

Legends and Legacies

Sustainable Tourism in an Era of Turbulence

Stephen F. McCool

Stephen F. McCool is the section editor of Legends and Legacies and professor emeritus, Department of Society and Conservation, University of Montana, Steve.McCool@cfc.umt.edu

If we understand anything about sustainable recreation and tourism it is that networking, public engagement and a vision of the future are key components of a viable strategy. And yet, in a century that can be only characterized as turbulent, we need to ask if the key questions of the past 25 years of discussion, debate and implementation of sustainable tourism are still relevant and useful for situations in which we find ourselves. Is it enough to simply find the intersection of what is socially acceptable, financially viable and ecologically responsible? Is it effective to think about sustainable tourism as a small business strategy? When we think about sustainable tourism, how do we also think not just of the market for “small is beautiful” but also the supply side, the experiences people seek? And why is it we rarely ask what is it that tourism must sustain?

Are there not mental models of sustainable tourism that are more useful than those of the past? If anything, the notion of sustainable tourism in the current times of change, complexity, and uncertainty provides an opportunity to examine where we are headed, what vision(s) of sustainable tourism there might be, and how by diving deeper and using systems thinking we can advance the human condition. In this theme for the Legends and Legacies Section of JPRA we present some views of Sustainable Tourism and their relevancy to park and recreation managers that at the same time may be provocative but also useful.