

# WILDERNESS—DIFFERENT CULTURES, DIFFERENT RESEARCH NEEDS

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## *Comparing Conflict Research Needs in Finland and the United States*

BY LIISA KAJALA AND ALAN E. WATSON

**Abstract:** Among the highest priorities identified for wilderness management and research in Finland is the conflict between different wilderness interest groups. Finland's unique land use history is reflected in its wilderness legislation. A significant difference between U.S. and Finland wilderness issues is how each has prioritized research on conflict issues. In Finland, conflict occurs between recreationists coming from distant locations and local people with local subsistence orientations toward the area, whereas in the United States, the most common conflict that has been studied, and managers struggle to address, is between members of different types of recreation groups. These differences in focus on wilderness conflict have important implications for future research.

**T**HE NEWLY DRAFTED FINNISH WILDERNESS RESEARCH PROGRAM (FWRP) cited conflicts between different interest groups (e.g., reindeer herding, forestry, recreation, mining, fishing, and hunting) as one of the highest priorities for research in the Finnish wilderness system (Sippola, et al. 1995). Since a major goal of the FWRP is to develop international cooperation in examining priority wilderness issues, in this paper we (1) compare and contrast the Finnish wilderness system with the older wilderness protection system in the United States, in order to (2) seek guidance for wilderness conflict research in Finland.

### A Comparison of the Two Wilderness Systems

The U.S. National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) was established in 1964, but the Finnish Wilderness Act was not passed until 1991 (Erämaalaki 1991). There has also been research on conflicts between wilderness recreationists in the United States for several decades. For example, there were early studies of conflict between canoeists and motor boaters in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area in Minnesota (Lucas 1964), a study of the historical and continuing conflict between hikers and horse users across the United States (Watson and Kajala 1995), and more recent research on conflicts between nontraditional users, such as llama packers, and other recreation visitors (Blahna, et al. 1995). While there has been a recent effort to more deeply explore the contributors to recreation conflict in additional recreation contexts, there is also a challenge to expand this research beyond on-site, interpersonal recreation conflict issues (Watson 1995).

The different land use histories and wilderness legislation lead to several differences between the Finland and the U.S. wilderness systems, with implications for differences in conflict research needs. The twelve existing Finnish wilderness areas

were established, primarily in the remote north, "to preserve the wilderness character of the areas, to protect the Sami culture and the traditional subsistence use of the areas, and to enhance possibilities for multiple-use of nature" (Erämaalaki 1991). Thus, Finnish wilderness areas are a transition type of nature protection area between national parks, other strict nature conservation areas, and commercial land (Tynys 1993). This allows the wildernesses to be large in their surface area, but on the other hand leaves the arena open for several controversies. For instance, small-scale logging operations are allowed in certain portions of some Finnish wilderness areas.

U.S. wildernesses were established to preserve areas "... where the Earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain ..." (U.S. Wilderness Act). Because of the more severe restriction on human presence in wilderness, the situation in the United States is quite different from Finland. U.S. wilderness areas are more strictly protected from human influence than are national parks, which in the United States usually include roads and commercial services. Therefore, in many cases wilderness areas have also been established within U.S. national parks, among other things to keep certain areas roadless. In Finland this kind of



Article coauthors Liisa Kajala (top) and Alan E. Watson (bottom).



**Snowmobiling is allowed on marked routes in Finnish wilderness areas. Locals are allowed to snowmobile outside marked routes. This picture is from the highest point in Finland, Halti, 1,328 meters above sea level in the Käsivarsi Wilderness. Photo by Arvo Olli.**

dual protection is not necessary because in the Finnish national parks, construction of new roads is generally prohibited and other uses are also more strictly controlled than in the Finnish wilderness areas.

