Wildlife-tourism, local communities and tiger conservation: A village-level study in Corbett Tiger Reserve, India

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Abstract

Tourism is often considered a valuable aide for management of protected areas: it can provide employment to local communities and also create opportunities for engagement. Yet, tourism can create challenges for socio-ecological systems, by significantly impacting key components. There is need for more evidence to establish the utility of tourism for conservation policy and management. Through this paper, we present the results of research conducted in a village on the south-eastern boundary of Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR) which has experienced rapid and dramatic social-ecological change as a result of tiger tourism. We aimed to a) identify the change in land cover because of growth of tourism, b) better understand the impacts of tourism on village structure, solidarity and institutions and c) consider the implications of this for tiger conservation management and policy. Our results indicate that tourism had significantly affected the ecology of the landscape, and seriously impacted the ecological corridor. While tourism established linkages between the village society and the global economy, it negatively impacted the local community. It also created a new village entity, tourist resorts, which were neither an individual nor a village member, making dispute-resolution impossible under existing institutional structures. By creating significant ecological and social challenges, tourism had affected the resilience of the system. Based on our results, future policy and management strategies that focus on building social capital and strengthening local institutions will increase the adaptability and resilience of villages to tourism impacts and will likely reduce the significance of associated ecological impacts.

Keywords: Protected Areas, socio, ecological systems, tourism, tiger conservation, India, conservation policy and management, social capital, institutions, land, cover change

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