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Proposal of planning and management of rafting in the Hua Hum river in Lanin National
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Proposal of planning and management of rafting in the Hua Hum river in Lanin

National Park, Argentina

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Images:

Rafting



Fisherman in the Hua Hum River



Executive summary

This paper consists in a comprehensive proposal for planning and management of rafting activity in the river Hua Hum. Latter is part of a developed research project by the Group of Planning and Tourism Management¹ in Saint Martin de los Andes and the National Park Lanín. One of its objectives was to analyze problems and to establish proposals for management of the tourist and recreational activities developed in the

Areas Hua Hum and Queñi, Cuenca Lácar, National Park Lanín, Province of the Neuquen, Argentina.

Hillock, Adriana, Roberto Boullón and others (2001) "Environmental Management of Tourist Centers of Mountain" Secretariat of Research. School of Tourism. National University of the Comahue. 275 pp.

The objectives of the research group has been centered on all those analysis dimensions related to the practices of community environmental management of this mountain center of Northern Patagonia, which bases its marketing strategy by presenting it as an "ecological town." The challenge has consisted in deepening the network of relations and its area of influence to work on those aspects that make possible for this community to lead satisfactorily the evolution of its growth, given by the greatest demand, identifying the priorities both of commercial and social nature of its residents, protecting the sense of local ownership of the people and handling the impacts derived from the tourism.

The proposal for this activity serves not only for the normative and legal frames on which it is enclosed, but also in the situation of current public use of the area and the conflicts derived from it.

For the preparation of these proposals, we considered observations performed in the field, the opinion of the principal social actors involved, as well as the information obtained through the collection of similar cases related to the management of the rafting activity in countries that have shown larger practical experience, and specifically, in a case study from the river Maligne, in the Jasper National Park, Canada.

Background

The micro-watershed Hua Hum is located among the 40° 01' and 40° 07' of Southern Latitude and 71° 38' and 71° 44' of West Longitude, in the Lanín National Park, Province of Neuquen. It has a surface of 3550 Hectares. It owes its denomination to the principal watercourse present in it, the Hua Hum River.

This river originates from Lake Nonthué and drains into the Pacific Ocean, due to post-glacial events that generated changes in the drainage. The Hua Hum River barely runs 2.7 Kilometers in Argentine territory.

The situation of operation and regulation of the rafting activity in Hua Hum River is perhaps an indicator of the type of conflict derived from deficiencies in the operation of public environmental management tools of touristic attractions in National Parks of the Argentinean Patagonia. Traditionally, the river was operated by a "pool" of three Companies, all located in the city of Saint Martin de los Andes, considered "virtual discoverers" of rafting activities in this river.

On the other hand, the river is habitat of the the Duck of Torrents (*Merganetta armata*), declared of special value for conservation, due to its rarity and distribution restricted to watercourses of the Andes. Presently, research on the effects of rafting is developed on the duck of the torrents.

In view of this, the Management of the Lanín National Park has decided to apply restrictive measures on rafting, by means of granting exclusively annual permissions, generating delays in the beginning of the season and in the granting of permissions.

This has originated a process of controversies between the public management of resources and the private operators, which has slowed down the creation of agreements for an integrated and shared management of resources.

Description of the case study

The proposal is structured in four successive stages, meeting the need for having final empirical results of the study:

a) STAGE ZERO:

Stage ZERO and stage ONE would be developed simultaneously. In stage ZERO, while the actual operational conditions of the rafting activity in river Hua Hum, would work in an agreement among the private operators and the Association of National Parks, in order to agree on precautionary operational ways which would serve to principles of ecological integrity, safety of the visitors and of better tourist service with regards to the responsibilities of the operators and with regard to the National Park, a better predisposition to administer the resource, avoiding the bureaucratization of the decisions and creating a space for agreements of transitory character, but legalized to local scale by mechanisms to define, as could be codes of behavior.

b) STAGE ONE:

It consists in continuing management of the operations of the river Hua Hum in the current conditions, looking for empirical information concerning the impact of rafting activity on the Duck of the Torrents, for which it is necessary to expect the definitive results of the study on the same. (2-3 years). This is based on the need for having valid information concerning the impact that this activity can generate on this species, before making any decision related to the management of the rafting that means contradicting these empirical results. Is worth clarifying that this proposal is based on the analysis of an analogous case in the river Maligne, Canada?

In this case, Parks Canada establishes a series of issues related to the type of information required to constitute the basis of decisions appropriate for the adoption of valid management options, which are listed below:

1. Why is the population of ducks of the torrents considered relevant in the area Hua Hum?
2. Which is the state of conservation of the duck of the torrents?
3. Why is it considered that the duck of the torrents is a sensitive species?
4. Why is it considered that the river Hua Hum is a critical habitat?
5. How susceptible are they the ducks of the torrents to disturbances generated by the rafting?

