

Linking Tourism and Conservation in the Arctic: What Should the Limits Be?

Juneau, Alaska

24-25 February 2001

Sponsored by

WWF Arctic Programme and

Alaska Wilderness and Recreational Tourism Association

Workshop Summary

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Introduction

The sixth annual workshop on Linking Tourism and Conservation in the Arctic was held in Juneau, Alaska on February 24-25, sponsored by the WWF International Arctic Programme (WWF-AP) and the Alaska Wilderness and Recreational Tourism Association (AWRTA). The purpose of the workshop was to identify problem areas in arctic tourism and to explore ways for governments, communities, and tour operators to minimize negative impacts. The workshop addressed four types of tourism to reveal areas of conflict with conservation and ideas for addressing them. The areas were motorized tourism, hunting and fishing tourism, wildlife viewing tourism and ship or boat-based tourism. Two or three speakers in each category presented conflicts and described efforts to address them and the associated challenges, successes and lessons learned. Participants engaged in lively and productive discussion of the issues and their implications for efforts by tour operators, communities and governments to realize the potential benefits of linking tourism and conservation. See Appendix A for the workshop agenda.

Additional objectives for the workshop were to consider the strategic direction of the LTCA initiative, and to announce the winner of the 2000 Arctic Award for Linking Tourism and Conservation, honoring the best example of a tourism operation linking tourism and conservation (see Attachment A for the full workshop agenda).

This was the first LTCA annual workshop to be held in North America, which allowed increased participation in the LTCA initiative from the United States and Canada. In addition, the focus on problem areas and mechanisms for limiting or otherwise managing tourism to minimize conflicts with conservation goals drew increased participation by government authorities with responsibility for recreation and tourism, public lands and/or wildlife management and planning, in addition to tour operators, community and native group representatives and conservation interests. A total of 36 individuals participated from six countries, of which 28 were participating for the first time. A list of workshop participants can be found at Appendix B.

Summary

Overall, participants were enthusiastic and appreciative of the opportunity to meet, share experiences and insights, and gain a better understanding of their respective roles, responsibilities, and challenges in attempting to achieve common objectives for linking tourism and conservation. Discussion themes fell into several categories:

- I. Reiteration of the potential for real benefits from linking tourism and conservation
- II. Specific problems or challenges that indicate the need for limits
- III. Potential approaches or mechanisms for establishing limits
- IV. Suggestions for future direction of the LTCA initiative

The key discussion points under each of these categories are summarized below.

I. Potential for conservation benefits

The potential for linking tourism activities to conservation benefits was reiterated, with particular emphasis on the importance of continued efforts of tour operators and tourism and recreation planners for this potential to be realized. Arctic tourists can become ambassadors for conservation as a direct result of quality tourism experiences. The benefits of linking tourism and conservation envisioned and articulated by the LTCA initiative continue to be strong motivating factors for workshop participants:

- á Increased awareness of arctic environmental issues, through direct exposure, and through information provided by tour operators;
- á Increased support for arctic conservation efforts;
- á Increased awareness and valuing of traditional arctic cultures;
- á Increased income for arctic communities who respond to the economic incentive to conserve nature, and their native skills, knowledge and culture; and
- á Increased interest in reducing and cleaning up waste and pollution in the Arctic

Keynote speakers Carol Kasza (AWRTA President and Arctic Treks) and David Cline (WWF, Bering Sea Ecoregion Project) reminded participants that hard work and long-range planning are needed to meet the current trend of increased interest and participation in arctic tourism. Caring about the arctic places that touch our hearts and souls means more than enjoying them and making a living by sharing them with others. Conservation advocacy and planning processes that involve all of the different interest groups are key elements in preserving these places for future generations.

II. Problems and Challenges

A. There has been a dramatic increase in arctic recreation and tourism over the last decade. In many places the increase in numbers of tourists has far exceeded the scale and scope of use that was anticipated by existing laws and regulations. Ironically, this is partly because of the increased numbers of conservation-oriented advocates who wish to visit arctic destinations, often inspired by the increased attention and publicity generated by conflicts over their management (e.g., oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska). The tourism industry has responded to the market demand by offering more and more trips to remote places, also at a rate faster than existing or new laws and regulations are being revised or developed. Problems associated with this trend include:

 á Even well educated, informed and responsible visitors and operators are a problem when sheer numbers are too high. The potential beneficial links between tourism and conservation diminish when the volume becomes problematic.

 á Increased numbers overall have been accompanied in some areas by an exponential increase in the use of motorized vehicles for access, sightseeing, and thrill seeking (snowmobiles, tundra buggies, helicopters, flight-seeing planes, and increased numbers of ships, etc.). As these modes of transportation have become increasingly available, the type of visitors and types of tourism activities have expanded beyond the hunters, fishers, and individuals seeking a rugged and remote wilderness experience. There are now more casual visitors wishing to visit wild and beautiful areas in shorter amounts of time and with greater levels of comfort.

