

# The Virtues of Localism and Arctic Wilderness Politics

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**Abstract**—An analysis of co-managing structures and land use issues in three case studies of arctic wilderness politics shows that more formal and informal power sharing by government officials with local people results in less conflict. Greater input and control by nearby communities may also help to protect wilderness ecosystems and traditional values of northern cultures. Especially for hunting and gathering societies, agency managers should work more closely with rural communities to realize the local virtues of vested interests, traditional knowledge, and voluntary compliance. But the success of co-managing renewable resources in arctic wilderness areas is limited by the type of land use issues active in policy debates and the capacity of public agencies to build a history of cooperative relations.

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This paper focuses on ways to lessen resource use conflicts between rural arctic residents with hunting and gathering traditions and national government agencies that manage designated wilderness areas. It is a problem with a global context, and concern has been growing for decades over the place of indigenous people in rural communities living close to national parks and other protected natural areas (Hough 1988; Stevens 1997). In the nineteenth century, the United States established a protectionist model of national parks to exclude all people except tourists as visitors. Local residents were not permitted to live inside legal boundaries or to continue traditional uses of renewable resources. The modern governments of some developing countries have adopted this model, forcing local residents to leave newly established parks and denying them customary uses of natural resources (Harmon 1987). The Ik and the forced loss of their homeland in northeastern Uganda is a tragic example of this ethically unfair and socially harmful policy (Turnbull 1972).

The circumpolar North has had its share of troubled relations between rural communities and southern-based national governments over managing lands legally designated as wilderness. One explanation for this is that some public lands were classified as protected natural areas without the consent or participation of affected local people. Another is that the land use rules for managing wilderness areas were designed by outsiders to exclude the traditional users of renewable resources. A third reason is that either weak

or no institutional forms were established by statute and regulation to take input from local residents when deciding how best to manage national parks to protect ecosystems and realize other policy goals.

In recent decades some national governments in the circumpolar North have passed laws to establish cooperative arrangements with local communities for managing wilderness areas. In 1980, the U.S. Congress passed the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (P.L. 96-487). Title VIII established subsistence resource commissions for local communities to work with the National Park Service (NPS) in managing renewable resources on newly created wilderness areas. In 1984, the Canadian Parliament enacted the Western Arctic Claims Settlement Act, also known as the Inuvialuit Final Agreement (IFA). It established a co-management regime of five boards, bringing together officials in the territorial and national governments and Inuvialuit representatives living in local communities. In 1991, the Finnish Parliament passed the Act on Wilderness Reserves (Erämaalaki). The Finnish Forest and Park Service (Metsähallitus) had already established citizen advisory councils for local input on state land use issues in Finnish Lapland, and they began discussing how to manage the new wilderness areas. These national laws sought to protect the natural and cultural heritage of different regions in the circumpolar North.

Castro and Nielsen (2001) note there is a trend in the co-management literature to define the concept in ways that include a variety of institutional forms and levels of authority. Berkes and others (1991:12) define it as “the sharing of power and responsibility between the government and local resource users.” Berkes (1994) distinguishes between local-level and state-level systems for managing natural resources in the Canadian arctic. He describes local-level systems as having decentralized power, traditional knowledge and resource users who self-enforce informal rules. A shift of political control to the state-level system in the last century is marked by centralized power, scientific knowledge, and external authorities who enforce bureaucratic rules. Berkes (1994) notes federal managers are making greater co-managing efforts to merge state-level and local-level systems and offers a participatory model to assess power sharing interactions between the two systems.

This paper discusses the findings of a study of ways to reduce political conflict between agency managers and local resource users (Gladden 2005). An analysis of three cases found that more power sharing in co-managing bodies reduces conflict over land use issues. A second finding was that conflicts over core values in land use debates are usually not amenable to compromise efforts through any form of a co-managing institution. A last finding was that informal power sharing by agencies in efforts to cultivate

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In: Watson, Alan; Sproull, Janet; Dean, Liese, comps. 2007. Science and stewardship to protect and sustain wilderness values: eighth World Wilderness Congress symposium: September 30–October 6, 2005; Anchorage, AK. Proceedings RMRS-P-49. Fort Collins, CO: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station.

cooperation and trust helps in an earlier detection and containment of conflict. Wilderness managers should find it in their interest to share more decision making power with co-managing boards for three reasons. This argument is based on the local virtues of vested interests, traditional knowledge, and voluntary compliance.

