

Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute: Publication # 450

CITATION: Watson, Alan E. 2001. A Focus on Circumpolar North Wilderness Values. *International Journal of Wilderness*. 7(3): 34.

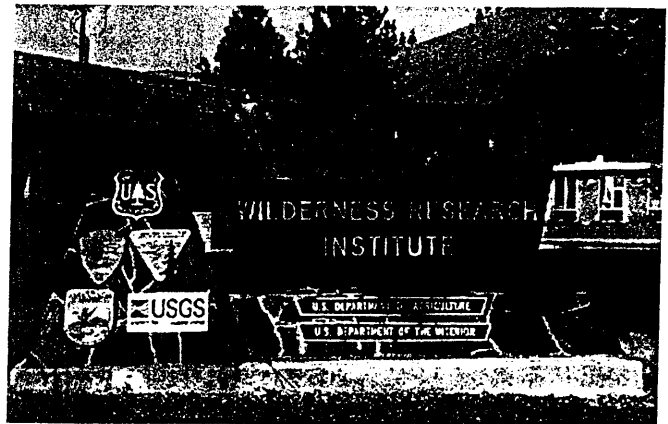
A Focus on Circumpolar North Wilderness Values

BY ALAN E. WATSON

What are the most important arctic and subarctic wilderness research topics for the next five years? In an effort to answer this question, a group of 80 scientists, state and federal managers, members of indigenous northern cultures, nongovernmental organization representatives, students, and wilderness users gathered from May 15 through 17, 2001, at the University of Alaska in Anchorage (UAA) to share information and plan for future collaboration on northern wilderness research issues. This meeting was co-chaired by Lilian Alessa of UAA and Alan Watson of the Leopold Institute, with sponsorship from the National Science Foundation (Office of Polar Programs), International Programs of the Forest Service, the Alaska Office of the US Fish & Wildlife Service, and the University of Montana's Wilderness Institute.

For three productive days, participants from Iceland, Canada, Norway, Finland, Russia, Denmark, and the United States defined the most serious threats and immediate opportunities to protect the values associated with wild places in the circumpolar North. They heard about the latest trends in tourism, efforts and needs to protect traditional relationships with nature, and increasing values associated with protection of unique arctic ecosystems. Participants then provided input on high priority information needs and the needs for advancement in research methods to address unique issues in the Arctic. Discussions were initiated on the priorities for education and how to accomplish them, as well as how to develop a forum, or working group, to continue the interdisciplinary and international dialogue.

Among the highest priority research topics identified was the need for better understanding of how to create awareness and appreciation of the divergent range of relationships people have with circumpolar North wilderness. Some of the relationships discussed include the perspectives of native people and their traditional relationships with wild places, the uninformed visitor, the nonvisiting public, the economic values associated with protection as wilderness, industrial develop-



ment values, personal growth opportunities, and those represented by legislation that establishes wilderness protection or protects wildness (e.g., U.S. Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act). The greatest need for research on threats to wilderness in the circumpolar North centers on energy resource development impacts and tourism promotion.

Abstracts from the presentations are posted at www.forestry.umat.edu/kiosk/seminars/circumpolar and submitted papers are being compiled into a book for publication in the near future. Important commitments were made by many participants to continue to work as a coordinated group to further share information and resources, coordinate research and advances in science methods, and work toward education of all interests about the many and sometimes conflicting values associated with the protection of wild places as wilderness. To assure the effectiveness of these future collaborative efforts in Alaska, it was generally agreed that industrial and commercial interests need to join current participants in a continuing dialogue focused on understanding the values and threats associated with wilderness protection. ♪

For more information contact LILIAN ALESSA, e-mail: lil@uaa.alaska.edu, or ALAN WATSON, e-mail: awatson@fs.fed.us.