

ABSTRACT

Tourism and Development: Implications for Snow Leopard Conservation in the Annapurna Conservation Area, Nepal

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The Annapurna Conservation Area was established in 1986 to manage environmental degradation. Its designation as a “conservation area,” as opposed to a “park,” was based on the World Wildlife Fund’s Integrated Conservation and Development approach. The goal was to maintain positive relations with indigenous people while protecting and conserving the area’s rich natural resources. The indigenous population was allowed to live in the designated area, and was also encouraged to take a partnership role in its management and sustainable development, in conjunction with the Annapurna Conservation Area Project management team. Though the Annapurna Conservation Area Project has achieved notable success in terms of both community development and protected area management, the focus on tourism (the area is Nepal’s most popular trekking destination) as the means to achieve the project’s development goals has led to a neglect of other stated goals, particularly wildlife conservation. The program lacks explicit linkages between wildlife conservation (e.g., the endangered snow leopard (*Unica unica*)) and community development, for example. This paper describes and analyzes how the project has handled snow leopard conservation. Alternative approaches for snow leopard conservation include coercive enforcement by the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, persuasive environmental education and outreach, agricultural extension assistance, from monetary compensation for livestock killed to monetary rewards for information on snow leopard poaching. I recommend several alternatives to improve snow leopard conservation. First, establish stronger and more formal links between the Annapurna Conservation Area Project and the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation. The department has the legal authority to enforce the endangered species policy that protects snow leopards, but no physical presence within the conservation area. Second, agricultural outreach could provide the subsistence pastoralists with direct economic gains while reducing snow leopard depredation of livestock. This alternative fits well with the development philosophy of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project. Third, increase entrance fees, setting aside a portion for snow leopard conservation. This allows tourists, who value the snow leopard positively, to share in the cost of its conservation. Taken together, these alternatives will improve snow leopard conservation while maintaining the spirit and philosophy of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project.

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