



Frontispiece: Integrated Landscape Management, Ecotourism and Community Perception:
Siri Charoenwat Forest Plantation, Chon Buri Province, Thailand.

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Abstract

A study was conducted in Siri Charoenwat Forest Plantation (SCFP), Chon Buri Province, Thailand, from November 2010 to September 2011 to evaluate the management of SCFP in the context of integrated landscape management and sustainable tourism. A combination of field observation, questionnaire survey, face-to-face interview and literature review was employed. The research participants comprised SCFP staff members including the site supervisor (n=10), representatives from local government units (n=10), knowledgeable members of the local community (n=10), and visitors/tourists (n=70). The responses from the participants were rated using the Lickert Scale method and descriptive statistics. An integrated approach to landscape management of SCFP is complex because it involves the management not only of the physical and natural environment but also economic and social aspects including the interactions of all features and assets. Most respondents were well aware of the reforestation project at SCFP but claimed that they are not involved in planning and management and do not derive direct or material benefit from its establishment. The management concurs with the suggestions of the majority of the respondents regarding the need to introduce physical (e.g. tourism interpretation, infrastructure) and logistical (e.g. policy, capacity building of staff) improvements to SCFP for it to be a model of an integrated, managed landscape. The study concludes that SCFP has yet to initiate better and effective operational/management and policy measures through compliance with the tenets of ecotourism and the principles of sustainable development including integrated landscape

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management. Inability to address these issues could compromise the fundamental goals of SCFP in pursuing forest conservation and rehabilitation as well as in promoting ecotourism. Some recommendations on how best to manage SCFP are provided.

Keywords: *landscape management, planted forest, community perceptions, biodiversity, sustainable tourism, environmental standards*

Introduction

A rapidly increasing global population has dramatically increased the worldwide demands for natural resources and their by-products, leading to significant decline in the quantity and quality of forest goods and ecological services (Jianguo and Taylor, 2002). Forests, especially in tropical regions, are considered one of most disturbed and exploited ecosystems in the world. Landscape management, in the context of ecotourism or sustainable tourism, involves the integration of various human and environmental aspects that change over time as a result of tourism development and visitor impacts. Consequently, it is imperative to explore and identify the perceptions of relevant stakeholders (e.g. visitors, host community, government entities) relative to landscape planning, maintenance and restoration including tourism development. The increasing competition between/among tourist destinations makes it crucial for the tourism industry to understand these various tourist perceptions regarding certain landscape qualities within a tourist destination (Jacobsen, 2007).

In the context of sustainable development, which was emphasised during the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, “landscape is essential in striking a balance between preserving the natural and cultural heritage as a reflection of setting identity and diversity, and being used as an economic resource capable of generating employment in the context of the boom in sustainable tourism” (Council of Europe, 2006: 3). It is closely linked with the principles of sustainable tourism, particularly in protected areas or areas dedicated primarily for the protection and enjoyment of nature as well as the maintenance of biodiversity and ecological life-support services (IUCN, 1991, in Ceballos-Lascuráin, 1996).

This study therefore aims to determine if SCFP can benefit from the practice of integrated landscape management in the context of sustainable tourism or ecotourism. The perceptions of the local communities and relevant stakeholders were solicited to assess the state and qualities of SCFP as a planted forest and a nature-based tourist destination.

Literature review

Landscape management may be understood in the context of sustainable development, wherein the landscapes are regularly maintained while also ensuring that there is harmony with the changes brought about by social, economic and environmental processes (Council of European Landscape Convention, 2000). Catibog-Sinha and Heaney (2006, p. 254) state that “the management of landscapes adopts a holistic approach to the conservation of biodiversity. It integrates the representations expressed in various technical and social disciplines, including those constructed by indigenous communities. The integration of the ecological and social factors within a landscape is fundamental to biodiversity conservation. The interaction among environmental, economic, political, and cultural elements in landscape are numerous, dynamic, complex, and often unpredictable”. Integrated landscape management requires an appropriate mix of environmental protection, nature conservation and development of social and economic objectives. These requirements can be complex and dynamic.

