

ALWRI PROGRAM OF WORK: RELATIONSHIPS

Problem Selection and Justification: (extracted from the Leopold Institute's Program Charter)

Problem 2: Improved information is needed on how relationships between people and lands protected for their wilderness values affect and are affected by management policies and actions.

The relationship between people and public lands influences response to management policies and practices. Wilderness management agencies are charged with making decisions that reflect the legislative intent of the Wilderness Act and subsequent legislation, but also are stewards of the relationship between the public and those public lands protected as wilderness. Most social science information used by wilderness managers has focused on indicators of threats to the quality of on-site recreational experiences. Measures of satisfaction, encounters with other visitors, perceived crowding, and other commonly used social science indicators imply a customer, or commodity, orientation towards the public. These measures suggest that the primary evaluations of how well public land managers are doing in their stewardship responsibilities are reflected through the quality of these transactions. Recent research has, however, suggested that these stewardship responsibilities may be further evaluated through examination of the relationship that is created, protected, or restored through wilderness management activities. This approach emphasizes relationships as a major influence on how the stakeholder public evaluates stewardship success. These stakeholders have opinions on how well the managing agencies reflect their values and how well they respond to knowledge about their needs. Stakeholders also vary in the level of commitment and attachment to these places and the activities that occur there, which influence their evaluation of management practices. The public has a range of perceptions about the collective social responsibility associated with providing opportunities to visit or receive other benefits from wilderness lands. Establishing baseline measures and monitoring of these indicators of the relationship between the public and wilderness lands can provide effective evaluation of many management activities, including protection of traditional relationships for indigenous people and enhancing and protecting relationships between the resource and both local and distant populations of stakeholders. They can also assist managers in making decisions that must weigh visitor and local community attitudes about policy against national legislation and policy direction.

Understanding the relationships between the public and wilderness is especially relevant for those who use wilderness for subsistence purposes or other traditional activities that preceded designation as wilderness. There is a need to better understand how management actions and off-site influences affect these relationships and influence reactions to management actions. The definitions of wilderness contained in the 1964 Wilderness Act focus mostly on attributes of the place and recreation visits there, but there are many types of relationships and many complex and sometimes competing values arising from the set of attributes of wilderness prescribed in legislation. The 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, for instance, introduced within our National Wilderness Preservation System the concepts of "inhabited wilderness" through continuation of subsistence and other traditional

activities by rural residents and “wilderness recreation experiences” even for some areas not classified officially as wilderness, including those using motorized methods of access to get there. It is now apparent that planners have few resources available to guide them in establishing management objectives that address these types of relationship issues. We believe we can make significant contributions to this problem area by focusing research on the following three topics.

Element 2a. Lack of knowledge about contrasting values of wilderness for visitors and non-visitors, and local, rural and distant, urban stakeholders, and the range of threats to those values restricts establishment of objectives for protection or restoration of those relationships.

Wilderness in the United States was established as a system of areas, defined in the 1964 Wilderness Act as areas where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by humans, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. “Untrammelled” was included in this definition to mean “not subject to human controls and manipulations that hamper the free play of natural forces.” We need to better understand the Euro-centric origin of this concept to more accurately contrast the dominant set of recreation values of visitors to the indigenous and local meanings of the landscapes we are calling wilderness. For example, although solitude has been studied extensively and is often described as the single greatest concern to protecting wilderness experiences in the U.S., continued research, and international collaboration are bringing us to a broader conceptualization of the human values and issues associated with wilderness protection.

For example, descendants of pioneers in the Western U.S. often have traditional and emotional ties to the wilderness landscape very different from those of newer migrants and from those of distant recreation visitors. Similarly, local, rural residents in Southern Appalachia may relate to a nearby wilderness primarily through the family cemetery it contains. Many indigenous people of North America believe that the complex interactions resulting from their relationship with the natural world enhance and preserve the ecosystem. Throughout time, people have managed the ecosystem to increase chances of human survival. However, when ecologists, land managers, and conservationists speak and write about threats to the natural environment they rarely address the potential loss to human cultures that can arise from changing these ancient relationships with the land. The concept of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) promotes 1) respect for nonhuman entities as individuals, 2) recognition of bonds between humans and nonhumans, including incorporation of nonhumans into ethical codes of behavior, 3) appreciation of the importance of local places, and 4) recognition of humans as part of the ecological system, rather than as separate from and defining the existence of that system. While TEK is the application of the evolving knowledge accumulated about the relationships between human and nonhuman forms, TEKW (Traditional Ecological Knowledge Wisdom) further acknowledges that there is also wisdom acquired through understanding and maintaining these relationships with a complex system. Improved understanding of the different orientations toward wilderness among recreation visitors and non-visitors, and rural and non-rural stakeholders and identifying how management actions and social and environmental change are influencing

