

COMPETING VALUES: A CASE STUDY OF PENNSYLVANIA'S ELK HERD AS A TOURISM ATTRACTION

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Abstract: This paper qualitatively investigates the Pennsylvania Game Commission's (PGC) "Elk Trap and Transfer Project" as a tourism development initiative. Beginning in 1998, a three-year trap and transfer project was initiated by the PGC to relocate 33 elk from Elk County to Clinton County. The ecological goals of this project included re-establishing an elk population that could once again support limited hunting opportunities and to address plausible negative repercussions of the significant annual growth the herd experienced in the 1990s in Elk County. The project has also led to an increase in the numbers of visitors to Western Clinton County interested in "elk viewing" experiences, and is reported to have stimulated local economies. The general consensus from recent research examining the economic impacts attributable to "elk viewing" in Elk and Cameron counties in Pennsylvania suggests that an escalated interest in Pennsylvania's elk herd has directly led to increased non-resident tourism in these two counties. These findings have supported the view that rural tourism development in northcentral Pennsylvania should be encouraged and expanded.

Amid an extensive body of literature related to rural tourism development, Middleton and Hawkins (1998) have advised that the management of local tourism destinations needs to be "proactive", focused towards identifying and addressing issues that could potentially become areas of conflict between different individuals and/or groups impacted by tourism development. One manner of being proactive and minimizing such conflict is to actively participate in "positioning" a given tourism development initiative in stakeholders' minds (cf. Crompton, 1999). A preliminary assessment of the current situation in northcentral Pennsylvania seems to suggest that the PGC's project to relocate and reintroduce elk into other parts of the state may have sparked some local discord or conflicts of interest. This paper attempts to investigate this dissonance from a case study methodology, paying particular attention to the relevance of the "positioning" concept to this dissonance.

Introduction

The management of the elk herd in Pennsylvania throughout the 20th century and into the 21st century has, at

times, been negatively impacted by competing values of local landowners and the Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC). Documentation of this ongoing struggle can be found as far back as 1914, when the Millheim Journal (a local newspaper in central Pennsylvania) ran an article informing the public about a proposition to relocate elk for the purposes of reducing and minimizing the crop damage they caused and to improve tourism. It has been said that history repeats itself; perhaps this is why one can read about the same elk management proposition in a local paper some 80 years later. In September of 1996, the PGC announced that it had developed an Elk Trap and Transfer Project to address those very same issues mentioned in the 1914 newspaper article. For the last couple of years, local farmers and residents in northcentral Pennsylvania have been driving off or shooting elk, various groups have been supporting or condemning these locals, and the PGC has found itself in the midst of it all. The PGC's most recent three-year Elk Trap and Transfer Project appears to have ignited some local adversarial fires that, in turn, have spawned a significant amount of negative publicity for the PGC. The purpose of this paper is to summarize an investigation of this negative publicity from a rural tourism development case study perspective. More specially, the researchers have attempted to examine the importance of Crompton's (1999) *positioning* concept within the context of rural tourism development based on Pennsylvania's elk herd.

History of Elk Herd Management in Pennsylvania

Over 30 years ago, local farmers and residents in central Pennsylvania began demanding that the Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC) do something with the "rogue", free-roaming elk herd in their part of state. In 1970, local citizens who were experiencing crop and/or property damage attributed to elk demanded that the situation be remedied. In support of the farmers and landowners, the Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs and the Elk County Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs proposed that the PGC consider planting food plots in nearby fallow and deserted croplands to attract elk away from active farms in production. Almost simultaneously, the Cameron County Soil and Water Conservation District and the North Central Pennsylvania Economic Development Corporation suggested the establishment of a 10,000-acre elk management area in Elk and Cameron Counties primarily for tourism development initiatives and economic growth. In addition, the Northcentral Division Supervisor of the PGC at that time suggested that if the elk herd continued to grow an elk hunt might be in order. A direct outgrowth of these conditions was the "modern era of elk management" for the state of Pennsylvania.