The definition of ecotourism generally includes the environmental, social and economic aspects of tourism (Mowforth and Munt, 1998; Swarbrooke, 1999). It aims to achieve a “balanced” or “wise” use of natural resources, for example conservation of natural environment and promotion of the well-being of local residents. Figgis (1993) states that ecotourism is ecologically sustainable tourism that includes both environmental and cultural aspects. Buckley (1994) defines it as tourism that has regard for the conservation of natural resources, sustainable management and environmental education. Boo (1990) uses the term “ecotourism” synonymously with “natural tourism” which she defines as “travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with specific objectives to study, admire and enjoy the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestations”. When nature-based tourism in

combined with nature conservation and sound management, it is referred to as ecotourism or sustainable tourism in natural destinations. Nature-based tourism or natural tourism is a fast-growing sector of the tourism industry. Nature-based tourism is a broad category that includes other forms of tourism such as adventure tourism (Catibog-Sinha, 2012; Fennell, 2003).

The challenges in the application of the principles of sustainable development and sustainable tourism are the numerous conflicts between conservation and economic development. These require a better and wider dialogue among concerned stakeholders to address both the conflicts and compatibilities between conservation and sustainable development (Schelhas and Lassoie, 2000). In these dialogues, it is vital to emphasise that ecotourism can be a strategy which can balance nature conservation and development. Because of the environmental problems associated with mass tourism, there has been an increasing demand since the early 1990s for an alternative form of tourism, i.e. ecotourism, that is environment friendly and socially responsible, and that offers a more meaningful tourist encounter with nature and the host community (Catibog-Sinha, 2012).

Tourism that aims to be sustainable has gained increasing interest within the tourism sector since the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the 1992 Rio Summit, although aspects of sustainable tourism have been in existence prior to this event (Beyer et al., 2005). Since then, tourism has played an important role in economic development at community, national, regional, and global levels by using natural resources and environments. In protecting the environment and natural resources, various national and global entities underscore the need for the tourism industry to minimise negative impacts and to ensure sustainable use as well as generate tourism revenue to reinvest a certain portion of funds for conservation. The reinvestment should aim at enhancing the quality of the resources and build the management capacities at the local and national levels (Warnasuriya, 2000).

The Tourism Authority of Thailand, the main organisation for promoting and marketing tourism in Thailand, has an on-going campaign to make the public aware of environmental conservation in tourism. It has disseminated information and embarked on public

relations campaigns on environmental conservation via mass media (radio, television, newspapers and magazines) as well as through the Tourism Authority of Thailand's publications such as *Anusarn Or-Sor-Tor* (TOT Travel Magazine), *Chulasern Karn Thongthiao* (Tourism Review), and newsletters. In addition, large quantities of multi-vision materials, videotapes, brochures and posters have been produced to promote conservation of both natural and cultural resources in destinations. These materials are distributed at various tourism-related exhibitions, government and private agencies and educational institutions around the country (UNESCAP, 1997).

Apart from forest landscape management aspects, community perceptions of conservation issues are likely to be influenced by an array of factors variously socio-economic (e.g. level of education, wealth status), demographic (e.g. household size, age of household head), and geophysical (e.g. distance of household from the forest or markets) (Hill, 1998; Mehta and Kellert, 1998; Gillingham and Lee, 1999; McFarlane and Boxall, 2000; Racevskis and Lupi, 2006; Dolisca et al, 2007). Understanding these factors can provide information necessary for designing targeted policy measures to address people's aspirations in conservation and sustainable landscape management. Several authors suggest that investment in education could increase conservation consciousness of the people and thereby promote long-term conservation goals. Membership of social groups could also increase peoples' collective bargaining power for more involvement in decision-making processes of forest management (Guthiga, 2008). Offering people direct forest extraction incentives could increase more positive attitudes towards conservation but this must be accompanied with strict enforcement to prevent forest degradation.

Study area description

SCFP is located in Chon Buri Province in the east of Thailand. Areas that are famous tourists destinations are found in Bang Lamung and Sattahip districts. It takes about two hours by car on the highway to reach the place, which is approximately 167 kilometers Southeast of Bangkok. SCFP is approximately 1,873 Rai or about 300 hectares. It is bounded to the north by Huai Yai Sub-District within Bang Lamung District, to the Southeast by Phlu ta lung Sub-District, and to the West by Na Chom-tian Sub-District, within Sattahip District.