The increasing numbers create an incentive for existing tour operators to expand and for new operators to proliferate to take advantage of the growing market demand, while at the same time increasing the likelihood that the sheer numbers will diminish the quality of experience operators can offer, and reducing the likelihood of realizing the potential conservation benefits. The need to establish limits to protect the sustainability of the market and the potential for achieving conservation benefits is directly related to these increasing numbers. This is also presenting a growing and complicated challenge for government authorities responsible for making management decisions (including setting limits) that provide for tourism and recreational use of the resources consistent with their protection.

B. Increasing numbers and types of tourism activities are leading to increasing conflicts between different types of tourism, such as between hunting/fishing tourism and wildlife viewing, or motorized tourism and wildlife viewing or remote wilderness enjoyment. This is leading to increasingly complex management challenges for authorities. Examples included:

 á As the tourism season gets longer to accommodate expansion, in some areas it is beginning to overlap with the fall hunting season, increasing the likelihood of a wildlife viewing trip directly encountering a hunting trip.

 á Separating wildlife viewing and hunting tourism by season does not necessarily solve the problem. Efforts to manage specifically for wildlife viewing during the summer season can result in animals becoming habituated to the presence of humans, making them unnaturally vulnerable to hunters in the hunting season. This is a challenge in Alaska's Kodiak Archipelago where there

is increasing pressure to manage for wildlife viewing in areas that have historically been used primarily for hunting the Kodiak brown bear.

C. Unrealistic expectations of tourists with regard to wildlife viewing are a challenge for tour operators and government managers. Ironically, the readily available dramatic photographs, particularly of wildlife, that often inspire people to care about and want to visit remote arctic areas, create unrealistic wildlife viewing expectations. This can lead to harassment of wildlife and even potentially dangerous encounters. Responsible guides and managers are often faced with angry clients and difficult enforcement situations.

D. There is a trend towards more, shorter trips. Participants generally agreed that greater numbers of shorter trips represent a more serious management challenge than fewer, longer visits. They noted that this trend exacerbates the problems associated with motorized transport and the infrastructure to support it.

E. Local, non-commercial recreational activities represent a more difficult problem in many places than organized, guided, commercial tourism activities – especially in the areas of use of motorized transport and hunting. They are harder to monitor and to regulate and are not influenced by organized efforts of tour operators to collaborate and coordinate schedules for mutual benefit (like AWRTA or LTCA efforts) and can, in some cases undermine such efforts.

F. Where management authorities do not have the ability to take *proactive* regulatory action to limit or control the amount or type of recreational use of public lands, it is extremely difficult to prevent negative impacts of tourism activities. In some cases, the burden of proof is on the government agency to demonstrate actual damage from a given activity before being authorized to manage or regulate that activity. Under these conditions (e.g., Alaska state lands management), not only will damage already have occurred before regulatory action can be taken, but users will have become accustomed to levels and/or types of use that are unsustainable. Establishing limits or curtailing activities to levels below what people have come to expect is much more difficult than establishing those limits and expectations at sustainable levels in the first place. Where government managers have the authority to act proactively, using a precautionary approach (e.g. Svalbard), the establishment of effective regulations and expectations consistent with sustainable use is much more likely.

G. Monitoring compliance and enforcement are extremely difficult. Arctic tourism activities take place in remote, often vast areas. The logistics and the cost of monitoring and enforcement are beyond the means of most government authorities.

H. Better data is needed on the impacts of different tourism activities on wildlife and habitat. Some participants felt that if there were more and better data – particularly on the impacts of motorized tourism on habitat, and on the behavior patterns of wildlife, it would be easier to manage these activities so as to reduce the impacts. A better understanding of carrying capacity at intensive wildlife viewing locations and minimum approach distances for different species were also cited as areas that would benefit from better information. However, some cautioned

that insisting on better data could support the perspective that no regulatory action should be taken until negative impacts have been demonstrated, by which time the damage has already been done.

I. The impact of ship-based tourism on small arctic communities is a concern, particularly in arctic Canada, where this is a relatively new phenomenon. Small communities are often unprepared to deal with occasional landings of ships sometimes bringing numbers of visitors that can overwhelm the communities. These communities may not have the basic infrastructure to accommodate the visitors, and may not have planned to take advantage of the opportunity afforded by these visits. Helping communities to determine whether they wish to have the ships visit, what is needed to accommodate the visits, and how to benefit from them is an important challenge if the benefits of linking tourism and conservation (of nature and cultures) are to be achieved.

