Interpersonal and Societal Aspects of Use Conflicts

A Case Study of Wilderness in Alaska and Finland

BY JOAN KLUWE and EDWIN E. KRUMPE

Abstract: Wilderness conflicts in Finland and Alaska are multifaceted, with recreation uses increasingly conflicting with subsistence activities. To investigate these conflicts, over 70 interviews were conducted with subsistence users, representatives from guide companies, local residents, land managers, and nongovernmental organizations in Alaska and Finland. While goal interference and scarcity of resources are factors in many conflicts, social and cultural factors (e.g., traditional values and rights issues) play important roles too. Conflicts that appear at first to be direct and tangible may be symptoms of underlying societal, judicial, and philosophical conflicts.

Introduction

Rural people in Alaska and Finland exhibit strong ties to the land, including legally designated wilderness areas, for subsistence purposes. These traditional activities reflect intricate relationships between humans and the environment (Endter-Wada 1996; VanZee et al. 1994). Similarities in relationships between the people and lands of the far north include contemporary and historic conflicts between urban and rural people, conflicts between indigenous and nonindigenous people, and conflicts between subsistence and recreation activities. The overall goal of this project was to identify components of land use conflicts in Alaska and Finland wilderness and to examine how those components interact to create the conflict situations.

Subsistence and Wilderness

Subsistence activities include fishing, hunting, gathering, and herding animals (particularly reindeer in Finland), and, generally, traditional cultural practices, traditional activities for sustaining life, or traditional occupations that provide a minimal livelihood. Subsistence activities typically rely on natural resources, such as land and water, and the animals and plants they contain.

Subsistence uses have long occurred within and adjacent to legally designated wilderness in both Alaska and Finland (Aikio and Aikio 1989; Endter-Wada 1996). In both locations, indigenous and nonindigenous people actively engage in subsistence lifestyles, predominantly based from rural communities. In both locations there are perceived threats to the continuance of subsistence lifestyles, including threats to land and natural systems, threats to a continuance of culture, and threats to rights of access and use.

Article coauthor Joan Kluwe above the Kanektok River in southwest Alaska. Photo by Larry Barnes.

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(PEER REVIEWED)

Alaska and Finland have relatively new wilderness legislation. Erämaalaki (The Act on Wilderness Reserves) was passed in Finland in 1991; it established 12 wilderness reserves in northern Finland, all north of the Arctic Circle. The 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act established several special provisions for Alaska wilderness, distinctly different from the 1964 Wilderness Act. In both cases, legislation was influenced by local demand for continued mechanized access to areas traditionally used for subsistence. In both areas, snowmobiles and airplanes were allowed, while Alaska also permitted motorboat access and Finland permitted all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) within wilderness. Structures, such as cabins, were allowed in both Alaska's and Finland's wildernesses for various uses, including public recreation. Both pieces of legislation also acknowledged and allowed recreation and tourism uses. In many respects, wilderness policy in Alaska aligns more readily with wilderness policy in Finland than with much of the rest of the United States, as many of the above-mentioned uses have been prohibited elsewhere by the 1964 Wilderness Act. Subsistence activities are not a predominant use in wilderness in the lower 48 states (VanZee et al. 1994).

This study focused on the northwest arm of Finland and southwest Alaska between 1999 and 2001. In Finland, people near Käsivarsi and Pöyrisjärvi wildernesses were interviewed in several communities. Both wildernesses support subsistence uses, particularly reindeer herding, though Käsivarsi wilderness has more recreation use. Near the Togiak Wilderness within the Togiak National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska, people in three nearby communities were interviewed. The predominant subsistence uses in the area were fishing and hunting along the major river corridors.

Methods

While there has been substantial research on recreation conflicts (Kajala 1993; Schneider 2000), there has been little research on conflicts between subsistence and recreation activities (Kajala and Watson 1997; Wolfe 1988). Recreation conflict studies historically focused on human behaviors that interfere with recreation goals, and only more recently on social value conflicts (Vaske et al. 1995). While goal interference is a factor in many conflicts, social and cultural issues often go unaddressed.

Snowball sampling with multiple origins (i.e., interviewees are asked to nominate additional sources of information) was used to identify key informants on conflicts (Miles and Huberman 1994). Semidirected interviews were conducted with individuals, interest groups, community representatives, and representatives from managing/regulatory agencies. Interviews were conducted with people having a variety of perspectives concerning conflicts between subsistence

Figure 1—Larry Barnes practicing catch and release fishing on the Kanektok River. Photo by Joan Kluwe.

and recreation uses: (1) local residents and community representatives who were familiar with subsistence uses, traditional lifestyles, and contemporary uses of wilderness resources; (2) representatives from tourism businesses familiar with past and present recreation uses in the area (e.g., dog safari and sport fishing companies); and (3) representatives from managing or regulatory agencies familiar with policy

Figure 2—Subsistence anglers work with their net in the Kanektok River. Photo by Joan Kluwe.

