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'Identifying “Appropriate Use” In Canada’s Parks: Collaborative Decision-Making'

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A perennial problem faced by park managers is determination of the “appropriate use” of park resources when confronted with competing claims – from, for example, hoteliers, ski hill operators, cross-country skiers, environmentalists, hikers, and tour operators.

My experience, as a member of the Scientific Panel to the Banff Bow Valley Study, suggested that traditional methods of measuring public preferences - such as opinion polls and roundtables – provide imperfect information about these preferences. For this reason, I have been attracted to a technique that has had wide acceptance among environmental decision-makers: collaborative environmental management. Although this technique has taken many forms, its basic premise is that workable solutions to environmental conflicts can be obtained if the groups that are interested in the policy outcome can be induced to reach a consensus agreement concerning that policy.

I begin my paper by discussing the theoretical arguments for use of collaborative management. The bulk of the paper, however, consists of a detailed analysis of the characteristics required for successful use of this technique. I cover, for example, composition of the group (should non-residents and government agents be included?), funding of research and of participants, the “hold-out” problem, and restrictions on scope of the negotiations.