Something similar to the legislatively protected wilderness areas within U.S. national parks exists in larger northern Finnish national parks. In Finland there are several management regions within

### **Comparing Use in the Two Wilderness Systems**

Because of the historical land use background and consequent legislation, a broader range of activities is allowed in Finnish than in American wilderness areas. In general, there is less nonlocal recreational use in Finnish wilderness areas than in U.S. areas. Because of their re-

Consequently, less regulation is also needed in these zones, thereby providing recreationists with a less regimented experience. This system is possible as long as only a few people are interested in going to these regions. In the United States it is sometimes quite the opposite; wildernesses within national parks are often very popular and use patterns are sometimes strictly controlled.

Because wildernesses in both countries tend to be located in harsher climates, recreational use is usually highly concentrated in relatively short seasons. For example, more than 80% of the recreational use of Käsivarsi Wilderness Area occurs in four months: April–May (46%) and July–August (36%) (Enojärvi 1996).

An apparent difference exists between users of the two systems in the level of dependence on human-created trails. Off-trail hiking appears to be more common in Finland than in the United States. This might be due to the fact that, for the most part, Finnish wildernesses are located in fairly easy hiking terrain and therefore there is little need to establish trails. In both countries, picking berries and mushrooms is popular and requires one to leave trails, but in the United States trails are more likely to access wilderness features such as lake basins, scenic vistas, and mountain streams. In Finland, people—especially foreign visitors who often find it difficult to orienteer in terrain without major landmarks—are beginning to express desires for more established trails.

In northernmost Finland, where all of the Finnish wilderness areas are located, local people depend heavily on wilderness areas for their traditional sources of livelihood (e.g., reindeer herding, hunting, fishing, and berry picking). Therefore, one of the main reasons for establishing these wilderness areas was to secure future access to these traditional resources. The native Sami culture is tied closely to reindeer herding and other nature-dependent sources of livelihood. Thus, these areas are of substantial importance to local people, not only economically, but socially and culturally too.

The Finnish Wilderness Act recognizes the value to local people of protecting these wild lands from uncontrolled development. To these people, however, there is not such a concept as “wilderness” as described in the legislation. This is especially the case with the Sami people, who historically have considered the wildlands as their home because they roamed these areas with reindeer herds. The local people traditionally just go “to the mountains” or “to the forests,” while “wilderness” is a more popular concept amongst nonlocal recreationists (Hallikainen 1993).

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each park, one of the most remote being called a wilderness zone. However, the reasons for administratively protecting these zones in Finland differ from the reasons for legislative protection within U.S. national parks. In Finland, the wilderness zones within national parks have been established in places with comparatively less recreational use and therefore more wildernesslike conditions prevail.

At more remote locations, the amount of single-day visits to Finnish wilderness areas remains low compared to the United States. On the other hand, Finnish national parks start right at the roadside and therefore get high day-use numbers. Thus, a couple of Finnish national parks with wilderness zones receive substantial recreational use, though most of it is single-day use.

In the United States, only recently have accurate perceptions of trends in human use of wilderness and user characteristics been documented. Recreation remains the largest use of wilderness (or at least the most studied/reported on) and the types of recreation activities pursued in wilderness have remained roughly the same for many years. Total recreational use of wilderness in the United States has steadily increased since passage of The Wilderness Act in 1964. Most wildernesses are experiencing growth in visitation, even though many experienced a period of declining use during the 1980s (Cole 1996). Visitors seek opportunities the wilderness offers to enjoy nature, solitude, and self-renewal. Wilderness managers and the public alike, however, are beginning to focus more on values beyond the purely recreational use of wilderness. What Americans value about wilderness, in addition to what they do in wilderness, should guide how it is described and managed. To date, most studies have focused on recreational use of wilderness, but now more interest is being displayed by scientists in studying relationships between humans and nature.

In the United States there was often local objection to establishing wildernesses because that would restrict logging or mining, important sources of revenue for many rural communities. Thus, some exceptions for mining as well as cattle grazing, airstrips, and irrigation water impoundments, were written into U.S. wilderness legislation to accommodate historic uses for some areas in the West.