## The Research Project

Does more cooperative management between local communities and national wilderness agencies reduce political conflict over resource use issues? Can co-managing institutions better assist public managers to protect natural areas and provide subsistence opportunities for traditional hunters and gatherers? To investigate these questions I did a study of ways to reduce land use conflicts in arctic wilderness areas (Gladden 2005). My hypothesis was that more power sharing results in less political conflict and I chose three arctic wilderness areas in Canada, Finland, and the United States: (1) Ivvavik National Park (INP) in the Yukon Territory, (2) Hammastunturi Wilderness Reserve (HWR) in Finnish Lapland, and (3) Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve (GAAR) in Alaska. The cases were chosen because the areas were located above the Arctic Circle and designated as wilderness by acts of national legislatures. They had rural residents who made traditional use of renewable resources and who were represented on legally established co-managing boards. My research findings are specific to the three case studies, but may also offer insights into how to reduce conflict and better protect the natural and cultural values of arctic wilderness areas.

An important part of the fieldwork was locating documents and conducting 54 interviews with wilderness managers, co-managing board members, and leaders of environmental groups. I used semi-structured interviews, asking questions to gain information on resource use issues and the intensity of value conflicts. Conflict in land use issues for each case was categorized as low, moderate, or high from the perspective of the interviewee. The first two levels indicated secondary value conflicts wilderness managers and local users believed they could work out together. I ranked an issue as primary (high) in conflict over core values if most interviewees saw it as charged with negative politics and mostly closed to a dialogue of compromise. These types of issues were similar to the intangible values inherent in larger cultural and philosophical questions (Kluwe and Krumpke 2003).

To study power sharing in the co-managing bodies, I did interviews and located documents to evaluate levels of participation by local resource users. The levels were little input (informing), moderate input (consulting), and high input (partnering), based on a model explained by Berkes (1994). I distinguished between formal and informal types of power sharing in co-managing bodies. The first looked at legal authority and institutional design and the second at existing levels of mutual trust and cooperation between local board members and agency officials. I compared the three cases by applying the qualitative measures of conflict intensity and power sharing to evaluate the effect of local participation through co-managing boards on political conflict.

## Findings of the Study

There were three major findings from an analysis of the three cases of arctic wilderness politics. The first from the case in Canada was that a high level of formal power sharing by government agencies with local resource users through co-managing boards results in less political conflict. By legislative design it had the strongest form of cooperative management of the three cases and I ranked it at the partnering level of power sharing. In 1984, the Inuvialuit Final Agreement (IFA) set up a regime of five institutions to co-manage lands and waters in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region, including Ivvavik National Park (INP). For example, Section 12 (56) of the IFA directs the Wildlife Management Advisory Committee (North Slope) to advise Canadian government ministers on wildlife policy issues, prepare a wildlife conservation plan, and decide harvesting quotas for game animals. The IFA also authorizes the committee to approve a park management plan before it can be sent to the ministerial level, giving it additional leverage in the political arena (East 1991). Doubleday (1989) argues the IFA slightly favors the government side of the power equation in that national ministers make the final decisions. But she notes the IFA gives the Inuvialuit a strong legal base to participate in a public policy process where the outcomes have direct impacts on their lives.

I assessed the level of value conflict in INP over land use issues between local people and wilderness managers as low. The disputes were over secondary values, given that those with conflicts expressed a willingness to discuss alternatives and work out solutions. One issue between local user groups and agency managers was over the expanding range of musk oxen and a concern that it may displace the caribou Inuvialuit hunters prefer to harvest (Snow 2003). Another was that some locals argue Parks Canada should do more to provide economic opportunities for Inuvialuit beneficiaries through nature tourism (Fehr 2003). For example, no permit holders who operate commercial float trips on the Firth River are IFA beneficiaries. The agency is studying these issues and there is an open policy dialogue on the best way to resolve resource use conflicts to the satisfaction of all parties.