It appears that little has changed with regard to the elk herd management over the last 30 years in northcentral Pennsylvania. It is once again "center stage" in newspapers, as citizens debate *the best practices* for managing the herd. The current situation precipitated directly from the PGC's three-year Elk Trap and Transfer Project, an important component of its current elk management plan to re-establish an elk herd that could once again sustain limited

hunting opportunities and provide "wildlife viewing" experiences. More specially, the goal of the PGC's 1996 Management Plan for Elk in Pennsylvania is,

...to recognize elk as a valuable wildlife resources, to perpetuate free-roaming elk, within suitable habitat for viewing and unique hunting opportunities, and to maintain elk population numbers that affected landowners will accept. (http://sites.state.pa.us/PA_Exec.PGC/elkhunt/02_hunt/eh20_01.htm, March 15, 2001, p.1)

To this end, 33 elk were released in western Clinton County (located in northcentral Pennsylvania) in February of 1998 in an effort to re-establish an elk population that could once again support limited hunting opportunities and to mitigate negative repercussions associated with a significant annual growth in the elk herd in Elk County during the 1990s. Prior to this date, the herd had already begun to migrate or drift out of its traditional range in Elk and Cameron counties in a southern direction and the PGC's plan simply hastened or augmented this migration to an area comprised a vast tracts of public lands (Clinton County). Thus, the PGC proposed that the "established" elk range in central Pennsylvania be expanded from an area where about one-third of the land is publicly owned and two-thirds privately owned to an area where just the opposite occurs-two thirds public and one-third privately owned land. In 1998, in conjunction with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF), the PGC began its three-year Elk Trap and Transfer Project designed to trap elk in Elk and Cameron counties and transfer them to Sproul State Forest in Clinton County.

Although this project might have begun solely as a PGC resource management practice, it was highly touted as an opportunity to further develop and promote tourism experiences that could (should) eventually have positive impacts on the economies of several rural communities in northcentral Pennsylvania. In fact, recent research, conducted to examine the economic impacts attributable to "elk viewing" in Elk and Cameron counties in Pennsylvania, suggested that an burgeoning interest in Pennsylvania's elk herd has directly led to increased tourism in these two counties (cf. Lord, Strauss, & Tzilkowski, 1998; 1999). In addition, Lord, Strauss, and Tzilkowski (1999) found that, 92% of the visits associated with elk viewing were by individuals residing outside Elk and Cameron counties. It has also been estimated that in 1998, elk viewing contributed a value added component of \$912 thousand and created 42 additional opportunities for local employment. Preliminary results of an ongoing study by Penn State University have estimated that the elk range draws up to 75,000 visitors annually (93% of whom are Pennsylvanians), who collectively spend an estimated \$1.7 million in the region for transportation, food and lodging (http://sites.state.pa.us/PA_Exec.PGC/elk/index.htm). These economic statistics suggest that the elk of Pennsylvania may have the potential to significantly impact those rural communities seeking to stimulate and stabilize their respective economies through tourism development.

Tourism Development

The call for local and public participation in the process and planning of tourism development has become quite commonplace in tourism literature, essentially because of the advantages attributed to its inclusion in tourism planning. For example, Murphy (1985) has pointed out that local participation can serve as an integral component in the assessment of impacts of tourism development, provide a balance to short-term objectives in tourism planning, be a most effective tool in dealing with local tourism-related issues, and should be incorporated because the local level is where the "action takes place". This "public participation" should theoretically include all stakeholders, but at a minimum include both experts and those affected by development of tourism (Murphy, 1985). Murphy also explicitly points out that public participation should be included in the tourism planning process early, "...before commitments are made and battle lines are drawn" (p. 171). Inskeep (1991) claimed that local participation leads to both economic and social diversification, which he believes is a precursor to a more integrated form of tourism development, and ultimately to the establishment of a sustainable tourism development framework. From his perspective, a diversified, integrated approach to tourism development can "...minimize the impacts [of tourism] on local development patterns and local society" (p. 30). Edgall (1999) explained that local residents could impact the diversification of tourism development by affecting the levels of novelty, excitement, comfort, and security that visitors experience at the tourism destination. Gartner's (1996) statement that, "all impacts associated with tourism development occur first and with the greatest intensity at the community level" (p. 300), certainly implies that it is only *fair and just* that the local residents have a voice in tourism initiatives and development. Beliefs such as these appear to have been seminal to the development of tourism planning models over the past few years, especially those involved with rural tourism planning (cf. Lewis, 1998; Sem, Clements, & Bloomquist, 1996; Walsh, Jamrozy, & Burr, 2001; Weaver & Wishard-Lambert, 1996).

