

[From a presentation given at the June 18, 1987 Superintendency Course at Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area]

Robert L. Arnberger, Assistant Superintendent, Everglades National Park, Florida.



Northern and Remote Parks: Development Management and Impacts

Chip Dennerlein

The theme of Northern and Remote Parks is one that excites the imagination and challenges the talents of both state and federal managers of park lands in Alaska. To put my relationship to this theme in perspective, I must introduce myself as the chief officer of a division of the Department of Natural Resources of the State of Alaska: The Alaska Division of Parks. That agency is charged with a general statewide responsibility for public recreation on all state lands in Alaska and is specifically responsible for the management of more than three million acres of state park lands, which have been withdrawn from the public domain as "special purpose sites" under the constitution of the State. I am not responsible for the nearly 100 million acres of park and refuge lands which have been set aside by various federal agencies. However, I spent the better part of two years traveling between Alaska and Washington, D.C., working on the legislation that set those areas aside.

"Northern and Remote Parks" are no strangers to State Park managers. Nearly three quarters of our system is comprised of large blocks of remote or semi-remote parklands. At 1.5 million acres, the Wood-Tikchik State Park comprises fully one half of our state system. It is one of the largest state parks in the world and no roads reach its boundaries. I would like to consider with you today the "Alaskan experience" in the management of our remote parks.

The impetus to set aside large tracts of remote park land in Alaska is probably not very different from the motivations that led Canadians to establish some of **your** great areas. Certainly, a desire to preserve a quality of wilderness that is

fast fading from even the memory of most of the inhabitants of our country was the driving force, which gave popular support to Congressmen and Senators who voted for the establishment of the federal areas in Alaska. While this romanticized and politicised decision-making process in far away Washington, DC led to strong and forceful opposition to the federal legislation on the part of many Alaskans, there is no denying that these same motivations operated in Alaskans themselves as they moved ahead to establish a 1.5 million acre state park even in the thick of the federal controversy.

Beyond this general drive on the part of many Alaskans to keep some blank spot on the map, it took a loose knit coalition of hunters, fishermen, wilderness tour operators and local people to provide conservationists with the strength to move the bills forward. Even a fear of ourselves, played a role in Wood-Tikchik's establishment. A concern that we might ourselves over react to the federal set aside bills by disposing of our own finest areas helped move the legislation for Wood-Tikchik to passage.

The qualities of the area itself provided the final impetus. Without question, the Wood River-Tikchik system is one of the superlative areas of Alaska. It is a series of large lakes (one 36 miles long) which are stacked up against a dramatic mountain range. The lakes are connected by short rivers (some less than two miles long); each summer they teem with sockeye salmon. In fact, one of the "purposes" for the park is the protection of the spawning and rearing habitat of one of the world's largest runs of salmon. In the end, the legislation that passed reflected the concerns for both preservation and use that have always tugged on the Alaskan conscience. The park was established to protect outstanding scenic and natural values and to preserve the wildlife and fisheries habitat. It also was established to protect both recreational and subsistence uses of the land and resources.

A management council was established in the legislation to assist in the preparation of a master plan and to ensure that local interests and needs were not overlooked by far away bureaucrats and planners. Finally, even commodity resource interests were incorporated in the bill, and provision was made for construction and operation of a hydroelectric project if a certain site proved feasible. The legislation passed and the division was handed the management of Wood-Tikchik State Park.

In many ways, Wood-Tikchik is not unique among our remote areas, but it does represent the quintessential "northern and remote park" and the essence of our "Alaskan experience" in the State Park System. In applying Wood-Tikchik and my experience to your conference theme, I immediately noticed that something was out of whack. Our experience did not quite fit the sequence of events expressed in the conference title. In our experience, the sequence has been "Impact, Management, Development, Impact." It has been our universal experience that no matter how remote the park, the visitor and his unmanaged impacts always gets there before us. I think this will always be the case, for the concept that we can simply leave the large remote parks alone to take care of themselves is deeply rooted in legislative policy makers and budget committees.

