

Locals In The Dark: Why Are People Living Near National Parks Unaware Of Park Research?

Ryan Brook, Post Doc, University of Calgary

A wide range of research occurs within national parks in Canada and the people living nearby are often interested in and affected by the studies that are conducted. In this presentation, I reflect on my experiences over the last eleven years working with local people living near Wapusk and Riding Mountain National Parks in Manitoba in an attempt to understand why most of them have little or no understanding of the science that is being done in their own backyard. For some it is simply because they make no effort to be informed. Events that are scheduled to communicate science are not always well attended, but this is only part of the answer. Interviews with 57 non-participants indicates that the most common reasons for not attending are: (1) the research is not relevant to their interests and needs; (2) lacks meaningful consultation; (3) frustration with park management; (3) not enough time available; (4) research ignores or conflicts with local knowledge; and (5) it is boring or incomprehensible. Clearly there is a shared responsibility among researchers, local people and park staff to facilitate novel approaches to communicating science that generate interest and provide opportunities for discussion, collaboration, and inclusion of local knowledge.