

Monitoring Sustainable Nature Tourism in Practice – Experiences From Pyhä-Luosto National Park, Finland

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Introduction

Natural Heritage Services of Metsähallitus manages the majority of protected areas in Finland, including 34 of Finland's 35 national parks. The main purpose of national parks is nature protection, but during the last few years, promoting local communities and economics has played an increasing role in management, especially in remote areas like Finnish Lapland.

Pyhä-Luosto National Park is located in central Lapland. The oldest part of the park was established in 1938. The estimated number of visits paid to the national park is about 100 000 annually which are mainly done by domestic visitors.

In order to incorporate nature tourism and nature conservation, Metsähallitus has created general principles for sustainable nature tourism in protected areas managed by Metsähallitus. The principles include all the three dimensions of sustainability: ecological, economical and socio-cultural. These general principles are implemented in practice by preparing management plans of sustainable nature tourism for all the important protected areas where nature tourism plays a significant role. The planning framework is based on the Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) concept.

Methods

In the LAC process, the use of an area and its impacts are monitored by carefully selected indicators. To be a useful and valid method also in practice, the selection of indicators plays a crucial role. It should be possible to set justified limits which

are based on the best information available. In addition, it should be possible to measure the indicators with reasonable economical and human resources.

However, applying ideal indicators is seldom possible in practice for several reasons. On the other hand, protected areas are monitored for many other purposes anyway. Data collected in these monitoring systems is often available and can also be applied for monitoring sustainability as such or with minor changes.

Results

The Limits of Acceptable Change process was modified to fit the purposes of the management plan of sustainable nature tourism for Pyhä-Luosto NP. It turned out to be a process as follows and an example of it is shown in table 1.

- The goals for nature tourism were set by establishing the general nine principles of sustainable nature tourism in Metsähallitus.
- More specific desired future conditions were defined for nature tourism and its impacts.
- A list of indicators and ways of measuring them was selected.
- Current values of the indicators were inventoried.
- Limits of acceptable change were set for the indicators.
- The management actions available to achieve or to maintain desired conditions or to react beforehand to unacceptable changes were identified.

Table 1: Example of LAC indicators in Pyhä-Luosto NP under the following principle of sustainable nature tourism: Customers' appreciation and knowledge of nature and culture are promoted.

Desired condition	Indicator	Method of measuring the Indicator	Current value 2005	Limits of acceptable change	Management actions
Nature is a major motive of visits	Visitor survey (question 8/1, recreational motives).	Visitor survey year 2010	Nature experiences are either very or rather important reason of the visit for 97%.	Nature experiences are either very or fairly important reason of the visit for 90%.	1. Co operation with entrepreneurs in marketing and developing products.
The customers should know the special features of the local nature and culture	Customer contacts in Nature Centre	Visitor counting and annual statistics (visits, telephone and e-mail)	33 000 contacts in 2005	30 000 contacts	1. Developing nature centre and its exhibition. 2. Marketing and communication 3. Co operation with entrepreneurs

Eventually, this pilot study of applying LAC process in practice proved that a set of indicators of sustainability in nature tourism or recreational use of protected area can be found without massive surveys or large economical costs. Applicable indicators can be found by using existing data collected mainly under regular management operations and through daily customer services. Visitor monitoring plays essential role in this process as standardized visitor survey includes several important indicators of sustainability together with number of visits.

This presentation describes the process of monitoring sustainability in nature tourism. It also describes creating a management plan of sustainable nature tourism, and the ways in which the indicators are being used through incorporation into the overall planning process.

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