III. Promising Opportunities, Mechanisms or Approaches

Participants identified a number of opportunities, approaches and factors that can support the success of efforts to manage, regulate or limit tourism activities. These included:

A. Encourage, support and implement a precautionary approach to planning and management for tourism and recreational activities. The ability of managers to act on the potential for negative impacts is critical. Where the authority to do so exists, it should be exercised; where it does not, it should be encouraged.

B. Tour operators, conservation groups and communities should support the efforts of regulators and managers to regulate use and numbers, and should encourage others (e.g. their clients, members, etc.) to do so as well.

C. Specific effective or promising management and regulatory tools identified at the workshop included:

1. Use of zoning in managed areas (public lands), with designated allowable uses, types of vehicles (if any), numbers of visitors, requirements for qualified guides, permits, etc. (*E.g., Denali National Park, Svalbard, Churchill*)

a) Designated routes of travel (ground and air routes and altitudes)

b) Requirements for qualified guides in certain areas.

c) Permitting systems, for guides, operators or individuals, with limits on the number of permits issued in a given area over a given time period or season. Permit systems can help with tracking and monitoring use. They should be accompanied by penalties for violations of permit conditions that are severe enough to create a strong disincentive for bad behavior.

5. Minimum approach distances for different modes of transport (bus, snow scooter, boat, on foot, etc.) and for different species of wildlife.

D. Managers and regulators should engage in inclusive planning and decision-making processes that reach out to all interest groups. Participation in planning processes and development of regulations can significantly increase awareness and understanding of the rationale behind management decisions and likelihood of successful implementation and compliance. Where there is controversy and/or lack of trust among parties, the use of an experienced neutral facilitator in planning processes can be very helpful. (*Denali National Park; Kodiak Archipelago*)

E. Cooperation among tour operators, especially those operating in the same geographic areas, can help to minimize conflict, ensure the delivery of high-quality experiences to customers, and sustainable operations over the long term.

F. Ongoing communication and information exchange between operators and managers or regulators; between managers and regulators in different places (different countries) and between different types of operators (coastal kayak operations and ship-based tourism; hunting tourism and wildlife viewing tourism, etc.) will help to identify individual and common interests, provide information needed to avoid conflict, and may reveal opportunities to work together to achieve common goals.

G. Provide incentives for people to join organized guided tours or groups. This optimizes the likelihood of achieving the linking tourism and conservation goals by increasing the likelihood that visitors are benefiting from traveling with informed, knowledgeable and responsible guides.

H. Opportunities to establish partnerships to accomplish shared goals should be explored and pursued. A specific suggestion was to seek partnership opportunities between conservation-minded hunting clubs and conservation groups. There is increasing interest on the part of hunting clubs to both engage in conservation and be acknowledged for having a conservation ethic. Models for this kind of partnership benefiting conservation include Ducks Unlimited and Trout Unlimited, waterfowl hunting and freshwater fishing organizations that have become active and effective players in habitat protection and restoration activities in the United States, particularly for wetlands and rivers.

I. Specific to hunting tourism, it was suggested that hunting outfitters would benefit from acknowledging the growing interest among their client base of well educated, wealthy and image-conscious big game hunters, to participate in responsible hunting activities. There may be an opportunity to market specifically to this growing interest and conservation awareness and to bring hunting tourism more effectively into the fold of linking tourism and conservation.

J. Provide training and technical assistance to native communities to help them avoid negative impacts of becoming a tourism destination, and to benefit from the potential for economic, cultural and conservation benefits. (*Russia, arctic Canada*)

IV. Future of the LTCA Initiative

Participants engaged in an important discussion on the future of the LTCA initiative. This discussion was informed by a briefing by Samantha Smith of the WWF Arctic Programme regarding the relevant events since the last meeting of the LTCA initiative in Borgarnes, Iceland (March 2000). These events included the development of Links, an accreditation program for arctic tour operators that is based upon the LTCA Ten Principles for Tourism in the Arctic. Links is a cooperative effort by the State of Alaska, AWRTA and WWF, and an outgrowth of the State of Alaska's ongoing tourism project under the Arctic Council. As a first step in the launch of Links, the State of Alaska endorsed the LTCA Ten Principles and challenged the other arctic countries to do the same. The State of Alaska will present the Links initiative to the Arctic Council in April, 2001, and it is likely that this will become an official Arctic Council activity.

The Arctic Council is also collecting information on sustainable arctic tourism and will make this information available via a Web site and handbooks. This project, led by Finland, complements the Links program by giving tour operators the tools they need to comply with accreditation standards. In addition, the Nordic Council of Ministers has begun a project on arctic tourism that also may result in some synergy with the LTCA initiative.

Participants were asked for their input regarding the potential or desired future of the LTCA effort. There was great enthusiasm for the value of meeting with one another, sharing ideas and experiences and developing stronger mutual understanding that enhances the ability to effect positive change. The participation by governmental authorities with management and planning responsibilities was especially appreciated, as it provided a greater understanding of the responsibilities and challenges facing such authorities and revealed opportunities for mutual support.