SCFP is a forest plantation project within the broader developmental project of Wat Yannasangvararam Voramaha Vihara, now a popular tourist destination, initiated through the programs of King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX) in 1976. To celebrate Queen Sirikit's 60th Birthday on 12 August, 1992, King Bhumibol initiated and facilitated the establishment of SCFP by planting forest trees along the denuded slopes of Chi-on Mountain. The forest plantation consists of both native and exotic plant species for the purpose of maintaining the forest's watershed value rather than as a production forest, wherein timber and forest resource harvesting may be permitted (Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation, 2005). SCFP is divided into three zones, where each requires specific management objectives (Figure 2). The first zone is the service or administrative zone located at the entrance section. It maintains a pavilion housing a diorama depicting a 3-dimensional landscape model of SCFP, 1 x 1.5 metre size signage (written in Thai and English) narrating the history of the SCFP project, other office headquarters spaces and facilities (e.g. office, toilets, water storage tower). The second zone consists of the forest trails, 1.45 km long, and boardwalks traversing the plantation at lower elevation. Several interpretation signs have been installed at strategic points along the trail for tourism, education and research. The third zone at the western end of SCFP is at a much higher altitude, where a remnant forest and the wildlife are protected. Public access may not be permitted within the core zone. The core and buffer zones, although recognized as such in theory, are not physically delineated on the ground.



Figure 1. Map of Siri Charoenwat Forest Plantation project.
(Source: 2009 Management Plan)



Figure 2. Aerial view of SCFP showing the zoning scheme.
Adapted from Google Earth.

SCFP's natural features (Figure 3) are a major aspect of its landscape that requires close management and surveillance. Although there are no mega-fauna (e.g. elephant, tiger) in the remnant core forest, it has a wide variety of plants and small animals (e.g. birds, reptiles, amphibians) that can be part of an enjoyable wildlife watching activity. Many of the trees were planted at different seasons and for different occasions. Many were planted to harmonise with the natural landscape, hence enhancing the beauty and attraction of SCFP. These plants belong to 139 species under different families and genera.



Figure 3. *Natural features of SCFP.*
Photos by Pichet Teeranuson, Dec 2010 to Sept 2011.

Forests provide goods (e.g. food, timber) and services (e.g. nutrient cycling, pollination) as well as information (e.g. on genetic diversity) and psychological benefits (e.g. scenic views, spiritual areas). These benefits, coupled with increasing threats to nature from human activities, have fueled conservation efforts across the globe (Jennifer, 2010).

Research methods

Primary and secondary data were collected. The primary data were obtained from field observations including from a questionnaire survey and interviews. The secondary data were from academic literature and government reports. The questionnaire survey sheets were prepared for 120 participants but the results from only 100 participants were found to be useful and relevant. The groups of participants comprised ten SCFP staff members including the site supervisor (n=10), ten representatives from local government units (n=10), ten knowledgeable members of the local community (n=10), and seventy visitors/tourists (n=70). A site survey was conducted during November 2010 to October 2011. All the infrastructure facilities on site were noted and photographed. Key factors noted during the field assessment were the educational, scientific, recreational, and historical values of the facilities. The study noted whether these facilities and tourism services were consistent with the principles of ecotourism (nature-based, educational and sustainably managed). Management recommendations on how best to manage sustainable tourism in SCFP as component of landscape management are presented.

Results and discussion

A. Socio-demographic profile of respondents

A.1 Visitors/tourists (n=70)

Out of 70 participants, 61% were male and 39% female, with the majority of visitor-respondents (43%) between 21-30 years of age, about 31% between 31-40 years of age, and the rest younger. The majority were educated, having completed secondary education, bachelor degree, diploma degree, or primary education (Figure 4).

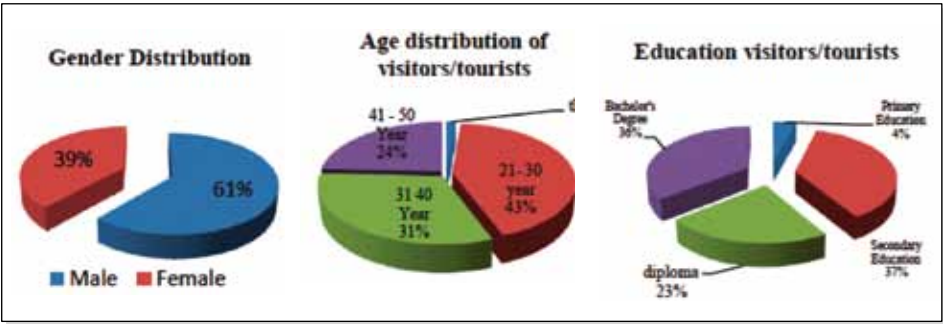
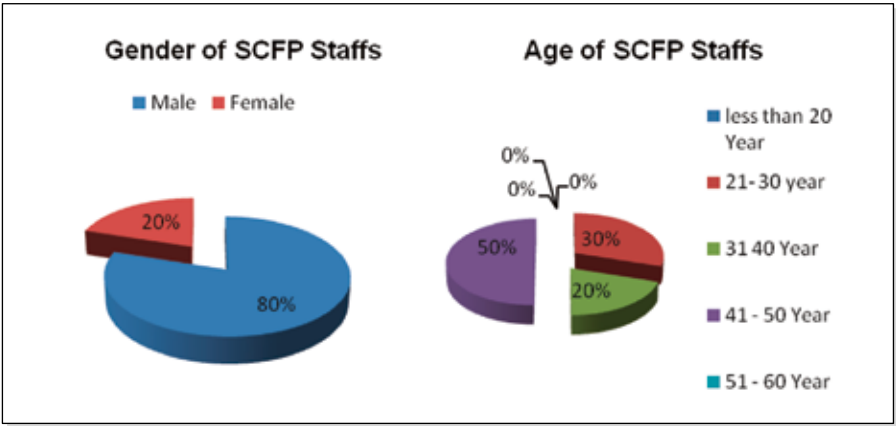


