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UNDERSTANDING WILDERNESS LAND USE CONFLICTS IN THE FAR NORTH

Keywords: subsistence activities, indigenous people, user conflicts, Alaska,

Background & Management Issues: Unlike most wildernesses in the lower 48 states, many wildernesses in Alaska and Finland are used by indigenous and non-indigenous peoples for subsistence purposes, such as fishing, hunting, gathering, and herding animals. Alaska and Finland have relatively recent wilderness legislation, and provisions were written into the founding legislation in recognition of the historical use of these areas by local people.

With increasing recreational uses of these wildernesses, the potential for conflict between subsistence and recreational uses has risen. Subsistence users perceive threats to the continuation of subsistence lifestyles and culture, and threats to land and natural systems. Often, recreational visitors and subsistence users hold substantially different social values and world views, which can lead to on-the-ground conflicts. Resolving these conflicts is an ongoing challenge for wilderness managers.

Project Objectives:

- To examine the underlying components of land use conflicts in Alaska and Finland wildernesses, and how those components

Project Description:
Over 70 interviews were conducted in northwest Finland and southwest Alaska. Individuals interviewed were local residents engaged in or familiar with subsistence uses, representatives from tourism businesses operating in the study areas, and representatives from managing agencies. Interview questions focused on the types of subsistence and recreation uses occurring, perceptions of the types of conflicts occurring, changes in conflicts, who was involved, and their roles in conflict situations.

Results:

A reindeer herd in Finland.

Both within-group and between-group conflict existed, but between-group conflict was a more prevalent problem. In Finland, there were conflicts within reindeer herding cooperatives, at times drawn along ethnic lines. There were also conflicts identified within subsistence fishing communities in Alaska. However, the conflicts between groups – between locals and non-locals, between rural and urban groups, between ethnic groups – produced richer data for understanding the nature of the conflicts.

Tangible and intangible conflicts were identified. Tangible conflicts have specific, observable episodes or events that create antagonism, such as a recreational dog-sledder disturbing and dispersing a reindeer herd cared for by a subsistence user. Intangible conflicts involve differences in values or ethics. The tangible conflict mentioned above may also have an intangible aspect: the disturbance created by the dog-sledder may be viewed not only as inconsiderate, but as violating an ethic or value.

The intangible issues of rights to access, rights to decision-making, and rights to self-determination underlie many tangible land-use conflicts between different user groups. These intangible, between-group conflicts appear to be the most complex types of conflict, encompassing other components of conflict.

Management Implications:

- Addressing conflicts exclusively at small, tangible scales may limit the effectiveness of conflict-resolution efforts, because many conflicts result from intangible differences. Wilderness managers dealing with subsistence issues need to look for issues transcending tangible conflicts as they endeavor to understand and manage local situations.
- Many social values conflicts, such as disputes concerning indigenous rights, are much larger than most managing agencies have the capability to effectively address. Creative ideas are needed to address these issues in the context of specific wilderness conflicts.
- Public-planning processes and joint projects between managing agencies and other organizations could be effective in developing strong relationships between agencies and user groups necessary to better understand and address differences in social values that lead to use conflicts.

Publications / Products:

- Kluwe, Joan. 2002. Understanding wilderness land use conflicts in Alaska and Finland. Moscow, ID: University of Idaho. 96 p. Dissertation.
- Kluwe, Joan; Krumpe, Edwin E. 2003. Interpersonal and societal aspects of use conflicts: A case study of wilderness in Alaska and Finland. International Journal of Wilderness. 9(3): 28-33.

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Subsistence and Recreational uses of Wilderness in Alaska: Fisherman in the Togiak Wilderness, upper left; Drying rack for fish, above; recreational salmon fisherman, lower left.

This summary prepared by N. Queener 12/04.