

Farmer attitudes towards conservation in Jigme Singye Wangchuck National Park, Bhutan

Sonam Wangyel Wang - Jigme Singye Wangchuck National Park, Department of Forest, Ministry of Agriculture, Head Office, Tshangkha, Trongsa Bhutan sww22@cornell.edu

James P. Lassoie - Department of Natural Resources, Cornell University, Ithaca NY 14853 USA

Paul D. Curtis - Department of Natural Resources, Cornell University, Ithaca NY 14853 USA

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Abstract

The attitudes and feelings of people concerning conservation policies and wildlife conflicts affect their behaviour, and understanding this is important in involving local people in conservation planning and decision-making processes. This paper examines these important issues in Jigme Singye Wangchuck National Park, located in central Bhutan. A survey of 274 house-holds was carried out to assess farmers' perceptions of the influence of Park management policies and protection regimes on traditional resource uses, and their attitudes towards the Park and conservation policies set forth in the Forest and Nature Conservation Act of 1995, integrated conservation development programmes (ICDPs) and wildlife conservation, and determine how demographic and socioeconomic variables influence these attitudes. Among local farmers, 52.2% disliked the Park and the Conservation Act, and 67.5% supported exterminating problem wildlife. Negative attitudes were linked to loss of resource use rights, livestock depredation and crop damage, lack of compensation strategies and exclusion of farmers from the Park's planning processes. However, 76.3% of the respondents appreciated the Park's development programmes, the positive attitudes associated with an expectation that significant economic benefits would be available from ICDPs sponsored by the Park. Empowerment of local communities associated with monetary benefits from non-timber forest products and compensation for loss of crops and livestock were emphasized by more than 70% of the respondents. These attitudes were related to age and literacy of the respondents, number of livestock owned and size of land holdings. Though important to the future of Bhutan's parks, study results also have wider applicability to conservation professionals throughout the developing world for resolving human-land use conflicts and involving local farmers in the protection of nature.

Key Words: Bhutan; conservation policy; farmer attitudes; Jigme Singye Wangchuck National Park; park management; wildlife conservation.