Rural Tourism Planning

Almost by definition, rural communities are have been described as being more vulnerable to poor tourism development than other communities. These rural communities and their economies are more isolated, have fewer resources, and probably fewer options. In such communities, tourism can be very disruptive. Rothman (1998) contends that tourism development often results in "irrevocable change" for both the tourism destination and its residents. He believes that the loss of the very characteristics that make a place unique results from the fact that,

When tourism creates sufficient wealth, it becomes too important to be left to the locals. Power moves away from local decision makers, even those who psychically and socially invest in the new system that tourism creates, and towards outside capital and its local representatives. (p. 11)

Additionally, Rothman believes that tourism often “frays” community bonds, as it pits local special interest groups and individuals against one another, while they attempt to capture the economic benefits of tourism development. This is precisely why Middleton and Hawkins (1998) have advised that the management of local tourism destinations needs to be “proactive”, focused towards identifying and addressing issues that could potentially become areas of conflict between different individuals and/or groups impacted by tourism development.

While recognizing such a possibility, Burr (1996) believes that rural tourism can also provide an opportunity for greater community development, and he developed a conceptual model for facilitating rural tourism planning that he believes promotes such development (see Figure 1). Emphasizing the importance of establishing a supportive infrastructure for rural tourism development, Burr’s five-step process provides local stakeholders with a network of

social interactions, essentially creating communication patterns between groups and individuals that connect local input and feedback with the tourism promotion organizations prior to implementation of tourism initiatives.

While acknowledging that these individuals, communication patterns, and interactions will vary according to the specifics of the local area and the magnitude of the tourism scheme, Burr (1996) advocated involving a diverse set of participants in the process of rural tourism planning and development. His findings led him to conclude that private citizens, local leaders, business owners, elected officials, governmental agencies, special interest groups, and tourism planners and marketers all play key roles in the process of successful rural tourism development. The resulting social networks encouraged interactions at the local level, while at the same time, creating valuable ties to resources outside the local community. Connections to the “outside world” afforded

