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Biodiversity Conservation: Can the Private Sector Play an Effective Role?

Randall A. Kramer
Professor of Resource and Environmental Economics
Nicholas School of the Environment
Duke University
Durham, N.C. 27708-0328
email: kramer@duke.edu

Abstract

Concerns about biodiversity losses have triggered a global effort to determine the causes of the losses and means to encourage greater conservation and wise use. Biodiversity is the source of many goods and services of direct benefit to mankind in the form of genetic material for agricultural, pharmaceutical, and industrial products as well as enjoyment through nature related recreation. In addition, the conservation of biodiversity can generate indirect benefits through ecological services (e.g. watershed protection, carbon sequestration) as well as intrinsic benefits associated with philosophical and ethical concerns. Much of the effort to date to encourage biodiversity conservation has focused on the establishment of national parks and other protected areas by the public sector, often working in concert with non-profit organizations. However, the private sector is increasingly involved when there are revenue making opportunities such as ecotourism or prospecting for new commercial products.

One way in which the private sector can become involved in biodiversity conservation is through privatization of existing parks. A government may choose to lease a park to one or more private organizations to operate on a for-profit basis, subject to contractual requirements that protect the park's biological resources from over-exploitation or environmental degradation. This approach is particularly appealing in developing countries that have limited funds to invest in maintaining parks. However, the environmental community has been reluctant to support such efforts due to concerns about long term consequences for biodiversity and ecosystem integrity.

This paper will discuss several examples of private sector involvement in park management and present a case study of Komodo National Park in Indonesia. Komodo National Park is one of the most important sites of combined terrestrial and marine biodiversity in the Asia/Pacific region. Its boundaries contain most of the habitat of the world's largest lizard, the Komodo monitor. Preliminary assessments indicate that the marine areas of the park contain a large proportion of Indonesia's marine biodiversity, a country that falls within the epicenter of the world's coral reef diversity. Its global significance has been recognized by its designation as a Man and the Biosphere Reserve and a World Heritage Site. The terrestrial biodiversity is under threat from poaching of deer, a main food of the Komodo dragons and poaching-related fires. The marine biodiversity is under extreme threat from destructive fishing practices that are rapidly depleting the area's marine resources. The threats include dynamite fishing, capture of

aquarium fish with cyanide, removal of corals, over-exploitation of a variety of species.

Efforts are underway to enhance prospects for biodiversity conservation in the park area by fostering a new collaborative management strategy, revamping the approach to enforcement, providing alternative livelihoods to local fishermen, developing a tourism management strategy, and establishing self-financing mechanisms for the park. The collaborative management approach would involve the park service, environmental organizations, hotel and tour operators, and local residents.