Figure 4. Socio-demographic profile of visitors/tourists

A.2 Staff (n=10)

Of the 10 staff respondents, 8 were males and two females and half were 41-50 years of age (Figure 5). In their jobs at SCFP, 6 of the 8 males are assigned to field operations, notably reforestation and facility maintenance with the others managerial. When managers were interviewed and asked if there were any changes or improvement made at SCFP during their time as supervisors, the current head, Mr. T. Kongkete admitted that there is indeed a need for improvements because SCFP is “sensitive and delicate”. The former head, Mr. Viriya Prompong, said that there are management efforts to improve the aspect of ecotourism at SCFP. He added that the remaining original forest and the plantation forest have to be protected to ensure that forest recovery will continue along with the development of nature tourism.



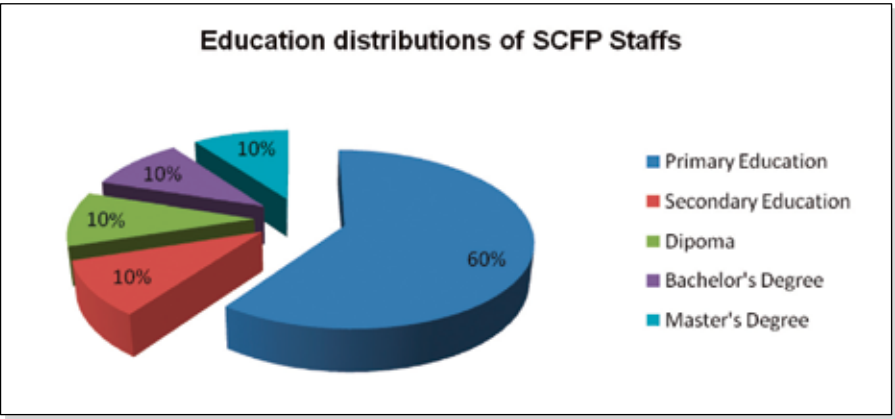


Figure 5. Socio-demographic profile of SCFP staff

A.3 Local Government (n=10) and Local Community members (n=10)

The local government respondents were 5 males and 5 females; the local community members were 4 and 6 respectively (Figure 6).

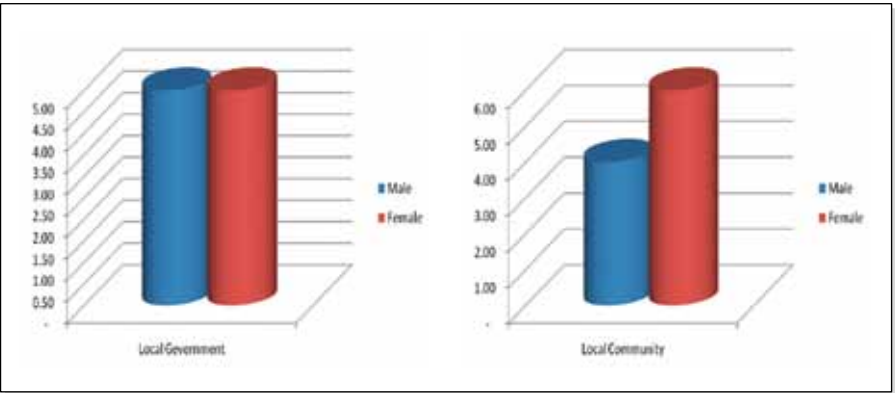


Figure 6. Socio-demographic profile of SCFP staff

B. Visitors’ Perceptions

All 70 respondents were asked to rank, using a Lickert scale, their level of satisfaction towards the quality of the visitor facilities and services that are available at SCFP. The scale was ranked from 5 (Excellent), 4 (Good), 3 (Average), 2 (Little), to 1 (Should be improved). The average scores and standard deviations are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Tourist satisfaction toward the visitor facilities and amenities at SCFP*