Table 1—Examples of Components of Conflict.		
	Tangible Conflict	**Intangible Conflict**
Micro level	Interpersonal/intergroup conflict Subsistence vs. recreation Reindeer herding vs. dog mushing Subsistence fishing vs. sport fishing	Social value conflict Clash of value systems Nonlocals don't understand or respect traditional ways.
Macro level	Societal level interpersonal/ intergroup conflict Conflict with agencies Commercial permit administration	Societal level value conflict Rights issues Land access Decision making Self-determination

related to subsistence regulations and administrative aspects of wilderness.

Interview questions focused on types of subsistence and recreation uses occurring, perceptions of the types of conflict occurrences, who had been involved in conflicts, changes in conflicts, and roles in conflict situations. Interviews were tape-recorded as permitted by the respondent and the interview location. While the majority of the interviews were conducted in English, Yup'ik and Finnish translators were used during several interviews in Alaska and Finland, respectively. The translators were local residents familiar with the respondents and the local area. The translators in Finland were social researchers or students familiar with qualitative research methods.

In the standard process of qualitative research (Marshall and Rossman 1999; Miles and Huberman 1994), data collection and analysis occurred concurrently. An open coding process (Strauss and Corbin 1998) was used to identify phenomena and group phenomena into categories. As concepts and patterns emerged from the coding process, they were compared with concepts from secondary sources of information. For example, a pattern found from a personal interview could be sought in other interviews as well as in contemporary media. As patterns were discounted and confirmed, relationships in the data were identified.

Results

Interview participants identified a variety of groups as having a stake in the conflicts. Consistent with the human propensity to categorize (Tajfel and Turner 1986), these were often identified as between-group conflicts (us versus them). From this information, five dichotomies of conflicting groups were identified: local/nonlocal, rural/urban, indigenous/nonindigenous, national/foreigner, and manager/citizen. For example, conflicts were identified between local indigenous groups and local non-indigenous groups.

Between-group conflicts could be classified along axes of tangibility and social scale (see Table 1). Tangible conflicts have specific, observable episodes or events that create antago-

nism, such as when a recreational dog musher disturbs reindeer herded together for subsistence purposes. Intangible conflicts may or may not encompass tangible events; regardless, they involve differences in values or ethics—that is, an intangible dimension. The disturbing noise created by the dog musher may not be viewed merely as inconsiderate, but as violating an ethic or value. Along the societal axis, *micro* refers to an interpersonal or intergroup level, and *macro* refers to broader societal levels, including societal institutions. Some of these conflicts seem to fit within prevailing typologies (e.g., Jacob and Schreyer 1980; Vaske et al. 1995), while others do not. Thus, this typology encompasses and expands upon former conflict research.

Tangible Conflict—Micro Level

In Finland, there were asymmetrical conflicts between subsistence reindeer herders and recreational users, including dog mushers and snowmobilers. Reindeer herders were disturbed by recreationists, but recreationists were not particularly disturbed by reindeer herders. Reindeer herders felt that sled dogs and snowmobiles spooked the reindeer

Figure 3—Midwinter light on the northwestern Finnish landscape. Photo by Joan Kluwe.

herds, dispersing the herds and rendering weeks of herding useless.

Intangible Conflict—Micro Level

Subsistence users in Alaska and Finland felt that outsiders as a group did not understand or respect traditional ways of life. For example, Yup'ik traditions include respect for animals as sentient beings (Wolfe 1988). If an animal offers itself to be taken for food, the animal is to be respected, taken, eaten, and all parts used. In contrast, the highest ethic of sport fishing includes catch-and-release practices, returning the fish to the water so as to not impact the fishing resource (Hummel and Foster 1986). The two ethics are perceived to be in opposition to each other. A common Yup'ik view is that the sport anglers are disrespecting the animal's spirit. Thus, in addition to the immediate, tangible conflict, there is an important intangible dimension. The conflict is manifested in actual interpersonal interactions (i.e., at the micro level).

Tangible Conflict—Macro Level

In Alaska and Finland, conflict involving the management agency was identified regarding the number of recreational users permitted in an area, particularly the number of commercial use permits available. Generally, in both countries, local people did not want more commercial or recreational users, whereas the other groups wanted more access. These are tangible conflicts because the permits are commodities or assets that could be exchanged or assigned value. Managing agencies have the power to determine uses and use levels on public lands (rights to access). While public land agencies have been making large steps to involve local citizens and to incorporate public comment in the planning processes (Daniels and Walker 2001; Loikkanen et al. 1999), there were still many people who felt their voices were not heard or were later ignored by the agencies. Conversely, the agency representatives felt that some of the issues raised by the public were not merely beyond the scope of the planning process, but beyond the present management authority of the agency. These types of conflicts focusing on how stakeholder groups contain different intangible values and the differences between the public sector and management (Allen and Gould 1986; Shindler 1999).

