

GRAA promotes management effectiveness at the World Conservation Congress

By Krissie Clark

More than 8,000 of the world's conservation practitioners and decision makers descended on Barcelona in October, to attend the 2008 IUCN World Conservation Congress. This included people from governments, NGOs (GRAA's Tim Snow, Bryan Havemann representing WESSA and David Zeller as IRF President), business, the UN, academia, and of course Wayne Lotter and I. Together their mission for 10 days was to debate, share, network, learn, commit, vote and decide. To try come up with ideas, action and solutions for a diverse and sustainable world. Our mission, to promote, seek funding and do some serious lobbying for a motion that we had submitted to the Congress regarding protected areas, conservation programmes and their management effectiveness.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with the nature of this congress, here is how it works. The congress first kicks off with 'The Forum'. It offers four days of debates, workshops, dialogues, art and film, roundtable discussions, training courses, music and exhibitions. Primarily on topics such as climate change, energy, forests, species, protected areas, marine, law and governance. It was over these four days that Wayne and I ran around frantically setting up meetings with strategic folk in the know, sharing our ideas and seeking further advice, which often was not as easy as we had hoped. Seeking out individuals amongst 8000 delegates is quite a task, much like trying to find a needle in haystack. For example on one occasion, where several attempts to meet up with the African representative from Conservation International failed, we were eventually told that we should be able to locate him at a book launch they were having that evening at a nearby hotel. This sounded like an ideal place to meet, 20-30 people, some cheese, some wine and hopefully lots of time to chat. Not quite!!! This was a book launch of note. Conservation International were launching a coffee table book called "A Climate for Life" and there were well over 1000 attendees, lights, cameras and lots of action. So as you can imagine, we never did find our Africa rep that night, but the red wine sure helped sooth our disappointment. The large exhibition hall also made for an ideal locality for us to query exhibitors regarding much needed financial support in order to further field test and document the positive role of PAMS in several globally significant conservation areas in Africa. Many long hours were spent in this hall, but hopefully our effort will pay dividends yet.

Exhausted and drained the forum eventually came to a close on Thursday afternoon. Then it was time for 'The Members Assembly'. This assembly is like a unique global environmental parliament for governments and NGOs. IUCN members and the IUCN governing body debate and establish environmental policy. It is also here where members from around the world may submit motions on priority conservation or environmental issues. These motions undergo several screening processes and eventually approximately 100 motions are discussed and voted on by the IUCN members. Adopted motions are then used to influence policies and conservation efforts around the globe.

Unfortunately due to financial constraints neither of us could attend the Members Assembly. Hence much research went into possible queries and responses regarding our motion, and then our resolution was left in the capable hands of the one and only Tim Snow to defend. It was then a waiting game, sitting around waiting to hear the outcome. Finally on Saturday our motion was put to the vote and we very delighted when the positive SMS came through from Mr Snow.

So folks, now the IUCN World Conservation Congress recognises that management systems (such as the one developed by the GRAA known as PAMS) which ensure continual improvement, and include management effectiveness assessments as key components of the management system, would meaningful assist in improving the effectiveness of protected area management. The Congress also recommended the implementation of appropriate protected area management systems in support of international conventions and national conservation legislation. Yippee!!!! Go GRAA and go PAMS.

Finally, I would just like to conclude by thanking all of those who were representing other NGOs and who voted in favour of our motion. Your support is much appreciated.