Perspective

A newsletter for widening your point of view

2001

Issue 3

Richard Bach, in his book *Illusions*, states a handy aphorism: **Perspective – use it or lose it**. This periodical shares amongst recreation and tourism management professionals, such as yourself, several tools and concepts which will help exercise your perspective. This issue considers a couple of resource management aphorisms and looks at my favourite risk management theory – a tidy link between Garrett Hardin's assertion that solutions to the world's resource problems are social rather than technical (managing people is more important than managing things) and Gerald Wilde's suggestion that managing risk is more about addressing behaviour than it is about making safer toys.

Perspective is distributed by **Rob Greenaway & Associates** as a service to the recreation and tourism industries.

The Tragedy of the Commons

I get the feeling that most of us think the *Tragedy of the Commons* is a concept authored in the 17th century. In reality, it was born in ecologist Garrett Hardin's 1968 thesis of the same name[1], although he based his assertions on those of earlier writers who predicted that uncontrolled population growth would destroy the ecosystems which support us in the manner to which we have become accustomed.

Hardin argued that common resources would be exploited – and ultimately destroyed – by anyone who could assert their rights to do so. He painted a bleak picture, and asserted that the solutions were social rather than technical (we have to control people rather than nature). He called for privatisation of resource ownership or other forms of exclusion. His rallying cry was for rigorous and even coercive regulation of population growth.

Hardin used the example of herders sharing village lands to graze cattle. As growth in capital allowed, a herder would choose to add additional privately owned cattle to graze the community's grass, increasing private profit. Ultimately the level of grazing would not be sustainable and all users of the communal asset would suffer.

While Hardin believed that ruin was inevitable without population control, recent works have identified systems and institutions that, in some cases, use selected resources sustainably, at least on local scales. The traditional theory regarding resource users as selfish consumers is being replaced by the recognition that users can communicate and co-operate when it is in their interest to do so, when the resources are at their disposal and when the social and political context permits it. Burger and Gochfield[2], for example, concluded that four properties must exist for co-operative management to be feasible:

- The resources have not been depleted beyond hope of recovery,
- There are reliable indicators of resource condition,
- Trends in resource quality and quantity are sufficiently predictable,
- The distribution of the resource is sufficiently localised to be studied and controlled by one political entity.

[1] Hardin, G. (1968) *The Tragedy of the Commons*, Science, 13-December, 1, pp243-48.
[2] Burger, J. Gochfeld, M. (1998) *The Tragedy of the Commons 30 years later*, Environment, December, Vol. 40 Issue 10, pp4-16.

Last year I had the chance to talk with a number of commercial fishers in Southland and discovered that Hardin need not have been quite so globally pessimistic. Burger and Gochfield's four properties are largely being met in the management of some of New Zealand's fish quota: The marine resource is not completely depleted; there are many indicators; fish are reasonably predictable; and the New Zealand fisheries area is defined and can be controlled. The current resource allocation framework uses tradable quota for commercial fishers, daily limits for recreational fishers for many species, minimum sizes, different net sizes and times suitable for each coastal fishing area, and monitoring and evaluation.

In Southland, the Fiordland lobster industry has voluntarily chosen to reduce its annual quota to increase future yield (by increasing the base breeding population). Since quota are owned as commercial assets, and their value is based on market rates, quota holders can increase their annual income from increased resource yield as well as the capital value of their quota. As a result, they are forced to adopt a long-term view of resource management and sustainability.

The trick, I believe, is individual understanding of the long-term benefits of looking after our resources. To do that, we each must have a stake in those long-term benefits. ❖

The Sucker Principle

I can't find a reference to this principle, but it has lodged in my memory from somewhere.

The Sucker Principle gives Hardin's analogy extra weight. The sucker in Hardin's conceptual village is the herder who recognises the declining quality of the commons and independently chooses to remove a beast from the field. The next week the sucker awakes to a reduced income, and finds that another herder has added more cattle. The sucker throws up their hands in disgust and brings back their own additional beast. The sucker is the opposite of the economist's 'free rider'.

Without equal regulation, the sucker is wise but is often depressed. The principle suggests that for change to occur – or for the sucker to adhere to their decision – the sucker needs to be rewarded by recognition or a more tangible benefit. Or the sucker needs to be part of a bigger movement with more suckers following suit.

Suckers always use honesty boxes, never litter, don't cut corners on tracks, burn dry firewood, use hedge clippers and push mowers to

reduce urban noise pollution, spay their pets, tune their cars and know who they are voting for in local body elections. We need more of them. ❖

Risk Homeostasis

This hypothesis really appeals to me, although it does not have universal support. It is encapsulated in the following poem:

Give me a ladder that is twice as stable,
And I will climb it twice as high;
But give me a cause for caution,
And I'll be twice as shy.