Accordingly, until having this empirical information, it is suggested to continue over a period from 2 to 3 years, with the current system of annual permissions, to the same

companies that are currently operating, in the same conditions in that these contracts have been fulfilled to date.

c) SECOND STAGE:

Once the data collected in stage ONE is available, options for location and administrative regulation of the activity will be proposed and considered. This phase will take 3 years, with annual revisions and a complete final review at the end of this second operation period. The information generated by the study on the duck of the torrents will make it possible to get introduced into the second stage of this proposal, forming the empirical support for:

1. Decide options for spatial and temporary location of the activity
2. Decide the administrative procedures to be implemented for regulation of the activities.
3. Options of spatial and temporary location of the activity A series of alternatives for spatial and temporary location were proposed:

Option 1: Restrict the use

In the case of the river Maligne, this measure of restriction would be adopted in order to protect population of harlequin ducks during the period of arrival and pairing. At any rate, this measure does not exempt from future impact on the breedings, in the advanced season. The closing period should adjusted to the time of pairing and breeding of the duck of the torrents in river Hua Hum.

Option 2: Permit rafting during the nesting period

It would permit the boat transit during the period of nesting, when it is presumed that the ducks are protected, closing or prohibiting the use during the rest of the year. In the case of the river Maligne, means granting the use during only the first three weeks of July. This period of three weeks coincides with the period of time in which the females remain in their nests and are accordingly less susceptible to the impact generated by the activity. This option provides the greatest protection to the species, while it grants the recreational use when it is considered that its potential impact will be minimum. Nevertheless, it restricts largely the period of commercial operation of this activity.

Option 3: Allow operations in the first months of the season

In this case, it would mean permitting activity from the beginning of the spring up to 31 January, prohibiting rafting from 1 February until the end of the winter, in order to make it possible for the baby ducks to use the river as a corridor.

It is important to point out, as element of negotiation with the operators of the activity, that in this case the number of operational days would be the same, what would change would be the time period of the season of rafting, that would start and end earlier.

Option 4: Total close of the river. Prohibition of the activity

This would be the most radical option, not permitting transit of boats in the entire year. The presented management options should be analyzed in light of the results of the study of the impact on the duck of the torrents and in relation to the information on the characteristics of this species, in order to be able to adapt these management experiences to the reality of river Hua Hum.

Nevertheless, it is believed that these options represent a progress toward suggesting, evaluating, and implementing planning alternatives in critical situations.

2. Administrative modality to implement regulation of the activity finally, the study on the duck of the torrents should also contribute light so that the Managers of the Park can decide that administrative modality should be implemented for the regulation of this activity. The options are:

- Annual permissions
- Leaves
- Concession.

From this viewpoint, it is suggested, once decided the more timely option, to establish concessions over an initial period non-longer than 3 years, with annual revisions as audits on compliance with the contract and definitive triannual revisions, prior to the new appeal to bidding. Based on the second bidding, it is proposed that the concession for the operation of the river has duration of 5 years.

Although it is matter of decision characteristic of the Intendancy of the park, it is suggested to take into account for the granting of the concession the following:

- The previous experience of the applicants in the reference river
- The previous experience of the applicants in other areas of practice of the activity
- The certification of ability of the personnel in contact with the tourists (guidelines, employees)
- The equipment provision, installations and infrastructure of the applicants

In case of presentation for renewal or new concession, the effective fulfillment of the conditions agreed upon in the concession contract (works, maintenance, environmental education, payment of fees).

d) STAGE THREE:

It will start once they conclude these three years, performing the corresponding tri-annual revisions, and the administrative situation of the operation of the rafting is regularized. Once decided on the administrative modality, this third stage consists of the succession of concessions of the activity, in terms of 5 years. The latter are justified by the need of the operator to ensure the reimbursement of the investments done, that will be geared in improvements and new investments.

As it was explicitly indicated, it is suggested to implement annual evaluations, although based on the knowledge of the operation daily of the concessionaries.

The noncompliance of the agreed upon condition, should cause preparations, sanctions and even the annulment of the concession. The effective fulfillment should

be stated, so that in case the former concessionaires are presented in light of a new appeal for concession, this background is taken into account.
In all cases, these clauses should be expressly set in the concession contract.

ENDNOTES

1. Parks Canada (1998) Options Analysis for the mid Maligne River in Jasper National Park"

Notes to readers

This paper is a case study on Mountain Tourism, and the Conservation of Biological and Cultural Diversity. A Mountain Forum e-consultation for the UNEP / Bishkek Global Mountain Summit. 23-28April 2002.

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