

Visitor Monitoring in Norwegian National Parks? If so: How Will it Find a Position in the Present Situation with Low Funding, Biological Hegemony, Expanding User Interests and Indistinct Management Priorities?

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Monitoring in Norway

There is no tradition for social monitoring in Norwegian national parks, only a few examples of isolated visitor studies. On the other hand, several biological monitoring projects exist, partly as national programs and partly because of the conservation goals within each area. Often the monitoring locations (for national programs) are in national parks because the environmental conditions are presumably more stable and predictable than elsewhere. Generally, even monitoring of biodiversity (in Norway) has to be implemented with very low funding, and often under sub optimal conditions (scientifically, practically and concerning database development). Monitoring in protected areas in Norway has a long way to go before reaching a satisfying level and quality (Hagen et al. 2005).

Changes in society and conservation management – conflicting goals?

- But something is about to happen that highlights the need for better monitoring. During the last years there has been political focus on the national parks and the mountain areas (where most of our national parks are located):
- New national parks are still being designated, partly on private land and very often through processes revealing land use conflicts. The rural municipalities want “something back” when “providing” the national and international society with national parks.

- The result is often pilot projects with community based management, and a stronger “will” (meaning political statements) to develop a combination of sustainable use and nature conservation. The “mountain text” (St.prp.nr. 65 (2002-2003)) states that commercial activity in national parks is no longer illegal. The critical question is: How can we do it, without developing conflicts, and threatening conservation goals?
- The “crisis” in traditional agriculture and poor economy in rural districts increases the pressure on economical development in remote areas (for instance in and around national parks). Tourism is often thought of as the answer.
- A new national tourism plan emphasizes the national parks as an important branding of Norway, and presents an ambitious goal of 25 % more foreign tourists in Norway by 2010 (Nærings- og handelsdepartementet 2005).
- In addition we have the European Community biodiversity strategy, and the ambition of halting the biodiversity loss by 2010.
- Can all these possible conflicting goals and ambitions be combined, or are they simply in conflict? Monitoring can be helpful in trying to answer this.

A pilot study area

In one of our newly established national parks, Dovrefjell-Sunndalsfjella National Park, two pilot projects are being implemented: A community based management model, and the development of a monitoring program.

The local ambition concerning tourism development is especially high in this area because one of the main national roads (E 6) and the railway between Oslo and Trondheim (Dovrebanen) are crossing the Dovre mountain plateau. On the other hand: The most important reason for establishing this national park was to secure the environmental conditions for the wild reindeer – a species for which Norway has a special international responsibility. The reindeer population is vulnerable towards different kinds of human activity and infrastructure. These are two important reasons behind the monitoring plan that is now being developed. NINA is responsible for the plan, and the Dovrefjell council (Dovrefjellrådet - the management authority) is the employer. The national authority for national park management (DN – The directorate for nature management) is also involved in this project, because of the principal aspects. Both ecological and social monitoring is included, and the critical frame is to develop a monitoring plan based on the management objectives of the park. This might be the starting point for a new (national) strategy: To develop and improve the monitoring in national parks of (hopefully) both ecological and social qualities, and to concentrate on the potential threats and developments that are within the possible frame of action for the responsible manager. The management goals for each area shall guide the priorities for the monitoring. It seems like The Norwegian Nature Inspectorate (Statens Naturoppsyn – SNO), together with local supervisors, will have the main responsibility for the practical monitoring in most national parks.

Local and principal issues

In the presentation I will discuss several (principal and case) challenges in this process:

- Integration of monitoring knowledge as a base for management planning and action.
- The co action and cooperation between the NINA (and other) researchers, SNO, the local supervisors and the management staff.
- The long term building of easy accessible databases
- Who will own and have access to databases?

- Co action and cooperation between the managers and the different stakeholders? (Monitoring data can be relevant input even for tourism developers).
- Monitoring knowledge - management actions? (Moving from traditional management to adaptive management?).

References

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