Risk Homeostasis is the brainchild of Gerald Wilde, and he writes about it at length in his book, *Target Risk*[3]. He believes that although people alter their behaviour in response to the implementation of health and safety measures, the riskiness of the way they behave will not change unless those measures are capable of motivating people to alter the amount of risk they are willing to expose themselves to. That is, if you want to reduce accidents, manage the person, not just the toys and tools they use.

Wilde uses many examples to support his hypothesis. One is the inability of flood control developments in the USA to reduce the nation's number of flood victims. Improved impoundment and levee construction has made many areas less prone to flooding, but as a consequence more people have settled on fertile plains, since a technical solution has made them appear safe. Now, although the floods are fewer, when they do happen, the loss of property and life remains high.

A more telling example is the introduction of anti-lock brake systems (ABS braking to us) in a fleet of taxicabs in Munich. A thorough study assessed the number of accidents experienced by drivers of ABS and non-ABS fitted vehicles. ABS drivers (who were aware of the increased 'safeness' of their cars) drove more quickly, accelerated and decelerated more rapidly and had more accidents than the relatively unsafe taxis. The severity of accidents remained the same for both types of cars. As a result the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) reported that:

'Behavioural adaptations of road users which may occur following the introduction of safety measures in the transport system are of particular concern to road authorities, regulatory bodies and motor vehicle manufacturers, particularly in the cases where such adaptations may decrease the expected safety benefit'.

Wilde assumes that each of us adopts – largely unconsciously – a level of risk that we are happy to expose ourselves to. We adopt various activities – like mountain biking – to keep our level of risk exposure at a comfortable level. If we make any of those activities safer (by closing risky launch sites for paragliders, wearing helmets on mountain bikes, or by developing ABS brakes), we are going to change our behaviour to maintain the same thrill level. Mountain bikers take up night riding, for example.

Risk homeostasis prophesises that we won't reduce accident rates by great amounts unless we are given, 'a cause for caution'. Having children is one. Wilde believes that rewarding people for 'accident free performance' is another (by lowering their insurance premiums, for example).

Of course, making the gaps in cot frames smaller than a baby's head remains a very sensible thing to do. ❖

[3] Wilde, G.J.S. (1994) *Target Risk*. PDE Publications.
See: http://pavlov.psyc.queensu.ca/target/

For Your Interest

Some years are good. Others are great. I'm happy to say 2000 was great - primarily because of the birth of our daughter Kate. The realities of long-term planning for communities and open space suddenly seem more important.

Projects over the past twelve months have included an interesting mix. Asset management is a continuing theme. A very interesting exercise has been developing a regional recreation and sport facilities plan for the Tasman District and Nelson City Councils, with David Allan of Strategic Leisure. The exciting part of the project for me was developing a set of tools to allow both Councils to operate from a common understanding when discussing joint support for developments with regional benefits. Other very enjoyable projects have included: a recreation survey of the Hurunui River for Environment Canterbury; helping Manukau City Council develop its parks strategy; assisting Whakatane District Council with its reserve contribution policy and Parks and Reserves Asset Management Plan (AMP); working with Montgomery Watson on Waimakariri District Council's Community Services AMP and its Properties AMP; editing Mary Hobb's book *Kiwi Tucker for the soul* (which made the top ten in NZ non-fiction book sales); developing a recreation vision for the Styx River in Christchurch for the Christchurch City Council; and ongoing concession application work for tourism operators.

I have also taken advantage of our photo-library and have had a series of postcards printed. A corporate version should be enclosed (a wee tip – cut the logo off to create a standard postcard). This year appears to be equally busy, especially with the 2001 NZRA national conference in Christchurch in September. See you there!

GLOBAL LEISURE GROUP

A very important development has been the formation of the Global Leisure Group, a consortium of recreation planners based in New Zealand and Australia. The group's focus is on providing 'leading edge' recreation consultancy services in the Pacific. The four members of GLG are:

- **Civic Solutions**, Wellington, New Zealand. Principal: Gareth Moore-Jones
- **Garry Henshall and Associates**, Victoria, Australia. Principal: Garry Henshall
- **Rob Greenaway & Associates**, Christchurch, New Zealand. Principal: Rob Greenaway
- **Strategic Leisure (NZ) Ltd**, Nelson, New Zealand. Principal: David Allan

GLG's strength is based on a co-operative approach to delivering robust research, planning and management solutions. This includes:

- Providing quality community consultation techniques and outcomes,
- Delivering pragmatic asset management and facility assessment solutions, and
- Providing a resource for information on 'Best Value' planning and management environments.

The core focus of the team is on recreation planning and management. This includes research, planning and management of open space, sport, facilities, community development initiatives, asset management, feasibility assessments and conservation resources. You'll be hearing from us shortly.