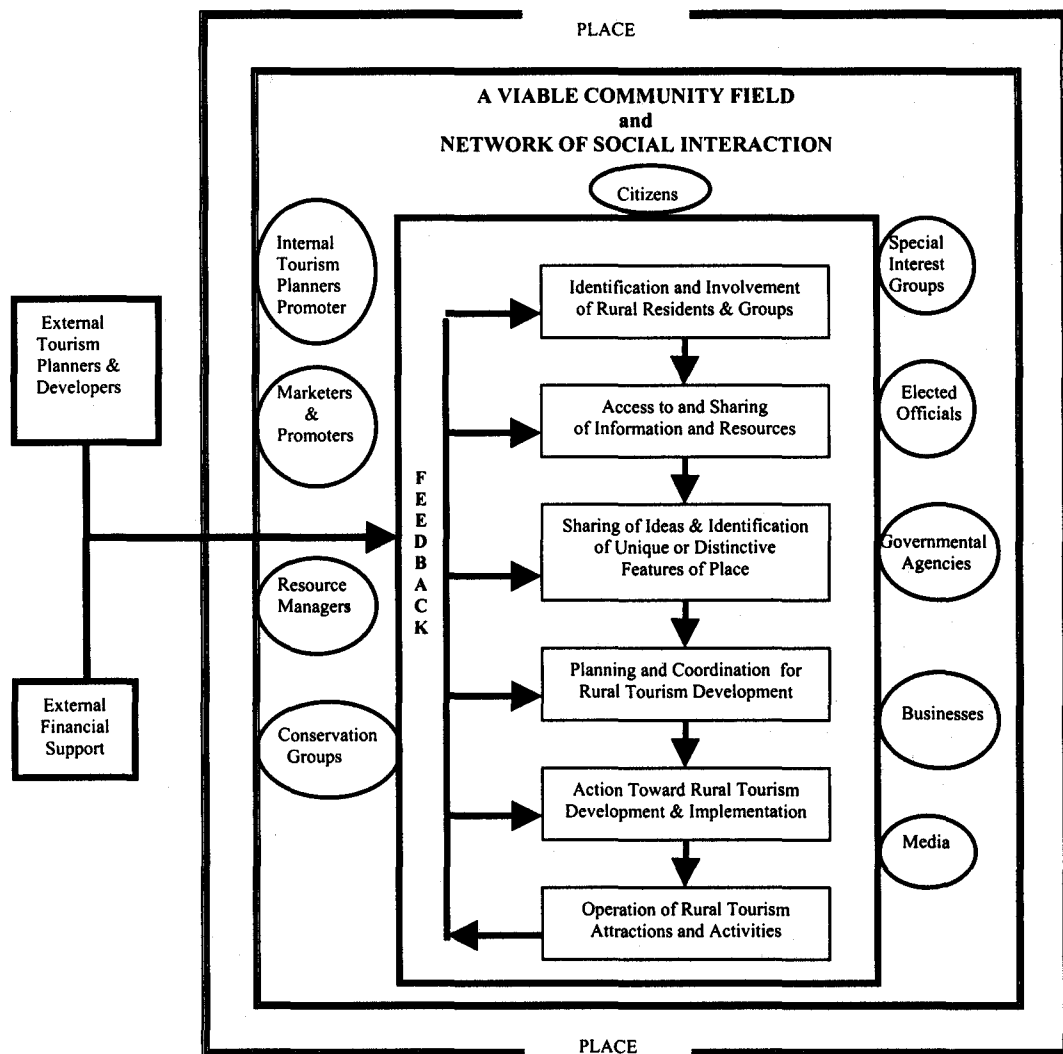


Figure 1. Burr's Conceptual Process for Facilitating Rural Tourism Development

local communities' access to essential human resources, planning expertise, and financial support they might not otherwise have had, and can make significant contribution to a community's ability to become more agentic in its development strategies.

Of course, incorporating the perspectives of such a diverse set of stakeholders in rural tourism planning is no simple matter and is sure to result in the promotion and advocacy of a multitude of disparate personal and organizational agendas. Often times, the final product of such a process is dependent upon the success with which individuals, groups, and/or organizations *position* themselves and their respective goals in the minds of other stakeholders involved in the planning process (cf. Eyre & Jamal, 1998).

Positioning

Positioning, according to Crompton (1999), refers to the place that something or someone occupies in the minds of others. Differing from *image*, positioning relates to a frame of reference or a comparison to similar entities or alternatives. In the context of rural tourism development, where a diverse set of stakeholders have been incorporated into the planning process, the positioning of one's beliefs, perspectives, and/or ideas can significantly impact the amount of support or opposition for one's idea or viewpoint. In other words, if a particular tourism development initiative is positioned favorably in the minds of stakeholders, it will be supported over less favorably positioned alternatives. This is precisely why rural tourism planning models often begin with an assessment or an investigation of public opinion/attitudes or the general mood of the community; to better understand what *position* tourism development holds in the minds of community members (e.g. Bouke & Luloff, 1996; Lewis, 1998; Sem, Clements, & Bloomquist, 1996). Such investigations can provide tourism development advocates and promoters valuable insights as to how they might strengthen a current *position* or possibly *reposition* tourism development to garner more local support and/or minimize dissonance to such development. Crompton (1999b) also warns that, "repositioning is likely to take many years of effort..." (p. 5), and "...is a difficult task because it involves shifting a widely held, long established attitude..." (1999a, p. 113). This leads him to the assertion that the identification and establishment of a strong, preferred position can be the most important aspect of strategic planning. A lack of attention to *positioning* can often be a main cause of local dissonance associated with rural tourism development. In situations where two or more individuals, groups, and/or organizations have differing views on tourism development strategies, discord and friction increases as these entities compete for favorable *position* in the minds of other stakeholders. A better understanding of the influential role *positioning* can serve in rural tourism planning and development may help minimize the amount of the local dissonance and social disruption often linked to such development.

Methodology

Based on the fact that two local newspapers – the Lock Haven Express and the Renovo Record – frequently

published articles and editorials related to the PGC's management of the elk herd, the researchers chose to conduct a content analysis of both newspapers. Using a modified snowball approach within this content analysis, the investigators also found several other documents related specifically to the PGC's Elk Trap & Transfer Project. The main purpose of this investigation was to gather constructive information to document the process by which the PGC involved various stakeholders in the development and implementation of its Elk Trap and Transfer Project. More specially, the researchers searched for dates and locations of public meetings, workshops, seminars, etc., as well as evidence regarding who was invited and/or attended these venues. Documents were reviewed for pertinent information related to the following questions:

- What factors have contributed to the current public dissonance related to the PGC's Elk Trap & Transfer Project?
- Could this dissonance have been reduced or eliminated?
- Who are the key stakeholders of the PGC's Elk Trap & Transfer Project?
- What process did the PGC follow to implement its three-year Elk Trap & Transfer Project?
- How do the PGC's actions, related to this project, compare to the steps in Burr's (1996) Model for Rural Tourism Development?