The division is itself partially responsible for this sequence, since like park departments everywhere, great needs continually compete for limited operating dollars. In a system where literally thousands of users crowd road accessible areas each summer, remote areas are moved to the back burner at budget preparation time. This is a dangerous situation for two reasons. First, the mere establishment of an area as a park draws attention to itself. In the case of Wood-Tikchik, for example, the noted outdoor writer Michael Frome had published articles in the Los Angeles Times exclaiming over "the new pristine park in Alaska" before any management personnel from the division had even seen the area. Patterns established through unmanaged use are hard to change and in a northern environment the impacts can be considerable. Second, recreation, like gold, is where one finds it. Those unfamiliar with a large remote park will tend to think in millions of acres. *Not so the visitors, or the guides or the flight services. They know that the attractions and values are often preciously small and site specific. The entire valley may constitute the "ecosystem" which must be preserved to ensure the continuance of the healthy fish and wildlife populations, but the confluence of the salmon stream with the main river is where virtually all of the visitors will travel. Very shortly, incredibly swiftly sometimes it seems, the essence of a million acres is compromised by the impact of one hundred acres. The very first mistake is to view our northern and remote parks as vast—they are as site specific as a city park.*

The first role of the manager of a northern or remote area therefore, is to get a handle on the site specific values of the area.

The second "experience" that struck me was the speed with which use of a remote area can grow once that use begins. In 1962, back country use of Mt. McKinley National Park amounted to 57 persons. In 1971, 5,500 headed for the back country and by 1977 the figure was over 32,000 with an additional 81,000 using established campgrounds in the park. Mt. McKinley, though northern and remote, is on the road system and home of the highest mountain in North America. Moreover, I will grant you that it is Alaska's number one tourist attraction. But the trend is not park specific, it is general and to a greater or lesser extent it is affecting all the northern and remote parks. In 1978, three kayakers passed the door of a commercial lodge located within the Wood-Tikchik system. This year, three *groups* per week were making that same trip and the first complaints of garbage were noted.

Throughout Alaska, wilderness tourism is experiencing a significant growth market. This past year, nearly 40 percent of the respondents to the State's official travel publication requested information about experiences "off the beaten track." *The special challenge for the management of such use in northern and remote areas is that the areas themselves are often fragile and require a higher level of management than some of their neighbors to the south, while the traveler is seeking a wildness and a lower level of management.* While it is becoming obvious that a defense for wildness and its management can be made on the grounds that increasing numbers of people are quite willing to pay handsomely to experience the remoteness of the north, it is also becoming obvious that northern wildness can be loved to death almost as quickly as it can be destroyed by exploitation. It is an extremely fragile equation. *Wilderness tourism, like any other resource needs to be managed, if only to ensure the preservation of the experience for which the visitor comes in the first place.*

This is where the management of a remote park reaches its highest art and science, for there is little room in which to maneuver. In a recreation area, the manager may often adjust and manipulate the resource and his own management of it to satisfy changing demands because people seek what might be

termed a "median" outdoor experience and their levels of tolerance are high. But "the call of the wild" has caused the visitor to expend the considerable sums which it might take him/her to visit a remote area. He expects a pristine setting and a sense of freedom. Management must be virtually unnoticeable and it must not remove the "essence" of remoteness the visitor seeks. *The visitor to a remote park is often looking for absolutes, not degrees of an experience. Management is by definition a science of degrees. Standing on that paradox is not an easy job.*

Seemingly on the other end of the visitor spectrum from those who seek to experience the remoteness of northern parks on nature's terms are those who seek to experience the parks on their terms. Perhaps another distinction would be that there are those who wish to immerse themselves in the wildness and those who wish only to stand on its edge with the ability to retreat to familiar surroundings at day's end. But *whether one wishes to leave civilization behind or merely stand on its fringe, the powerful draw, the exciting mystique is essentially the same* and the quality required to satisfy both seekers is remarkably similar. Whether from a lodge or a campsite, the viewer of remoteness has little tolerance for its impurity. Both harbor an amazingly similar notion that civilization stops with them, whether at the end of the canoe or the car. Just as with the backpacker, the individual who we used to think of as the "conventional tourist" demands that the "remoteness" begin at the end of his fingertips. The infrastructure which supports his visit and experience may be a larger example of civilization's impact, but in reality it is simply a slightly bigger "zone" than the wilderness traveler's. The line at the edge of that zone is crisp. There is no room for fuzzy transition zones.