Description	Mean	Std. Dev.
1. Directional sign from main road to the SCFP.	3.21	0.36
2. Fence and main entrance gate	3.69	0.48
3. Car park and motor bike park	3.50	0.43
4. Information center	3.53	0.44
5. Interpretation sign around information center and on view board	4.01	0.56
6.Toilet	3.47	0.42
7.Tracks/walking trails around SCFP core zone	3.99	0.56
8. Interpretation sign along tracks or walking trails	3.89	0.53
9. Pavilions around SCFP	4.07	0.58
10. Viewing points on the mountain tops	3.97	0.55
11. SCFP staff knowledge & explanation	4.06	0.58
12. Safety and security	4.00	0.56
13. Brochures and other information materials	3.73	0.49
14. Communication point (for future tourism plan)		
- Internet	3.44	0.41
- Telephone line	3.49	0.43
- Mobile phone	3.53	0.44
15. Environmental management practice	3.66	0.47
Average	3.72	0.49

In summary, the majority of surveyed visitors had a positive attitude (ranging from average to good) towards the quality of the facilities and amenities at SCFP. However, there is still plenty of room for improvement in the management of the study area especially by taking into account the principles of sustainability and integrated landscape management.

C. Staff members' perceptions

As shown in Table 2, the perceptions of the majority of staff members surveyed re-confirm the researcher's personal observations of the lack or absence of appropriate environmental standards. The results indicate the need to put into place the minimum acceptable standards for the integrated and sustainable management of SCFP.

Table 2. *Respondents' views about the various environmental standards appropriate for SCFP (n=10).*

Theme	Issues	Results
Forest Plantation Management	Should SCFP have internationally accepted standard of good practice in forest plantation management, heritage conservation and ecotourism?	8 strongly agree; 2 agree.
	What are the standards that should be in place? What are the indicators of high standard?	The majority of standards should be the environmental management standards ISO14001:2004 and quality management standards ISO9001:2008. Both are international standards and acceptable for implementation.
	Based on the existing management of forest plantation, what problems would hinder or prevent SCFP from achieving this standard?	Six of the respondents mentioned issues relating to policy, staff management and leadership, budget, and technical capacity of staff; the rest had no comment.

Environment Management	Do you have environmental management policy for SCFP management?	Eight respondents said none for environmental management; two said the “policy” relates only to housekeeping and cleaning
	How much budget is allocated for resource and environment management?	Eight respondents had no idea; two did not give any comment
	What environmental concerns are affecting the community and tourists?	Six respondents mentioned safe water, waste treatment, and wildfire; three mentioned transportation, noise and flooding; one had no comment
Sustainable Development	How do you envision the future of SCFP as living natural museum?	Eight respondents had no comment, the rest said it depends on management policy

C. Local community’s perceptions

Eight of the ten respondents who were interviewed provided information regarding their perceptions about the values of SCFP (Table 3). The various attractions at SCFP are highly regarded (average Lickert score= 4.05), but they can be improved to attract more visitors and support the idea of landscape management and sustainable tourism.

Table 3. Attractions value at SCFP, based on the Likert scale

Attractions	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. SCFP landscape / environment	4.25	0.07
2. Knowledge / education	4.38	0.08
3. Tracking and other activities	4.00	0.06
4. Vegetation	4.38	0.08
5. Staff’s services	3.25	0.04
Average	4.05	0.07

Management Recommendations

Table 4 outlines a proposed action plan built on the research findings of this study. This plan will serve as an initial document which SCFP management may consider for implementation in consultation with relevant stakeholders from the public and private sectors as well as from the local communities. The budgetary requirements for the proposed action plan should subsequently be submitted to appropriate authority for hopefully immediate implementation. Transparency in the use of the funds should be in place.