This information was then utilized to construct a chronological timeline that included the date of the event, key contacts, purpose and outcomes of each meeting/event, and individuals and groups in attendance (see Figure 2 as example). It was anticipated that having developed such a timeline, the researchers could better identify key stakeholders in the Elk Trap and Transfer Project, as well as, better understand the comprehensiveness and inclusiveness of the planning process.

These stakeholders (individuals and groups) were then classified in accordance with categories contained within Burr's (1996) Model for Facilitating Rural Tourism Development in an attempt to correlate individuals and groups involved with the PGC's elk project and *types of stakeholders* identified in Burr's work. Finally, a minimal number of personal interviews with stakeholders were conducted in an attempt to verify the accuracy of the newspaper articles and editorials, as well as, the researchers' interpretations of these articles.

Findings

Over 200 documents and articles related to the PGC's Elk Trap and Transfer Project were reviewed, the vast majority of which were published between 1996 and 2000. The following individuals and groups were identified from these documents, and labeled as "stakeholders" in the PGC's Elk Trap and Transfer Project based on the fact that they either attended or sent representatives to meetings, contributed articles, and/or were invitees to specific events related to the project. These "stakeholders" have been classified into the following categories of stakeholders found in Burr's (1996) model for rural tourism planning.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE FOR THE PENNSYLVANIA GAME COMMISSION'S ELK TRAP & TRANSFER PROGRAM			
<i>Date</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Groups</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<u>1976</u>	Webpage	PGC Dept. of Environmental Resources' Bureau of Forestry (BOF)	Developed an elk policy directing the agency to improve elk range in Elk & Cameron Counties
<u>1982</u>	Webpage	PGC BOF Local farmers Sportsmen	Elk committee (sounding board – not a regulatory board)
<u>1990</u>	Webpage	Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) PGC	Donation of \$38,000 to purchase State Games Land 311 – 1,600 acres at Winslow Hill, Elk County for elk habitat
<u>1996</u> Sept.	Newsbrief	PGC	Developed their Elk Management Plan – 90 elk over a three-year period to be trapped and transferred to Clinton County Elk Field Tour to Benezette
Oct. 3	PGC memo	PGC County Commissioners Legislators	
<u>1997</u> Sept. 19	Express	Consolidated Natural Gas Corp (CNG)	Sponsored luncheon at Sportsman Restaurant, Renovo for stakeholders Public meeting announced for St. Marys, PA to discuss the Elk Management Plan and the feasibility of establishing an Elk Hunt. Also identified RMEF, Pennsylvania State University (PSU), Frostburg State University, and Purdue University as partners in the elk program.
Nov. 6	Express	PGC DCNR BOF	
<u>1998</u> Oct. 10	Express	Residents – Kettle Creek Valley	Petition of 50 residents opposed to a second release of elk in their backyards. Sponsored meeting in Cross Fork (Chapman Township) of 50 residents' presentation of petition of 79 people in favor of Trap & Transfer Program.
Oct. 21	Express	Clinton County Economic Partnership	

Figure 2. Elk Trap & Transfer Project Timeline

The findings also indicated that at least 33 meetings/events were held related to the PGC's management of the elk herd, the majority of which focused specially on its Elk Trap and Transfer Project. While many of these meetings were organized to increase the public's awareness of the PGC's on-going efforts to manage the elk, sessions also involved an assortment of public and private forums intended to: promote events, share research findings, planning future initiatives, manage conflict, and to gather public input.

The content analysis revealed that there was a substantial amount of local dissonance evolving from the PGC's Elk Trap and Transfer Project. This dissonance stemmed from competing values, those supporting the PGC's expansion of the elk range into Clinton County and those local farmers and landowners opposed to such efforts. Those landowners arguing against the project viewed the PGC's efforts to be in competition with their individual property rights as landowners. The PGC, on the other hand, described its efforts as beneficial to the general public, local communities, and in the best interest of the elk herd.

