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Preface

Certain questions have always puzzled me. Why doesn’t science work to answer conservation policy questions in a systematic, reliable, and holistic way? Why isn’t science easily translated into science-based policy? Why don’t scientists listen to policymakers’ questions about evaluation, assessment, and feasibility estimates and better advance the scientific knowledge base needed to answer policy questions?

I pursued a conservation social science PhD under Barbara Knuth at Cornell University in order to position myself to answer these questions through the process and products of doctoral research. My dissertation explored the human dimensions of black bear management. In many ways the context was ubiquitous to human–wildlife conflict around the world. Humans and black bear populations were increasingly overlapping and coming into contact with each other. When a black bear attacked an infant who later died from her injuries, there was widespread agreement among stakeholders that social science, along with ecology, was needed for decision-making. My research explored how to foster voluntary behavior change and compliance with rules among humans so as to reduce human–black bear conflict. I will never forget the last question I received during my dissertation defense. Lou Berchelli, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation bear biologist, asked me why the behavior change program I designed, implemented, and evaluated did not generate intended outcomes and what I would change if I could do it all over again. My answer was automatic: I would focus more on non-compliance and enforcement. It was at that moment that I started to think deeply about why a marriage between conservation and criminology would be a good idea and what it might look like. I also considered what such an interdisciplinary perspective might bring to the conservation policy arena.

Fast forward to today, and human-wildlife conflicts are globally distributed and pose risks to people and wildlife. There is agreement that a scientific understanding of human behavior is critical for effective environmental policy and to improve humans’ ability to predict and adapt to environmental change emerging as a cause and/or consequence of natural resource declines. The volume that follows is the product of many hours of hard work by the contributors and myself to produce new and innovative boundary science—that is, science that connects the knowledge base to practice associated with the risks from natural resource declines. Chapters reflect agreement that scientists and policymakers can work together and better address the issue of extra-legal exploitation of natural
resources. One way this can occur is by increasing interdisciplinary collaborations among and between sectors. Policymakers can delineate for scientists the practical gaps in knowledge needed to inform development or implementation of policy, context specificity, and evaluation. Scientists can work to present their results in ways that help policymakers scale implications. Along with broadening opportunities for interdisciplinary cooperation, it is worthwhile to provide ample space for disciplinary specialists to contribute when needed.

A second parallel opportunity for scientists and policymakers to pursue is engaging the public. Both may engage publics to assist in surveillance and monitoring of natural resource exploitation. Considering publics as informants rather than suspects in natural resource exploitation can help build datasets to help study change over time, enhance capacity of civil society regarding natural resource management, and broaden the network of defenders against extra-legal exploitation. In practice, public participation is challenging but worth pursuing because broadening the quality of the intelligence base can help policy-makers craft policy that is as effective, efficient, and feasible as possible.

I’m indebted to the authors for their time and perspective. I believe there is a valid sense of urgency for us to collaborate and address the negative effects of natural resource declines, but I also have a sense of optimism about what can be resolved. It is my hope that this volume contributes to solutions both on the ground, in the policy arena, and for science diplomacy.

_Meredith L. Gore_
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