Specific suggestions for the future of the LTCA effort included:

- á Continuing the effort, but not creating a formal membership organizational structure at this time. Many cautioned against jumping to a formal independent organization at this juncture. Rather, continue as an "alliance", based on common interest, focusing where the energy and momentum are greatest (through working groups or other mechanisms), continuing to identify allies and partners, and building on successes. Continue the tradition of bringing people together to talk about the issues and to help one another, and others, to envision and practice more effective ways of supporting the link between tourism and conservation.

- á There was some interest in moving forward with a sectoral approach (e.g. ship based, hunting and fishing, wildlife viewing, etc.) where there is interest and energy in doing so among tour operators and/or others. Sector-specific working groups could share experiences and challenges, brainstorm opportunities and solutions, or develop sector-specific codes of conduct and evaluation checklists based on the principles.

- á There was unanimous support for maintaining the circumpolar Arctic as the geographic focus. It was also suggested, however that more geographically focused working groups could address challenges, opportunities and strategies specific to or tailored for their specific geographic location and political situation.

á There is continued interest in developing better mechanisms for evaluating implementation of the principles and codes of conduct – these should be easy to use and adaptable to different places and types of activities.

á It was suggested that an opportunity for regional follow-up to this meeting be organized to inform others in the region of the issues and conclusions of the workshop.

á Specific next steps identified included:

a) See what develops in the Arctic Council and Nordic Council with regard to adoption of the LTCA Principles

b) See how the “LINKS” effort unfolds

c) Continue to develop a strategy for the LTCA effort (including exploring funding options) via email communication with interested parties

d) Explore options for a future LTCA meeting

VI. 2000 Arctic Award for Linking Tourism and Conservation

At a reception on the evening of February 24, the winner of the 2000 Arctic Award for Linking Tourism and Conservation was announced. This award honors the best example of a tourism operation linking tourism and conservation in the Arctic. Peter Prokosch, Director of the WWF Arctic Programme announced the winner: Lapplandsafari of Ammarnäs, Sweden, operated by Ann-Kristine and Michael Vinka. Lapplandsafari is a Sami-owned company that is located in the Vindern River Nature Reserve in northern Sweden. The Vinkas were active in the successful fight to protect the Vindern River and its surroundings from hydropower development, with the result that the Vindern is now one of only four Swedish rivers that are completely protected from development. The Vinkas are currently working to prevent the building of a road from Norway through the currently roadless area.

The Vinkas’ operations highlight traditional Sami culture and the natural beauty of the Vindern River Nature Reserve. All tours are low-impact and based on a long-term strategy for cultural and environmental sustainability, including the use of local products. Using traditional Sami building techniques and materials, the Vinkas have rebuilt a small Sami settlement within the reserve. They use this base to educate tourists about Sami culture and its relationship to nature, and to preserve traditional knowledge in their community.

A strong runner-up for the 2000 Arctic Award was the Wilderness Tourism Association of the Yukon (WTAY). WTAY is a non-profit membership organization consisting primarily of tourism business in the Yukon. WTAY was instrumental in the enactment of the Wilderness Tourism Licensing Act, which sets minimum, low-impact environmental, safety and guide training standards for all wilderness tourism operations in the Yukon and requires operators to report to the authorities concerning trip locations and tourist numbers. WTAY also support the Yukon Protected Areas Strategy and sits as a representative on the panel that is reviewing the

implementation of the strategy. Finally, WTAY is an advocate for conservation in the Yukon on a variety of resource use issues, both alone and in partnership with local conservation groups.

Information about Laplandsafari and WTAY is available on the WWF Arctic Programme Web site (<http://ngo.grida.no/wwfap>), as is information about previous years' award winners. The Arctic Award will be offered next year as well; applications are available either through the Arctic Programme office (arctic@wwf.no) or on the Arctic Programme Web site.

Conclusion

Increasing numbers of people will continue to seek opportunities to experience new, undisturbed destinations, and to do so responsibly. They will continue to want to see nature and native cultures at their best. The market will continue to provide economic opportunities for operators and communities, provided the basis for the quality experience is sustained – the integrity of natural and cultural arctic systems. The conscious effort to link the tourism and conservation benefits is and will continue to be at the heart of the success of arctic tourism. The potential is great in part because there is still the opportunity to act proactively to limit the potential negative impacts that would undermine the success of linking tourism and conservation in the arctic. Tour operators, communities, government authorities and conservation groups all have a role to play in supporting efforts to manage this growing area responsibly for now and the future. The sharing of experiences, ideas, successes and failures at this workshop contributes to better mutual understanding of existing and potential roles and responsibilities available to all of these players, jointly and individually.