Facilitating people-deer interaction: Ideas for the Monroe County and Bloomington Deer Task Force

Presentation to the City of Bloomington and Monroe County Joint Deer Task Force

February 17, 2011

This presentation is based on part of the outcomes of a research project titled Collaborative Frameworks in Land Management: A Case Study on Integrated Deer Management, funded by a UK research program (Rural Economy and Land Use – RELU) and based at the Macaulay Land Use Research Institute in Aberdeen, Scotland. More information about this project can be found online http://www.macaulay.ac.uk/RELU/

The theoretical overview outlined in this presentation is discussed in a research paper in preparation for printing in the upcoming issue of the journal Human Organization. The paper titled Wild Deer, Multivalence, and Institutional Adaptation: The 'Deer Management Group' in Britain is co-authored by Stefano Fiorini, Indiana University, Steve Yearley, University of Edinburgh, UK and Norman Dandy of Forest Research also in the UK. The paper is available upon request.

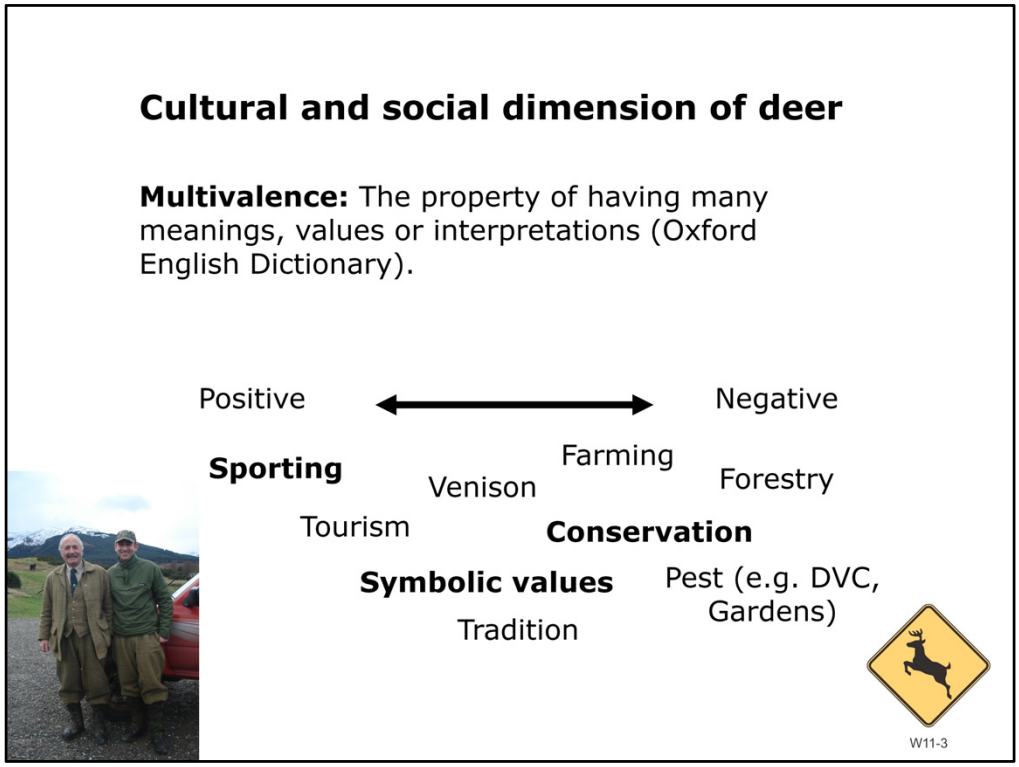
Presentation outline

- Cultural and social dimension of deer
  - The multivalence of deer
  - Adaptive management of natural resources
    - Institutional analysis
    - Bridging organizations
- Building adaptive co-management
- Including community: is a survey the ideal tool?
  - Risk of administering a survey
  - What is still needed
- A coordinated public engagement
- Meetings with the public
- Open discussion

“The relationships and interactions between humans and wild deer are many and varied, being affected by the uses that people make of deer and the value and meanings they attribute to this animal.” It can be argued that “this ‘multivalence’ has increasingly influenced the process of institutional adaptation of deer management in recent decades. Hence, institutions have had to move from regulating deer as a resource for food and hunting, to the incorporation of their impact upon agriculture and forestry, to account for the linkages this resource has to various economic activities and social, cultural, and ecological processes. Among others, these include mobility and transport, national identity, and nature conservation.” (Fiorini et al. forthcoming).

People’s relationship with deer is also linked to emotions, meanings and values that emerge as individuals relate and experience this animal and the environment.

Deer, in a sense, become the meeting point of this diversity in experiences.



This slide define multivalence and represents examples of diversity of ideas, meanings, values and interpretations that are attributed to deer. Note that this diversity resides not only in different individuals, this diversity (for sure part of it) can coexist within the same individual depending on the situation/context this person finds herself/himself.

Deer become "anomalous animals" because they cross space that is culturally divided into different spheres "each of which carriers a distinctive moral evaluation" (Knight 2002).

