

Excerpt From –

“Towards a New Management Plan for the Ruoergai Marshes Nature Reserves”

Stephan Fuller, 2001

Forward

Attempting to develop and implement a new management regime for a protected area is a complex business no matter where one is, whether in a developing or a developed country. Our environmental knowledge, and our understanding of cultures and peoples is often imperfect and we must deal with both formal political structures and often multi-layered informal systems of decision-making. This is particularly true in China and it is certainly the case in the Ruoergai marshes and the surrounding Qinghai-Tibetan plateau.

So it seems important as we move towards the development of a new management system for the Ruoergai Nature Reserves, and other protected areas that may emerge from the growing understanding of the potential benefits of ecotourism and nature conservation in western China, that we have some idea, some unifying principle that guides us in the work. We therefore propose that the achievement of a form of sustainable ecological integrity be acknowledged as the main theme in this work. We must also accept that both the ecosystem and socio-economic system are very complex and that we should not be daunted by this. We must accept that the people of the Ruoergai area are as much an integral part of the ecosystem as the flora, fauna and the grand sweep of the Tibetan landscape.

Developing the Ruoergai Nature Reserve complex should therefore mean developing a system that respects traditional culture and rights, and where there are problems, old or new, that we strive to mediate a relationship between humans and the environment, for the survival of both. On a more philosophical level: ensuring ecosystem integrity means that we all, government, villager or visitor, understand that the ecosystem has intrinsic value and that we must necessarily live in harmony with it.

For the Ruoergai marshes those of involved in this initiative must see the combination of technocratic and scientific work as inextricably linked to the broad political and local decision-making processes. For the local Tibetan herders, the ecosystem is home, and all the management planning and development work in the world will come to naught if the effort results in negative consequences for their home place.

Government cannot simply make an abstraction of the nature reserve idea, or achieve world class designations and it certainly cannot impose solutions. If the people of the Ruoergai marshes do not believe in the idea, it will never be achieved. Empowerment and involvement of local people – combined in the so-called co-management process – are crucial to success, as is the acceptance of responsibility for local governance. If the planning process in Ruoergai is undertaken as a truly sustainable development, then the participatory process proposed, and the high priority recommendations for resolution of several vexatious management issues must be respected at every turn in the path ahead.

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