One reason to explain low value conflict is that local users and park managers appear to share the same policy goals of protecting ecological and subsistence values. Earlier in the history of the park, agency managers were highly protectionist and wanted to govern uses based on standards of wilderness purism (McLean 2003). The culture of INP managers has shifted to consider the needs and concerns of local resource users. Another way to account for levels of low conflict is that after nearly two decades of operation of the IFA, the members of the co-managing bodies have evolved a positive climate of politics resistant to the outbreak of core value conflicts. A third possibility is the Canadian government was able to preempt future outbreaks of core value conflicts with a land claims settlement in 1984.

A second major finding, from the Finnish case, is that land use conflicts driven by core value disputes strongly resist efforts at compromise between local users and agency managers. I rated the amount of power sharing as weak consulting in that local citizens serving on the co-managing body had the least amount of legal or formal power to shape decisions for

managing an arctic wilderness area. The Finnish case also had the highest amount of political conflict but the issues the advisory board confronted were about political collisions over core or primary values. The Hammastunturi Wilderness Reserve (HWR) is managed by the Natural Heritage Services and the co-managing body is the Metsähallitus Advisory Committee for Inari Municipality. An agency official chairs the committee and the Inari Municipal Council, Sodankylä Municipal Council and Finnish Sami Parliament appoint members who serve in a strictly advisory capacity. The agency uses it as a forum to gain perspectives on issues from the viewpoint of local communities and to circulate information about management plans and actions (Kajala 2003). The committee holds formal meetings twice a year and many informal interactions occur, such as field trips and other forms of contact.

I rated the overall level of conflict in HWR over resource use issues between particular local user groups and Metsähallitus as high. The overarching political issue is a core value conflict over who either owns or controls Finnish Lapland and has power to make decisions for land uses. The Finnish Sami Parliament has posed these basic questions for public debate and the Helsinki government has not yet responded to them with clear policy declarations. As a result, Sami land claims and rights overshadow most other resource use issues on state lands (Saarinen 2003). For example, Sami leaders oppose agency plans to use primitive methods for logging two tracts of old growth forest in HWR, arguing this will harm the economic and cultural values of Sami reindeer herders. These stands provide arboreal lichen for winter forage and reindeer herding serves as an iconic symbol of traditional Sami culture. The issue of primitive logging in HWR also challenges a core value of environmental groups who maintain that any commercial forestry is incompatible with a philosophy of wilderness (Leskelä 2003). However, the Inari Municipal Council in 2003 went on record by a majority vote to support primitive logging in the wilderness reserve as a source of jobs and income for local people (Niemelä 2003). It wanted the agency to manage the area by finding a balance between logging, herding and tourism, noting that the 1991 law provides for careful logging in the Hammastunturi Wilderness Reserve.

The Finnish case shows the effect of core value conflicts on land use issues, and in this politically volatile climate it is unlikely any restructuring of power sharing arrangements to cooperatively manage the wilderness area will lessen differences. The co-managing board in the Finnish case differs from the other two cases because it represents several interests beyond those mostly concerned with hunting and gathering as subsistence activities. This makes it more difficult for the agency to work out land use conflicts within its own statutory constraints because those serving on the board have opposed positions on issues. The case in Finland shows that heterogeneous land use values in local communities may decrease the capacity of co-managing bodies to work out conflicts over issues with wilderness managers.

A third and last major finding of the study is that more informal power sharing helps to explain why some co-managing institutions are more effective than others. An informal sharing of power is critical for building trust between managing agencies and local residents, and in this regard it

may also serve as a buffer of good will to prevent core value conflicts. This finding is drawn mostly from the United States case, but there is evidence to support it in the other cases. I rated the co-managing body in the Alaska case study of arctic wilderness politics as having a strong consulting level of power sharing with the National Park Service (NPS). This rating was based largely on efforts by NPS officials to informally share power for making decisions with the Subsistence Resource Commission (SRC) for Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve (GAAR). Although the members of the SRC represent several ethnic groups spread over a wide geography, they share a remarkable degree of consensus on the issues. One reason for this is that they share a common set of values oriented around respecting the land and desiring to protect a subsistence way of life (Ulvi 2004).