those relationships will provide important input to inform dialogue between all stakeholders in decisions related to public lands protected for their wilderness values.

We propose studies to:

- Work cooperatively with indigenous and other rural groups to identify the range of attributes, threats, values and stakeholders associated with areas protected for wilderness values and how management actions threaten or protect those values. Outcome: improved ability to protect or restore traditional and evolving relationships with wilderness landscapes in planning and management decisions.
- Develop understanding of the attitudes indigenous and other rural people have towards the federal agencies' ability and intent to manage wilderness lands in a way that respects local values, and the things that influence those attitudes. Outcome: enhance collaborative planning by creating cross-cultural understanding and protection of the range of cultural values associated with wilderness landscapes.

Element 2b. Managers have little understanding of the sources of conflict between different demands and interests associated with wilderness, and how to determine the influences of management on these conflicts.

Whereas there has been substantial research on conflicts between different types of wilderness recreation visitors, there has been little study of conflicts between recreation and other uses of wilderness. For example, sport hunting, cattle grazing, scientific activities, and subsistence uses often occur within and adjacent to legally designated wilderness frequented by recreationists. In Alaska, indigenous and non-indigenous people actively engage in subsistence lifestyles, and these uses are often perceived in conflict with both recreation and ecological protection values of wilderness. The increasing pressure across the arctic north to develop energy resources and to attract ecotourism, while attempting to balance global needs, will have significant and unprecedented effects on wilderness values and overall biophysical integrity there. There is an acute need to understand the ways in which these forces constrain wilderness values, how they impact the "functionality" of wilderness socio-culturally and biophysically, and how these constraints can be mitigated so that reasonable rural economic progress is not blocked. We will try to better understand these types of conflicts and therefore understand how different groups may respond to attempts to manage some behavioral and attitudinal contributors to the conflict. The primary beneficiaries of this research will be future generations of people who visit, use, or otherwise benefit from wilderness resources.

We propose studies to:

- Determine the amount, causes and potential solutions to conflicts between different types of demand, such as between subsistence and recreation, hunting and non-hunting, local and distant visitor, agency and local community. Outcome: enhance the agencies' abilities to establish and prioritize management actions with full understanding of the implications for various interest groups.

Element 2c. Managers need methods of measurement and frameworks for describing the various influences on relationships between the range of stakeholders and public lands and the role these relationships play in development of attitudes toward wilderness management actions.

Public land management agencies have been entrusted not only with stewardship of the land but also the public purposes legislatively mandated for that land. It is our belief that success of this stewardship is most likely when defined more by the development or fostering of a relationship between people and the place, and less by the matching of short-term outcomes with varying preferences. This reflects a recent trend in recreation research towards increased emphasis on meanings-based methodologies. Measuring the success of public lands management entails more than counting the number of satisfying experiences, if only because there are many factors beyond the control of managers that influence the achievement of those experiences. Research and management performance goals are becoming more focused on measuring the relationships between the public and wilderness and understanding communications, land management practices and collaborative planning procedures that influence these relationships. This research will benefit all stakeholders in wilderness and related wild lands through bringing focus to the influences of management actions on the relationship between the public and wilderness lands.

We propose studies to:

- Understand how public lands management techniques, visitor and local community characteristics, and collaborative planning techniques related to wild lands influences public trust. Outcome: increased effectiveness and efficiency of monitoring of public trust as a long-term evaluation of success of planning and management activities.
- Continue research to support application of “public purpose marketing,” with focus on understanding the impacts of management activities on relationships between the public and public lands. Outcome: improved understanding of different segments of the public, facilitated targeting of information to the public, and public response to management policies, such as recreation fees, user control techniques and fire risk reduction actions.