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STAFF PERCEPTIONS OF THE NEW CONSERVATION POLICY IN PROTECTED AREAS: EVIDENCE FROM SHENNONGJIA NATIONAL PARK, CHINA

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Abstract

National Park Policy (NPP) is a new strategy to balance the necessary protection and sustainable utilization of natural resources. The successful implementation and development of NPPs highly depends on public awareness and attitudes. Employees are an important bridge between the government and other stakeholders. Their perception of a new policy is crucial for its implementation. This study examined the staff's perception of the NPPs based on a questionnaire survey in the Shennongjia National Park (SNP) in China. Results indicated that more than 80% of respondents approved of the public welfare of the SNP and expressed positive attitudes towards supporting and cooperating with the NPPs. Staff with higher levels of education were more likely to be aware of and have a positive attitude towards the NPPs. In terms of the support and cooperation with the NPPs, the self-reported attitudes of the staff were much more positive than the staff-perceived ones from the residents and tourists. The staff believed the SNP establishment could bring some important benefits, such as ameliorating the ecological environment (76.67%), promoting local economic development (51.11%), achieving more popularity (36.67%) and providing employment (35.56%). However, some major factors such as imbalance between tourism and conservation (64.44%), lack of systemic policies (47.78%) and low quality of tourists (42.22%) still constrained the SNP development. These findings provide practical guidance for the institutional construction, policy adjustment and rulemaking of China's national parks in the future.

Key words: conservation policy, environmental protection, park management, staff attitude

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