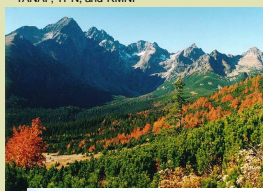
Due to a change in park administration at the Slovak park since we developed the sister park arrangement, relations with the park have been challenging due to the language barrier and not knowing the new people. The U.S. Embassy in Bratislava has been instrumental in assisting Rocky Mountain National Park with re-developing a productive relationship with the new TANAP administration.

Support from both embassies has been crucial to establishing and maintaining the relationships among the three parks.

In Common....

TANAP and TPN are spectacular high mountain parks located within the Carpathian mountain range in Slovakia and Poland. These parks straddle the border between the two countries and the core protected area is roughly 417 sq. mi., which is identical to the size of Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado. In Slovakia, the park is named Tatransky Narodny Park and is administered jointly by the Slovakia equivalent of the National Park Service (NPS) and Forest Service. In Poland, the park is named Tatranski Park Narodowy and is administered by the equivalent of the NPS. RMNP, TANAP, and TPN share many similarities in geologic history and terrain (dominated by glacier sculpt mountains), with ecosystems ranging from montane to alpine tundra, intermixed with riparian areas. Some of the same or very similar species are found in all three parks, and visitation numbers (about 3 million annually) and their impacts are common issues. Staffs from the three parks have expanded relations and collaborated on many management issues of mutual concern. Because all three parks are faced with similar challenges and issues, sharing expertise can greatly benefit all.

TANAP, TPN, and RMNP



Shared issues include:

- Air pollution effects on high mountain ecosystems
- Regional haze and visibility effects
- High visitor use and visitor management concerns
- Bark beetle infestations affecting large forested areas
- Conflicts over use of border areas that benefit local communities
- Wildlife management challenges
- Management of Special Park Uses
- Water quality
- Ecosystem management and the effects of heavy human activity, both within and adjacent to the parks, including development pressures
- Fee management
- Transportation systems
- Commercial visitor services
- Backcountry use management
- Volunteer and partnership programs
- Interpretation and education including youth programs
- Environmental education

As a specific example, TANAP is dealing with a wind storm event (2004) that toppled 5 million trees and radically altered the landscape (in addition led to logging of all the affected timber). RMNP is currently dealing with the effects of up to 90% mortality in Lodgepole pine stands from mountain pine beetle on its western side of the park. Both effects present information sharing and learning opportunities.



Recent Collaboration:

Vaughn Baker, Superintendent of Rocky Mountain National Park, led a team of park/Colorado State University staff as part of a reciprocal relationship (sister park) between Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP), the Tatra National Park, Slovakia (TANAP) and the Tatra National Park, Poland (TPN). All 3 parks are also international Biosphere Reserves. In conjunction with the U.S. Consulate in Krakow, Poland, the three parks hosted a park management/research conference in conjunction with Earth Day 2009. The purpose of the conference was to promote international cooperation and support for the mutual benefit of the three parks and to enrich the experience and training of personnel. This was accomplished through the exchange of technical and professional knowledge, information, data, technology, and experience. The participants made presentations on a variety of topics at the conference.

Goals of the international conference:

- Compare and contrast the environments and management of the three park biosphere reserves. Topics covered include biotic and abiotic features, cultural values, economic significance, and management structure.
- Share examples of the use of science in decision-making. Topics of shared interest include renewable energy, forestry ecology (pests: pine beetles), air quality and climate change, wilderness protection and predator ecology & management.
- Discuss priorities for future collaboration.



Conference participants: park staff and embassy representatives, Poland and Slovakia, respectively.

Next Steps:

- Arrange for current TANAP staff to visit the U.S. and Rocky Mountain National Park, possibly at the 2010 biannual research conference.
- Identify areas of need and subject matter experts at both parks.
- Arrange for information exchange between subject matter experts.
- Arrange for subject matter experts to spend time performing on-the-ground work at their respective sister parks (staff exchange program to be initiated in Fall 2009).
- Scientific Exchange: coordinate with Colorado State University faculty to develop a research project that benefits all parks

Conclusions

Because of the similarities between the two Tatra National Parks and Rocky Mountain National Park in both geography and management issues, and because of the relationships that have been established between park managers thus far, it is highly desirable to sustain and further develop the exchange of expertise between these world class national parks.