Table 4. *Proposed outline of a five-year action plan for the management of SCFP*

Description	Action plan (Year)				
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Environmental aspect					
1. Re-design the recreational/service zone so that some plants are not so densely crowded; diversity of native plants should be emphasised.	✓	✓	✓		
2. Enhance protection of the core zone to increase growth of native plants and wildlife.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3. Separate or delineate the SCFP administrative office and built facilities from the visitors/ tourists service zone.	✓	✓			
4. Provide permanent staff positions.	✓	✓			
5. Develop policy on setting up environmental standards on waste (solid and water) management, soil and fresh water management.	✓	✓			
6. Develop and implement energy management policy and standards.	✓	✓	✓		
7. Provide a bigger parking space at the front gate area to accommodate in-coming visitors and vehicles.	✓	✓			
8. Implement policy on ‘no pets’ – cats and dogs – inside the protection zone.	✓	✓			

Educational aspect					
9. Develop and implement, in collaboration with relevant organisations, a short training course on environmental/landscape management and conservation for SCFP staff and stakeholders.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10. Develop and implement, in collaboration with relevant organisations, a short training course in sustainable tourism management for SCFP Staff and stakeholders.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
11. Develop a more effective tourist interpretation program to include improvement of signage, maps, brochures in both oral and written media.	✓	✓	✓		
12. Provide more facilities and recreational activities such as bird watching, landscape viewing from elevated platforms, mountain viewing points, and camping.	✓	✓			
Economic aspect					
13. Introduce licensed tourist commercial outlets such as coffee house, food center, Wi-Fi internet connections, souvenir shop, camping zone etc.	✓	✓	✓		
14. Provide a space to display and sell local products produced by the local community.	✓	✓	✓		
15. Improve market promotion of tourism through the internet.		✓	✓	✓	✓
16. Implement a user fee system (tourist entrance fee).		✓	✓	✓	
17. Provide local employment within SCFP.		✓	✓	✓	✓
Social aspect					
18. Incorporate involvement of the local community and stakeholders in all stages of planning and management.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
19. Increase public awareness and appreciation of the benefits of sustaining SCFP for the social well-being of the local community.		✓	✓	✓	✓
20. Provide a reasonable security system for the safety of the staff, visitors and assets of SCFP.		✓	✓	✓	✓

SCFP has to ensure that the remaining remnant forest is clearly demarcated on the map and on the ground. A demarcation signage advising visitors to tread carefully or not to enter the protection zone should be part of the interpretation program of SCFP. The visitor or recreational zone should also be clearly marked so that visitor management can be properly implemented. Illegal encroachment of public land, usually occurring at the periphery of SCFP, should be stopped. Respondents in this study suggested the need to expand the area for visitor use especially the provision of adequate space for parking vehicles, rest area, restroom and a canteen/coffee shop. Direction signs should be more strategically located and visible. Eventually, better communication systems at the site and off-site (e.g. through a website) can be developed. The on-site interpretation service can also be enhanced through a VDO presentation and guided tours. Although these suggestions are ideal for a nature-based destination, the budget required would be substantial.

The income from visitors as well as from rental fees for the use of the area (e.g. rentals paid by coffee shop owners, parking fees) could contribute to the operational budget of SCFP. Whether or not tourists are willing to pay for the services of SCFP is another matter that should be discussed and further studied.

SCFP, as a living natural museum, has the basic elements for becoming a popular nature-based destination in the province. Nearby schools can integrate in their science curriculum the study of plants and animals and field trips at SCFP. Nature-based visitors, many of whom are educated, will learn more about the native biota of Thailand and the province. Knowledge of these different natural assets will help increase public awareness and understanding of the conservation and ecotourism values of SCFP among local residents, visitors, and other stakeholders. By extension, it will increase such understanding in Thailand more widely and indeed the world. The awareness of the value of conservation in landscape management should not be reserved only to the scientific community (Canadian Integrated Landscape Management Coalition, 2005).

Conclusion

SCFP, if it is to be managed in accordance with the principles of integrated landscape management, should use a combination of strategies that address the maintenance and enhancement of its geographic features such as landforms, water-bodies, flora, fauna and human communities. SCFP contains several ecosystems (e.g. natural forest, plantation, wetlands and demonstration plant groups), wildlife and their habitats; all of these are good for tourism and ecology study. A man-made or built environment which can provide additional attractions and facilities, although needing improvement, is part of landscape management. The nature and quality of these features should be assessed on a regular basis. Providing support to both staff and local communities is also necessary in integrated landscape planning for SCFP. More importantly, a clear and strategic action plan for SCFP is necessary for implementation. This plan should be developed in consultation with the local community and relevant stakeholders. The plan should have a clear mission and vision that incorporates the environmental, economic and social aspects of development.

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