More commonalities are found between Finland and Alaska. In Alaska, some aboriginal people live close to wilderness areas and conflicts between recreation and subsistence uses of wildland resources are a significant issue. Moreover, legislation that added Alaska wildlands to the NWPS allowed several exceptions to accommodate native people's dependence on these lands.

## Implications for Wilderness Conflict Research and Management

In Finnish wilderness areas, conflicts occur most often between recreationists and

local people with subsistence orientations toward the area. The fact that, generally, less recreation occurs in Finnish wilderness areas, reduces the potential for conflict between user groups. The U.S. wilderness legislation is much more restrictive of human presence than the Finnish one, thereby reducing the potential for some conflicts encountered in Finland. This reflects a basic difference between the Nordic and American land management cultures. The abundance of resources in the United States has led to more segregative land management practices, whereas Nordic countries, with a longer habitation history and smaller land base, have established a more integrative approach (Sievänen and Knopp 1992; Stankey 1995). The current trend in the United States, however, is toward more integrative approaches to natural resource management. The ecosystem management approach adopted by federal land management agencies and some private industries in the 1990s is a strong motivator for greater integration of science and management disciplines and implies a need for broader understanding of conflicting demands on all natural resources.

Some conflicts do occur between recreationists in Finland (Saarinen 1995), and this conflict needs research to direct management, but the greater problem is reports of recreationists disturbing traditional sources of livelihood and the reverse—traditional users' activities interfering with recreation pursuits (e.g., conflicts between skiers and snowmobiles operated by subsistence users in their work). Some recreationists question whether snowmobiles or All-Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) are appropriate. On the other hand, some reindeer herders are concerned about the relatively new appearance of recreational dog sledding in areas where it had not existed previously. They are afraid of the impact these dogs and this activity may have on their reindeer herds.

Consequently, in order to focus on the issues surrounding conflict in Finnish wilderness, research needs to be of a different scope than what it has traditionally been in the contiguous United States. An approach to studying conflict is needed that encompasses even the most indirect human conflict, such as the conflicts between reindeer herders and tourism entrepreneurs, and their associated differences of opinion about the desirability of promoting tourism in the region. For example, in Käsivarsi Wilderness Area and UK National Park in Finland these are important issues.

As conflict studies are developed in Finland, commonalities between the mixture of wilderness uses in Finland and Alaska should be kept in mind. Cooperative studies in Finland and Alaska could be particularly fruitful because they would be truly crosscultural, with several cultures involved, and not just international.

Research methodologies must be developed and tested to address the specific conflict issues in Finland. Watson (1995) has suggested that in conflict research only recently has there been an effort to look at social conflict, differentiating it from the more traditional interpersonal conflict issues. There is a need to understand and describe social conflict, values conflict, and social acceptability, yet we are still largely using psychometric measurement methods in most conflict studies.



Among Finnish recreationists it is becoming increasingly popular to access wilderness by nontraditional methods, such as by airplane. Photo by Teppo Loikkanen.

Research methods developed for studying the contribution of personal and social meaning differences to conflict (Brandenburg and Carroll 1994; Gibbons and Ruddell 1995; Williams 1993) may have particular application potential in the Finnish context. These studies are likely to be more qualitative, focusing less on recreation motivations and more on the relationships people have with the landscape.

In terms of selecting conflict management techniques, recent American research on the impacts different techniques have on visitor experiences (Asp, et al. 1996; McCool and Lime 1989) is likely to be important also in Finland. Traditionally, management options have

been described as direct or indirect based upon the levels of management presence, with the belief that the less visible management is, the less impact the technique has on visitor experiences. This impact has been recently measured and described as obtrusiveness. However, for some conflict situations it can be that more direct approaches to management may be the least obtrusive to those involved. This question remains to be addressed for situations involving diverse user groups such as in Finland wilderness. **IJW**

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