

**Key note address at the  
“Linking Tourism and Conservation in the Arctic”– Workshop  
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We are all here today because something about these arctic lands that we live and work in touches our hearts. These wild and beautiful open spaces, with their limitless views and endless summer light, somehow strike a chord deep in our souls. Because of this, to me, this work that we do in relation to the Arctic, no matter what its form, is sacred work, work from and for the heart and soul.

But in the more than 20 years that I,ve been both working in the Alaskan Arctic and working to protect the fantastic wilderness there, I,ve learned that just loving this land alone will not save its wholeness and integrity~that it also takes a lot of mental effort, political knowledge and strategies, and working together with key allies and involved parties.

In Alaska, we,ve been very fortunate that, at the same time as huge amounts of oil was discovered in the Arctic, there was an equally huge public sentiment for protecting our nation,s last great wild lands. The result was that our nation,s conservation system of protected lands was more than doubled in size as millions of acres of spectacular wild lands in Alaska were placed in protected status as national parks, forests and wildlife refuges, to counter-balance opening up huge tracts of previously untouched Arctic lands to oil development. The primary areas that my company operates trips in~Gates of the Arctic National Park and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge~are two of those vast conservation units that were given the most protective wilderness designation.

There was one glaring exception to that protection however~the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, which people believe also has potential for oil. Because there was a stalemate between development and protection advocates 20 years ago, that area was left for Congress to decide later whether to open it for oil drilling or protect it as wilderness. So I,ve been engaged in an on-going battle since then~„fighting the good fight% as we say, to protect the biological heart and integrity of this national treasure.

Somewhere along the way though, 10 or so years ago, as I watched the number of recreational visitors to the Arctic Refuge triple in one year,s time because of the publicity about the oil development

issue, I began to realize there was an equally grave threat to the integrity of this purest of wildernesses~a potential invasion of uncontrolled and unmanaged visitors, most coming in commercially guided groups, who by their sheer numbers could forever change the quality of the premier wilderness experience that had first drawn them there. The particular irony of this is that these are the people who are the wilderness advocates, who are part of the public voice that wants to keep these lands wild forever.

It was this conundrum that compelled me to become a founding board member of the Alaska Wilderness Recreation and Tourism Association, when a handful of us, other small business owners and outdoor educators, realized that we were facing similar problems around the state and we needed to come together to work on them.

Since that time 10 years ago, we've had some successes beyond our wildest imaginings, and we also constantly face what sometimes seem like insurmountable obstacles. But the one thing that we've found to be most effective is to bring a wide range of people together in our annual Ecotourism conferences to discuss these issues and look for strategies and solutions~just as we are all gathered here today in an international forum.

All the topics that we will be discussing in this workshop are topics that we've discussed in our Ecotourism conferences. But that doesn't mean at all that we've already found the solutions or solved the problem. We've come to look at our conference programs as „variations on a theme%, because the thing we're talking about is always really the same thing: how to protect the resources that our tourism businesses depend on~Alaska's unique wildlands, wildlife, cultures and communities~all the things that make Alaska the remarkable place that it is. Because this is such a huge, all encompassing goal, we pick different aspects of it to focus on each year, going where the energy and momentum are, always looking for allies and partners and building on our successes.

We've found a number of key allies over the years, primarily in land management agencies and environmental organizations. Since the overall scope of both of these groups is much more than just tourism, it's rather striking to me how much interest seems to be converging on tourism right now. But if you look at our shared concern for protecting wildlands, it seems very appropriate that there is a particular focus on tourism, because this is where the interconnection between people and wildlands happens. While land management agencies and environmental organizations are in the „connecting people to wildlands business% too, either carrying out mandates created by the public or advocating for new ones, they have to operate one step removed from the real thing itself.

It's the tourism businesses though, people like me, the other AWRTA members and those of you here, who have the great privilege of operating at the very heart of this larger work that we're all engaged in together. As I said earlier, to me this is sacred work~work that feeds my soul and that of my clients. The reason I say that tourism is at the heart of this larger effort is because I've watched, over and over again, how my clients' hearts open up as they're deeply touched and moved by the wild lands we're traveling through. I know that most of my clients' lives are changed forever by their experience in the Arctic.

I also know that some people seem to run their nature-based tourism businesses with no awareness of this fullest potential they have for enriching their customers' lives. Nor do they seem to realize yet that their own lives could be enriched so much more, in spiritual and emotional as well as financial ways, by operating in this more wholistic way. To me, the purpose of this workshop is to help ourselves and others to see a better way of doing tourism~to use the integrity and wholeness of the wilderness itself as a model for designing our own human practices~to ask ourselves always, when we get lost in the complexities of these issues, does this practice support connecting people with the Earth? If we pay attention to what our hearts tell us as we look at how to best do tourism, we'll be able to use this greatest of tools to serve the highest good for all.