Conclusions & Implications

The implementation of the PGC's Elk Trap and Transfer Project appears to have acted as a catalyst to the unveiling of conflicting values within some local communities in central Pennsylvania. A comparison of the findings of this investigation with both the process, and the stakeholder groups, within Burr's (1996) conceptual model for rural tourism development reveals genuine similarities. The most obvious difference is that while the PGC appears to have integrated the vast majority of Burr's stakeholders in the **implementation** of this project, it failed to include a significant group of local residents and citizens from the initial **planning** of the project. It is easily discernible from newspaper articles that this project has illuminated a local dissonance involving the PGC's elk trap and transfer project. Although some local dissonance is inherent to the development of rural tourism in an environment of disparate values, evidence in this case study suggests that the PGC developed and implemented an elk management strategy that incited a significant amount of public controversy, a consequence of the clashing of stakeholders' competing values.

Governmental Agencies & Groups

PA Game Commission (PGC)
PA Dept. of Forests & Water
Dept. of Env. Resources – Bureau of Forests (BOF)
Dept. of Conservation & Natural Resources (DCNR)
U.S. Forest Service
Cameron County Soil & Water Conservation District
Northcentral PA Reg. Planning & Development Comm.
PA Economic Development District
Clinton County Farm Bureau
PA Farm Bureau
PennDot

Universities

Pennsylvania State University
Frostburg State University
Purdue University
Indiana Univ. of Pennsylvania

Elected Officials

State Legislators
Clinton County Commissioners
Game & Fish Commission of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives
Pennsylvania General Assembly

Additional Individuals or Groups of Individuals

Property Owners
Residents
Farmers
Hunters

Special Interest Groups

PA Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs
PA Chap. of the Nat. Wild Turkey Fed. (NWTF)
Elk County Federation of Sportsmen Club
Western Clinton County Sportsmen's Association
Elk Hunt Advisory Committee
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF)
PA Wildlife Habitat Unlimited (PAWHU)
Lehigh Valley Chapter of the Safari Club International
Northcentral PA Conservancy

Citizen Groups

Benezette Homeowners Group
Citizens Against the Exploitation of Private Prop. Rights
Clinton County Elk Support Group
Sproul Forest Chapter of RMEF

Internal & External Planners and Developers

Northcentral PA Economic Development Corporation
Clinton County Economic Partnership
State Park Planners
Town and County Planners
Forest Planners
Tourism Industry Representatives

Corporations

P & N Coal Company
Consolidated Natural Gas Corporation (CNG)

The PGC appears to have been facing the conundrum of balancing the greater good and will of society with individuals' rights. An expanding elk herd would lead to elk hunts and increased elk viewing tourism, both of which seem to be in the general public's best interest. On the other hand, a larger herd needs more space, a space like that in northcentral Pennsylvania, one with few residents and farmers. The decision was made that the PGC develop and implement an elk trap and transfer project intended to expand the existing elk range and at the same time provided more tourism opportunities. A direct consequence of initiating this strategy was the generation of local dissonance between those supporting the elk project and those opposed to it. The most vocal detractors of the PGC, and most adamantly opposed to the elk relocation project were local landowners and farmers who contended that the PGC was impinging on their individual rights by transferring the elk near their properties. Some of these disenfranchised stakeholders also contended that they were being routinely excluded from access to the media, and constrained from publicly sharing their viewpoints. Finally, there is evidence that suggests that the PGC's implementation of this elk project may have negatively impacted its *position* in the public's mind.

While there may not have been a way to avoid this "public" conflict, its intensity and the negative publicity associated with it, may have been minimized had Seeking's (1980) warning that, "...all major policy proposals should be thoroughly ventilated in public [deliberately subjected to public scrutiny and debate] before becoming officially adopted as policy" (in Murphy, 1985, p. 173) been observed. This type of a proactive approach to tourism development affords stakeholders with divergent values constructive opportunities to explore differences in a collaborative process rather than simply fighting over differences in the media (Eyre & Jamal, 1998). Initial planning stages should have been designed to openly address the concerns of those who now see themselves as having been *marginalized* by the process. Although extremely difficult to quantify, it seems only logical that the PGC's position in some people's minds has worsened and that it may now need to allocate significant additional time and energy to *reposition* itself in the public arena as direct result of implementing its Elk Trap and Transfer Project the way it did.

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