While it may be said that wildness is in the eye of the beholder, I have found that eye to be increasingly educated and demanding. This is another great challenge of northern and remote park management. As crisp as the fold of a piece of paper, the home of the bears and the raw untouched realm of the glaciers must start at the edge of the road, at the end of the trail, at the fringe of the campground and on the other side of the pane of glass in the visitor center window. The slice of wilderness offered the "conventional tourist" of today and the window through which he views it must be cut with a sharp scalpel.

In another aspect of the "development" of northern and remote areas to meet the needs of what we have considered the "conventional tourist," it has been my experience that we are increasingly seeing the "experiential" nature of travel today in this group of visitors as well as in the increased amount of back country users. No longer are even conventional tourists content with simply sitting in a tour bus or visitor center. They too want to reach out and touch the remoteness and wildness of our areas in their own way. We have seen this trend in museums across the country where those institutions offering "hands on" experiences have prospered while others have withered. It is only natural that this interest for a "hands on" experience should extend itself to the greatest of our outdoor museums—the living areas of our great northern and remote parks. Europeans, particularly the Swiss, have offered experiential tourism to even the most conventional traveler since the early 19th century. I do not believe we have to emulate the Swiss. We do not have to swing cable cars to the top of each mountain of our parks. We are offering something different. Europe is a beautiful land, but it is an old land, a pastoral land, a traditional land. *Those seeking their experience in North America, and I can speak here for Alaska, are seeking the experience of "raw" land, the sense of a land in the very process of being born.* We may not, therefore, need cable cars to each mountain, but we will need new forms of developments which protect the "rawness" of our remote resources while enabling the average visitor to reach out to the glaciers.

This brings up the ever present question: Who will pay for these precise and delicate management schemes and developments? And who are we developing for? Our experience in Alaska has been one of being caught in a proverbial bind. While we are not dealing with separate provinces or territories as you are here in Canada, we are a vast state with widely divergent geographies and demographics. By definition, our remote parks are located far from the population centers of the state. By that definition, they also are located far from the number of votes in the state legislature needed to finance their management and development. Yet, in terms of tourism and visitation, it is the urban resident who seeks to leave civilization behind, thus constituting the majority of users. The problem is simple. It is always going to be extremely difficult to get politicians to

spend money for amenities outside the boundaries of their districts and it is unfair and unrealistic to think that rural legislators can carry the cost of remote park management and development in their share of the budgetary pie.

This crunch is precisely why the visitors and their impacts always seem to get to our remote areas before we do. Eventually, the concern of the visitors themselves for the future management of the parks, the legislature's recognition of statewide and even national importance of an area as visitation grows, the concerns of local people that "their area" is being overrun by outsiders and important local resources such as fish and wildlife will be destroyed, and the efforts of the agency itself bring funding to begin active management of the remote area.

Finally, I might say about development in northern and remote areas that I see two distinct aspects of our development program. Development can be a provider of opportunity or a management tool to control impacts. In the case of what we have thought of as the "conventional tourist" development of our parks opens the door and offers the visitor a window on the wilderness which he could not have seen without a conscious effort on the part of the agency to provide for his needs. This is the development of the road, the lodge, the visitor center, the hard surfaced trail and the campground. It is what has been traditionally thought of as development for traditional reasons. In our "Alaskan experience" another form of development is becoming equally important in our management of northern and remote parklands. This development is aimed at the 90 percent of the wilderness travelers who use the 1 percent of the park land of even a remote area. Earlier I mentioned the increase in use of the Wook-Tikchik State Park. There are two "obvious" Kayak trips in all of the park's 1.5 million acres. These are already experiencing impacts that are beginning to diminish the essence of the remoteness and wildness of the area.