The challenge presented by deer is that they are difficult to bound and challenge the *cultural spatial ordering* that we use to organize the environment we live in. This translates in deer being in an anomalous status: "John Knight (2000), building on Mary Douglas' work (1992, 2002), describes an animal's 'anomalous status' as deriving from a cultural ordering of the world into dichotomous classes. Based on this perspective, phenomena are viewed as anomalous when they resist such classificatory schemes. One grouping of anomalous animals is based on physical cross-boundary; e.g., the whale that blurs the line between fish and mammal. A second form of animal anomaly identified by this author is spatial: 'When space is culturally divided into different spheres, each of which carries a distinctive moral evaluation, it can serve as a basic classifier of animals' (Knight 2000:14). This process also underpins the production of place. Land uses divide the landscape up into more or less discrete spaces in which economic, social, and cultural spheres of human life materialize. The anomalous status of deer results from the fact that, unless they are fenced in or out, deer move across these spaces and interfere with this spatial ordering." (Fiorini et al. forthcoming).

“The impossibility of maintaining the boundaries of this spatial ordering due to the mobility of deer results in human social conflicts with and over deer. Conflicts related to damage caused by deer, as well as conflicts that emerge from people holding different interests and attributing different meanings to deer give rise to social divisions and social aggregations (Knight 2000 following Douglas 1992). This is a sociocultural process that, as we have discussed above, involves not just discussions over different uses that are made of deer (or of a resource); this process involves exchanges that are intimate to the actors involved, being linked to emotions, meanings, and values that emerge as actors relate and experience their society, culture, and environment (Milton 2002). Institutional responses to deer mobility and multivalence can, thus, develop only where social contact and exchange is possible.” (Fiorini et al. forthcoming).

In this presentation I argue that the Deer Task Force have the potential and is placed for facilitating such contacts and exchanges.

Cultural and social dimension of deer: Adaptive management of natural resources

Elements of effective commons governance (Dietz et al 2003):

i) Monitoring of resources and uses

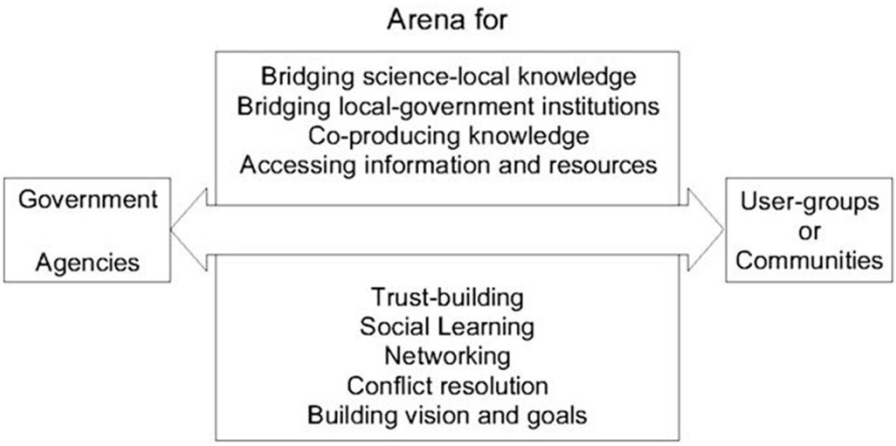
ii) Moderate change in the resource, its use and surrounding economic and social conditions

iii) Face-to-face communication and networks

iv) Exclusion of outsiders

v) Users' support for the rules in use

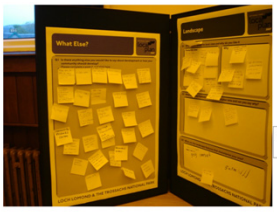
Adaptive co-management and the possible roles of bridging organizations (Berkes 2009):

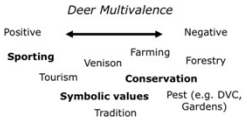


Building adaptive co-management

The Deer Task Force can be considered a bridging organization and contribute to urban deer co-management by facilitating:

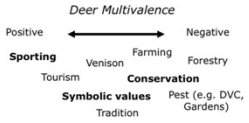
- Knowledge co-production
- Trust building
- Sense making
- Learning
- **Vertical and horizontal collaboration**
- Conflict resolution





Including Community: Is the survey the ideal tool?

- Effective in knowledge production – Still missing the "co-"
- Potential negative impact on trust building, sense making, and facilitating **vertical and horizontal collaboration** – due to bias of "deer as impacts"



Other issues:

- Incomplete in providing needed information (e.g. preferences for deer control)
- Stakeholder/public fatigue
- Costs – time and money
- Target population is undefined

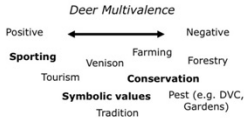
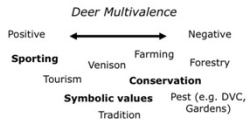


Photo: Joe Weiss

A Coordinated Public Engagement

- ❑ Web Page
- ❑ Media
- ❑ Structured meetings in various Council Districts and county's communities
- ❑ Surveys (social and ecological)
- ❑ Public forum



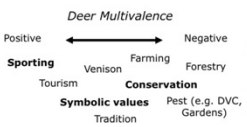
Meetings with the public: A proposal outline

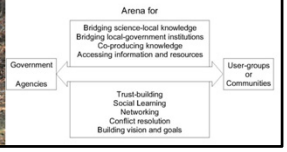
A. An introductory information session – 20 minutes

B. Questions and answers on part A. – 15 minutes

C. Structured discussion – 40 minutes

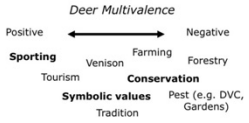
D. Open discussion – 15 minutes





Structured discussion example of questions/themes:

A. What is your relationship with deer in the city and county?
B. How do you manage deer in your backyard and in the places you live and visit?
C. What should the most important elements for guiding the City and County in making management decisions regarding deer be?



Open discussion