

REMARKS AT WWF ANNUAL CONFERENCE

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Ecoregion Conservation around the World

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INTRODUCTION

Thank you, Mr. Secretary. I am truly honored to be here today.

These have been extraordinary presentations. They show....

- The remarkable reach of WWF's activities and
- The boldness of its ecoregional vision.

These are projects that have the potential to make lasting progress on 'our' extraordinary mission to save the planet.

That's why I came here today.

- A year ago, Jim Leape, Kathryn Fuller, and Garo Batmanian asked me for my ideas on managing the Amazon Region Protected Area – ARPA - program to set aside 10% of the Brazilian Amazon in strictly protected areas.
- Although I was a novice in the Amazon I have lots of experience running big, expensive, complex and risky projects in the business world.
- So, I did what we always do on Wall Street – we call it 'due diligence.' I read stacks of reports, made a few phone calls, and *quickly saw that* ARPA is one of the most significant projects in the conservation community today.

In fact, I got very excited about this project. If we can actually make it work, it will make a real difference in the health of the planet we leave behind -- to our grandchildren and to their grandchildren. And it soon became clear to me that, in WWF's plans, it was one of many such opportunities – including those discussed here.

ECOREGIONAL PROJECT CHALLENGES

I don't need to tell you that eco-regional strategies are (by their nature) huge, complicated, and difficult to pull off.

They present many challenges, including....

- Securing the political will
- Making sure that the project is sound scientifically, especially given the political realities and the needs of people living in the region.
- Raising the necessary funding – for startup and sustainability over time
- And, finally, there are the challenges of execution - successful delivery on commitments

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

It is on the last of these – what most of us call project management – that I'd like to say a few words because it is on this point in particular I believe we can do even better than we have in the past....

Definition

Let me start by defining exactly what I am talking about.

By project I mean something that has

- a beginning and an end, and
- a number of interdependent elements that must be implemented simultaneously for the whole machine to work

In an ecoregional strategy this might typically be setting up a protected area or a corridor, but it might also be something larger, at the regional level.

By project management, I mean the organizational machinery to assure delivery of promised results.

Specialized project management organizations are used to:

- build major facilities like power plants, highways and stadiums

- design and deliver airplane prototypes, and
- plan, code, and install complex computer systems.

In the business world excellent project management is viewed as a particular and difficult management challenge.

For example, at Goldman Sachs, which is dominated by a tremendous flow of trading deals, we struggle constantly with the management of large systems projects that will make that flow more efficient.

Designing

Here is what I see as the most important elements for the design of a successful project management structure:

First – Setting a project’s scope and thus deciding what activities will get the focused discipline and resources of project management.

Second - rigorous project planning, with

- specifically defined phases
- results – deliverables - by phase
- detailed financial planning

Third - risk analysis. This means a very clear understanding of what can go wrong, what we will do to prevent that from happening, and what we will do if it does.

Fourth - definition of the role of project manager and the project management organization, and assignment of adequate decision-making authority to him or her.

- This is the most single important dimension.
- it is not a flat task force of peers without a clear decision-making process
- It is a person or small group that can make operational decisions about what will happen next and how it will get done.

Fifth - the selection of the project manager – this is an extremely demanding role – it requires someone who has adequate substantive knowledge of the topic, and thrives on bringing control to chaotic situations.

One colleague observed to me that project management is similar to wrestling with an octopus – its arms outnumber your hands and legs – so 3 or 4 of its legs are out of control at any time, and every time you grab one of those you have to let go of one you've got.

Sixth – mechanisms for financial control, to assure that the money goes only to the right places.

Seventh – tracking mechanisms to measure how the project is doing and to keep the interested parties informed.

Eighth - communications processes – informal and formal - that assure that the project management team has the information necessary to make sound decisions and for reporting to donors and funding agencies.

Ninth - oversight mechanisms and ways to resolve issues that are beyond the authority of the project manager.

- Examples might include changes in scope, deadlines, or funding.

Tenth, and finally – a shared culture of personal accountability that deeply motivates individuals to be continuously proactive and to keep their focus on the practical results planned for the project.

Getting agreement

I don't need to tell you that the trickiest part of all this is getting each organization with an interest in the results to give up significant day-to-day control to the project manager, and take on a supervisory rather than an operational role.

In the private sector this is often done through special organizational structures, such as a joint venture, or a delegation of operational authority to one of the interested parties.

It is most ideally done at the very beginning of a new project.

Where there are established power structures and relationships among the involved government organizations, NGO's, and funding agencies, changes cannot happen quickly. But even there a clear tracking of whether things are working, a clear vision for how the machinery could be modified for greater success, and persistence in pursuing that vision might over time make a big difference.

CLOSE

In closing, I know that much of what I have covered is not new to you in this room. A lot of it might be called institutional arrangements of partnership-building. What I am offering as new is a clarity of vision on the mechanics of ecoregional conservation and the same persistence in pursuing that vision that we dedicate to the conservation planning. There are vast areas to be worked out – a start was made at a workshop in Washington last week.

If we bring our focus on this machinery to the same level of vision and commitment which we bring to our conservation planning, we can attain the results that we need out of our ecoregional strategies. This will, I believe, allow us to use our political and financial resources more efficiently and to be better positioned to accrue more.

I hope very much that we can take up this topic as we take on bigger and more ambitious projects that these ecoregional strategies imply.

Thank you.