There are really only three alternatives. The first is to establish a "no trace" camping ethic among all who travel to the area. While progress can be made in this area through public education and the establishment of a ranger station through which most people visiting the area might pass, it is highly unlikely that this will afford us with a total solution. The second option is to limit the amount of users. This option is simply not possible for us in Alaska, even if it were desirable.

You can imagine the response of legislators to the information that the Division of Parks was limiting the number of people using a 1.5 million acre park when the use figures for the area numbered only in the hundreds each year. Even the area residents, who may resent the influx of tourists (the self-contained variety) into their fishing and hunting grounds would join the fight against the division from a fear that one limitation on use would lead to others which would affect them. I am a firm believer in "real world" management and the set of givens that go along with every situation. In Alaska, it will be some time before we limit users in our remote areas.

The third option is to provide carefully contrived, minimal developments which themselves "manage" some of the use of the park. An outhouse in the wilderness may not be your idea of Alaska, but it is preferable to human waste and toilet paper behind every bush. Similarly, a cabin or shelter may not convey completely the feeling that "no one has gone before" you, but those shelters and cabins have a way of drawing in even the most ardent wilderness traveler. In fact, a cabin in the midst of the wilderness can be part of the essence of a remote experience. From a resource management point of view, that cabin can be placed off of the confluence of the salmon stream and shelters can ensure that truly unique, site specific attractions along the way are not blessed with the countless campfire rings and tent circles of travelers as the seasons pass. *In this sense, development can become one of our most important wilderness management tools in a system where personnel intensive management just isn't going to happen.* The development itself is an impact, but it is a planned and calculated impact, designed with both the user and the resource in mind. It is the role of the manager to use the development tool to ensure that the impacts after development are more positive than the ones prior to development, or those which would occur without development. This is what I meant when I first referred to the sequence of "Impact, Management, Development, Impact." Remember the rule of clear and sharp lines between the visitor and the remoteness of the park. That line is sharper at the cabin door oftentimes than it is along a soiled and impacted stretch of river.

Lastly, I would like to offer a sort of synopsis of opinions I have arrived at through my experience in Alaska and which I think apply directly to the management of northern and remote areas wherever they are located.

First, get on the ground as soon as you can. Despite the difficulties of funding, make even some small effort to have a presence in any new areas. The longer you wait to begin active management the firmer the impression and expectation of an "unmanaged" area becomes. Also, the more difficult it is to correct problems that have become established patterns.

Second, look at your remote areas through the eye of a needle. The management of 10 acres may determine the quality of 10 thousand. Do not hesitate to employ "special area" designations and set widely divergent regulations for heavily used site specific areas and vast lightly used areas. Such actions can often ensure protection of key areas while allowing maximum flexibility for the use of vast areas by local peoples pursuing traditional uses.

Third, form advisory boards in the areas of the parks and work with them in an open and honest fashion. Northern and remote parks are often located in areas where Native residents and other local peoples have traditionally used the land for subsistence and other purposes. In many instances, they have supported establishment of the parks for fear that the lands would be put to other uses which would pose even greater impacts to their traditional lifestyles. The local peoples generally are wary and mistrustful of bureaucracies, often with good reason. They are also a wealth of knowledge. Work with them from the first. There is no substitute for this rule. There will be problems in the future. Outside use will impact local lifestyles and certain "traditional uses" may seek expansions that are inappropriate or incompatible with park values. But with a rapport and open working relationship from the first, the problems can be dealt with in a positive and constructive manner.

