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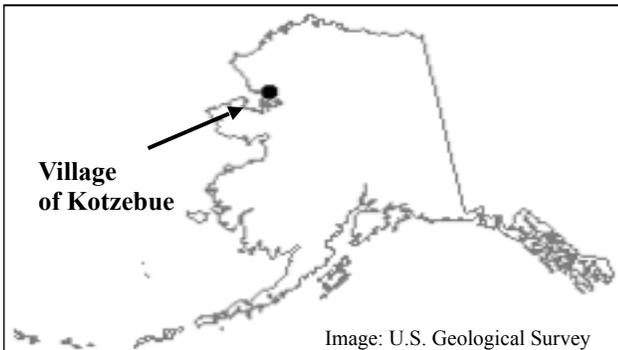
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NATIVE PEOPLE AND THE WESTERN ARCTIC NATIONAL PARKLANDS

Keywords: wilderness values, subsistence, Western Arctic National Parklands, Alaska, Qikiktagrugmiut, Kotzebue, trust

Background & Management Issues:

Following the definition in the U.S. Wilderness Act of humans as visitors who do not remain, studies of the attitudes, opinions, and values of visitors to wilderness and national parks have typically focused on people visiting these areas for recreation. However, the attitudes, opinions, and values of people for whom wilderness areas are considered homelands, where they fulfill their nutritional, spiritual, and cultural needs, have received much less attention.

In 1980, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) set aside four National Conservation Units to be managed as the Western Arctic National Parklands (WEAR) by the National Park Service. People living in or near WEAR are legally allowed to use the land in a manner consistent with historical practices. As this is a variance from traditional National Park policy, there is ongoing tension between traditional uses and other park objectives. This study explores the relationship between the Qikiktagrugmiut (Kotzebue tribal members) who actively use these lands for subsistence activities, the land on which they live, and management of the WEAR.



Project Objectives:

- ❖ To understand the values and threats Kotzebue tribal members associate with their subsistence lifestyle and how these relate to management of the Western Arctic National Parklands.

Project Description:

Interviews were conducted with 30-40 year olds representing the Tribes most active hunters/users of parklands. This group will be using the parklands for the next few decades, and their children are likely to comprise the most active future user group. The interviews were open-ended but used a predetermined set of questions about values, park management, and threats to traditional uses associated with WEAR.

Results:

Many interviewees reported spending nearly half of the year “on the land.” When asked what “the land” means to them, they mentioned a range of values not commonly associated with the purpose of federally designated wilderness. Examples include the land being an important source of identity, essential to practicing a traditional way of life, and important in maintaining mental and physical health. Some of the land attributes identified as providing these values would be familiar to most recreational visitors to wilderness (e.g. open space and an undeveloped landscape) but others, such as the presence of wild animals for food and fur, might not.

Some of the threats interviewees identified to maintaining the values associated with these lands were agency restrictions and regulations, competition with NPS for land inholdings, sport hunting, globalization, and the increasing number of visitors. Many of the respondents stated the belief that they see the land in fundamentally different ways than do park managers, whom they believe reduce the land to place-names on a map or GPS coordinates removed from human activity, and the experiential knowledge of place. Respondents emphasized that they had been raised to use common sense in taking care of the land.

When asked about their relationship with WEAR staff, slightly more than half said it was good the way it is. The remaining participants suggested more participation from native people in management and policy roles, and relationship and trust building with WEAR managers.

Management Implications:

- ❖ The threat of an ongoing land use relationship being destroyed through dependence on legislative, administrative, and legal decision making is a source of anxiety in the Alaska Native community.
- ❖ The NPS management of traditional lands occurs in a time of unprecedented external influence on and threats to Qikiktagrugmiut society. These external pressures may influence the relationship between the people of Kotzebue and WEAR management.
- ❖ Many Qikiktagrugmiut view much of what NPS managers do as beneficial: conserving resources, controlling nonlocals, and other management activities. However, ongoing tension between WEAR employees and the native community is influenced by the memory of past conflicts with government officials, and the predominately nonlocal, relatively transient nature of WEAR staff that makes it difficult to establish long-term trust.

Publications / Products:

- ❖ The relationship between Qikiktagrugmiut (Kotzebue Tribal members) and the Western Arctic Parklands, Alaska, United States. *International Journal of Wilderness*. 10(2): 28-31, 8.

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For additional information...

Alan Watson, Leopold Institute Contact

phone: 406-542-4199

email: awatson@fs.fed.us

**Alex Whiting, Native village of Kotzebue,
Environmental Protection Specialist**

phone: 907-442-5303

email: mailto:sheep@otz.net