I found the level of conflict over land use values in GAAR between the NPS and local communities with residents using park resources to be moderate. This evaluation was based largely on conflict between some air taxi pilots in Bettles and the agency over efforts to regulate recreational uses in the park (Pendergrast 2004). But the SRC has good working relations with agency officials and sees the managers as sharing its goals to protect the natural and cultural values of the park (Simon 2004). The SRC realizes that some resource issues threatening subsistence use are beyond the jurisdictional control of the NPS. For example, a bill has been introduced in the Alaska State Legislature to open the Dalton Highway Corridor to all-terrain-vehicle use near the eastern boundary of GAAR. There are also efforts to explore for oil and gas deposits in the northern foothills of the Brooks Range along the northern boundary of the park (Reakoff 2004).

The early history of relations between the SRC and the NPS was charged with conflict, when the agency appeared to view subsistence as a threat to the wilderness values of the park (Schwarber 2004). New GAAR officials were needed to shift the culture of the agency and begin working cooperatively with the SRC to support subsistence activities in the park. The NPS began to ask how it could protect the wilderness character of the park and also provide rural residents with subsistence opportunities. Today the SRC and the NPS appear to agree on the value of the co-managing body to identify and discuss resource use issues at early stages of conflict. The Alaska case shows that formal legal arrangements may be less important to the success of co-managing land uses than the informal element of power sharing founded on building a history of mutual trust and cooperative relations.

## The Virtues of Localism ---

Based on an analysis of the case studies, there are three reasons why wilderness managers should support more power sharing with rural residents who practice modified traditions of local resource use: (1) vested interests, (2) traditional knowledge, and (3) voluntary compliance. These are the virtues of localism, where a virtue is defined as a favorable trait of character and localism refers to a special attachment people have to where they live and to their capacity to be good stewards of the land. Rural residents have a vested interest in protecting the ecological quality of

the geography on which they depend for hunting and other uses. A second virtue of rural residents is their ability to practice traditional knowledge as a set of skills enabling them to harvest renewable resources in sustainable ways. A last virtue is that local people who help to make the policy decisions they will be governed by are more likely to obey those rules on a voluntary basis.

In this paper, localism refers to any rural community that displays four criteria: (1) a relatively small and stable population, (2) depends significantly on local resources for economic needs, (3) uses traditional knowledge to manage environmental resources, and (4) has a meaningful amount of political control over a geographical area. Societies with these characteristics have the capability to manage renewable resources in sustainable ways. Arctic communities with hunting, fishing, gathering and herding traditions meet some or all of these criteria, even if not in an ideal or paradigm form. The research literature on common pool resources (Agrawal and Ostrom 2001; Ostrom 1990; Pinkerton 1989) uses similar constructs to explain why some small rural societies are able to manage natural resources in ecologically sustainable ways and others are not.

## Vested Interests

The first reason why agency managers should partner with local people through cooperative institutions is that subsistence users have a long-term interest in protecting the land health of arctic wilderness areas. Rural residents with economic traditions such as hunting and gathering know the importance of natural and healthy ecosystems to their lives. They realize that over-harvesting wildlife populations and degrading habitats threaten to destroy the economic basis of their community. Based on this insight, the traditional resource use behavior of rural residents fits well with agency goals to protect the naturalness of wilderness ecosystems.

The Inuvialuit who negotiated the IFA with the Canadian government wanted to establish Ivvavik National Park (INP) as a means to prevent the construction of an oil or gas pipeline across the North Slope of the Yukon Territory into the Mackenzie River Valley. The reason was to protect the habitat of the Porcupine Caribou Herd as a critical resource for subsistence uses. Placing this much land off limits to any form of industrial development is a clear sign of a genuine desire to protect the natural environment of the wilderness park. Opposition by the Finnish Sami Parliament to any logging of old growth forest in Hammastunturi Wilderness Reserve (HWR) symbolizes the idea of protecting natural areas so that reindeer herders may continue a traditional use. In the past, arboreal lichen in old growth trees was important late winter forage for reindeer. However, most ancient forest lands in Finnish Lapland have been cut and reindeer herders cannot now realistically count on arboreal lichen as a source of forage. In Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve (GAAR), local hunters in Wiseman and other rural communities have an interest in maintaining the genetic quality of moose populations. Sport hunters want to harvest the largest bulls as trophies and some locals argue that over time this may result in a smaller body size and less ability to survive deep snow winters (Reakoff 2004). Unlike sport hunters, subsistence users depend on natural

and healthy moose populations in the local areas where they live for the long term.