Fourth, base all developments on quality not quantity. If funding is limited, limit the scope of development. *Never compromise on quality. For this reason, it is essential that the agency itself control the development of its park areas.* You may provide for private sector involvement and even facilitate it, but do not turn your areas over to the private sector. I say this as one who has earned most of his experience in business and whose family is as good a business family as one will find—the inescapable liability equating bigger and better can cost the essence of the very thing we are charged with preserving for the enjoyment of future generations.

Fifth, be willing to go hungry. People are people. It is just as likely that a land manager will hunger for visitor statistics to justify appropriations as it is that a tourism promoter will hunger for profits. Neither profits nor appropriations are bad, but don't create yourself a problem just so you can solve it. Be patient, even if it hurts. Don't peddle the fragile remoteness of the north for a clerk and two field rangers in your next budget.

Sixth, when development does come, don't be afraid to *pave the wilderness....in small amounts*. There is nothing aesthetic and romantic about muddy trails, rutted roads, and wilderness streams with waste and toilet paper behind every tree. Neither is there anything "wildly" pleasing about a bog with 18 different foot trails through it. Harden a trail, even a wilderness one. Put an outhouse in a remote and heavily used location. Build a shelter or cabin in the wilderness, but let nature dwarf your developments. And keep the line between the visitor and the natural world crisp and sharp.

Seventh, let the visitor "experience the wilderness" whether immersed in it or on the edge of the remoteness of the north, *design your management and developments so that each class of visitor can touch and feel and experience the essence of the wilderness he came so far to see*. Build one road to one glacier. Authorize one helicopter firm to land on one peak. Remember—quality, not quantity. But give each who came to see the wondrous remoteness of the north a taste of it. In one place within your vast areas, *let him hold in his hand what you have asked him to protect*, even if he is in a wheelchair.

Eighth, hold the line on incompatible uses. With few, if any, exceptions, there is no place in the northern and remote park for commodity resource uses. Recognize prior existing rights, but seek to minimize their impacts on park values and resources. In existing areas, resist their opening to extractive resource uses. In new or proposed areas, excise if you must, commodity resource potential lands from the proposed boundaries, but don't end up with a confused mish mash of lands in which all things must be preserved and protected and all things must be used and exploited. *Remoteness, especially in the north, demands an incredibly high degree of adherence to absolute principles to preserve its essence*. Don't enter the ring with one hand tied behind your back. It will wear you down and drag you down in a battle in which you will always lose. Don't learn to talk in terms of "mitigation." Mitigation is

a code word for "we have already lost, the question is—how much." Draw a line you can hold and hold it.

Ninth, base all your decisions on the natural values of the system. Whether it be development or management decisions, always remember that for northern and remote areas; there is precious little margin of error for your decisions. Northern and remote areas are closer to absolutes than any other areas I know. One step over the line and they can become nothing more than big giant "ordinary" parks. Remember that you are managing as much a philosophy, an image, an essence, as you are managing the tangible resources that comprise that essence. The reason for the existence of the park and the reason people will come to see it is not what civilization has done, but what it has not done.

Tenth, become a spiritualist. The rewards for managers of northern and remote parks are in heaven.

[Theme paper presented at the 20th Annual Federal and Provincial Parks Conference at Ft. Selkirk, Yukon Territory, Canada.]

Chip Dennerlein, Director, Alaska Division of Parks, State of Alaska [at the time of this address]. Present address is in Anchorage, Alaska.



The Role of Research in Wilderness

[Keynote address at the Sierra Nevada Wilderness Managers Meeting, 29-30 September 1987. Bass Lake, California]

David M. Graber

In the legislation creating wilderness, Congress has reflected two distinct perspectives: one is the value of wilderness to mankind through its spiritual and aesthetic qualities; the second is wilderness as the conservator of resources likely to be lost elsewhere, including whole ecosystems. Wilderness, in this alternate view, is a vessel containing precious cargo. The history of wilderness legislation reveals increasing understanding on the part of Congress that to be protected, wilderness and its resources must be managed—albeit gently—and that management in turn requires scientific infor-