Intangible Conflict—Macro Level

Rights to access, rights to decision making, and rights to self-determination emerged as a societal level of conflict and are considered intangible because they focus on broad philosophical issues rather than identifiable events. The participants in these conflicts were largely, but not exclusively, aligned by regional and ethnic identities. The conflicts transcended agencies and were directed at higher levels of government, such as national legislatures or global organizations. For

Figure 4—Recreational snowmobilers enjoy the spring weather in northwest Finland. Photo by Teppo Loikkanen.

example, in both Alaska and Finland local indigenous interviewees discussed the possibilities for Native sovereignty. They felt the existing ownership and management schemes were not valid—that the indigenous people were the rightful owners of the land. Questions were raised by the interviewees regarding who has the right to act as leader or as participant in the planning processes.

Conclusions

It is difficult to neatly separate the components of conflict. All four components, or some combination thereof, may characterize an individual's position. Not all conflicts will display all

Figure 5—Reindeer are fundamental to subsistence lifestyles in northwest Finland. Photo by Joan Kluwe.

components. However, complex conflicts such as intangible conflicts at the macro level may embody all of the other components of conflict. For example, a debate concerning rights to ownership may include moral issues regarding oppression and domination as well as examples of past tangible events that illustrate oppression and domination on an individual or societal level.

These four components of conflict have direct implications for resource managers. Tangible conflicts at the micro level have been extensively addressed by researchers. As a result, agencies have been able to address direct conflicts between groups, where such conflicts involve direct interaction among people with little symbolic conflict. For example, classic management techniques such as zoning (Haas et al. 1987) can separate incompatible groups or draw together compatible uses, thereby alleviating tangible conflict.

Figure 6—Finnish reindeer herders work on the fall round-up. Photo by Joan Kluwe.

Resource managers have often focused on tangible conflicts at the macro level, such as those concerning allocation of scarce resources. Planning tools such as the Limits of Acceptable Change (Stankey et al. 1985) have assisted managers in addressing some of the allocation questions (and their ethical implications) with a broader lens than zoning or carrying capacity determinations allowed (Graefe et al. 1984).

Social value differences have also been addressed in a variety of ways in recent years. The micro level has been examined in recreation research (Vaske et al. 1995), focusing on value differences between groups with different orientations. Education programs have been suggested to increase understanding of conflicting values as has segregating user groups by zoning to decrease potential direct encounters.

Rights to access, rights to decision making, and rights to self-determination are intangible macro-level social values that underlie many land use conflicts in wilderness in Alaska and Finland (Kluwe 2002). These appear to be the most complex types of conflict, often encompassing other components of conflict.

Some techniques of investigating wilderness conflict may not reveal all dimensions of conflict. If someone mentions a tangible or micro-level conflict, one must probe into whether the conflict has deeper philosophical or societal roots. Some issue-driven management processes may be limited by directing efforts toward concrete, trackable actions, addressing conflicts exclusively at the micro tangible level.

Macro-level social value conflicts, including rights issues, are intractable because they are much larger than most managing agencies have the capability to effectively address. Some of the more fundamental rights questions have been pursued in global forums, such as the United Nations Human Rights Council, but individual nations continue to struggle with indigenous rights issues (Kirsch 2001). Creative ideas are needed to begin to address these conflicts in the context of specific subsistence versus recreation conflicts in wilderness.

Managers may need to expand beyond the confines of agency mandates and frameworks to consider some of the underlying components of conflict rather than merely targeting the more readily observable tangible conflicts. Acknowledging these larger societal conflicts more accurately represents actual conflict contexts and brings voice to the larger issues—possibly freeing managers and citizens to then focus attention on the more tangible issues. Managers could establish mechanisms with other agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and tribal organizations to address the intangible social and philosophical issues. Such forums as working groups, advisory councils, and joint projects could be effective in developing strong relationships to understand and address these intangible conflicts.

In addition, indigenous rights groups and others (e.g., Alcorn 1993; Lane 2001) have suggested shifting to a comanagement structure to increase local voices in natural resource issues, enhance local self-determination, and address conflict at a societal level. Wilderness designation, or other protected area status, has been overlaid on historic indigenous territories. These designations have strong implications for future management of natural resources. Micro-level tangible conflicts have been easier to address in public planning processes; however, societal, judicial, and philosophical questions often remain as underlying factors. Wilderness managers dealing with subsistence issues need to look

for issues transcending tangible conflicts as they endeavor to understand and manage local situations. ❧

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From MARAFA article on page 42

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