## Traditional Knowledge

Sharing local expertise on land use problems associated with sustaining the use of renewable resources is a second reason why more local input and control makes sense for agencies managing arctic wilderness areas. Traditional knowledge can provide valuable information on how to better protect natural areas for their ecological and subsistence values (Sherry and Myers 2002). Aboriginal societies have adapted to often harsh arctic conditions for centuries and this is a good measure of their economic and cultural robustness. It suggests arctic cultures have important things to teach newcomers about how to adapt to changing environmental conditions. Traditional knowledge is a specific set of practical skills for the sustainable use of natural resources and a worldview integrating humans with the natural world. This cultural way of seeing the place of humans in the world can help in constructing a larger environmental ethic to realign modernity with nature.

In the case study for Canada, participation by rural residents who share traditional knowledge insights results in an improved making of land use decisions. For example, the Environmental Impact Screening Committee is an IFA co-managing body that approves or refers for final assessment and review, proposals for economic development and other types of projects. It values the input gained from Inuvialuit members who can provide the committee with detailed information about the natural conditions of a proposed project area (Klassen 2003). The Finnish case also provides evidence of the value of traditional knowledge for wilderness managers to help protect natural and cultural values. The local users of renewable resources are experts on where the best places are to hunt, fish and gather wild resources. Metsähallitus could use this information through its advisory body to better protect the local resource use traditions of Sami residents (Aikio 2003). The case in Alaska shows that SRC members can provide the NPS and other government agencies with valuable information on the general health of local ungulate populations and their habitat conditions (Reakoff 2004). They are hunters and have frequent contact with other subsistence hunters who live as neighbors in their rural communities.

## Voluntary Compliance

If local people help to approve land use rules through co-managing institutions they are more likely to comply with those rules. This is important, given the vast and remote land areas of many arctic wilderness areas. Officers of the law cannot always be at the right place to enforce rules governing uses of natural resources. It is in the interest of wilderness managers to have local resource users voluntarily comply with land use rules. If they have meaningful input into the policy making process two results may be anticipated. Local people will be able to get more of what they want written into policy rules by arguing for their positions on the issues. They will also be inclined to accept the framework of a rule-making system that gives them a fair measure of control over policy outputs. A political theory of democracy argues

those closest to a problem often are the most affected by a policy outcome and have the most detailed knowledge about the nature of the issue (Dahl 2000). These two points help to justify the cooperative management of arctic wilderness areas. They suggest that rural communities with self-governing capacities have a key role to play in the making of resource use decisions.

The case study in Canada provides a model for a vigorous regime of co-managing institutions that overlap authority between local, territorial, and national levels of interest. This regime provides local people with meaningful input and control over land use policy in the park and elsewhere in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region. As a result, the subsistence values of local communities are reflected in agency policy outputs and compliance with the rules by rural residents is more likely. Although feelings are often intense in the Finnish case and the co-managing body is strictly advisory to Metsähallitus, I found little evidence of rule violations in the wilderness reserve. The ideological dispute over land claims and political rights have yet to provoke any larger acts of civil disobedience. The disposition of feelings on both sides of the conflict over core values and the direction of future events are unknown. In the Alaska case, a high level of mutual trust and cooperation between the SRC and the NPS suggests a desire by the agency to fully include local communities in its decision making process. It is more likely local residents who help to make the rules for managing GAAR will freely comply with them, and may even help to enforce them.

## Acknowledgments

This material is based on work supported by the National Science Foundation under grant award #0228665. Any opinions and findings expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation. I also wish to thank the Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute for support while on sabbatical leave from the University of Alaska, Fairbanks.

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