

# Ethical recreation? Applying an ethical decision-making framework to the case of heli-hunting in New Zealand

**Brent Lovelock**, University of Otago, New Zealand, [brent.lovelock@otago.ac.nz](mailto:brent.lovelock@otago.ac.nz);

**Viktoría Kahui**, University of Otago, New Zealand; **Oliver O'Sullivan**, University of Otago, New Zealand

Natural resource issues often involve limited resources, but multiple constituencies, creating situations in which it is impossible for everyone to get what they desire (Smith and McDonough 2001:241). A particularly vexing issue for protected area managers is the allocation of visitor opportunities, these frequently becoming 'messy' problems i.e. multidimensional and complex, with competing stakeholders, and often involving tradeoffs between visitor satisfaction and environmental quality. Smith and McDonough believe that "Focusing on fairness may help to alleviate resource-based conflicts" (2001: 241), and in essence are calling for a more ethical approach to decision making around resource/opportunity allocation..

Currently, protected area managers are guided by legislation, policy, and a number of visitor management frameworks (e.g. Recreation Opportunity Spectrum; Limits of Acceptable Change). While some visitor management frameworks are implicitly based upon 'fairness', and may be loosely connected to ethics, the development of recreational activities within protected areas is more strongly linked to various combinations and considerations of: the environmental impacts of the activity; its effects on other visitors' experiences; or, increasingly, the revenue generated by the activity. The emphasis placed upon these criteria differs according to the politic of the day, which in turn is influenced by issues of power and access (to policy and decision makers), political expediency, the state of knowledge (what is known and unknown) about the recreationist and the resource, and the economy.

This paper explores the case for adopting a more fundamental applied ethics approach to visitor management decision making. Such an ethics approach may provide "...a pro-active mechanism for navigating the often uneasy tensions that exist between policy and application on the one hand, and various autonomous, self-interested groups on the other" (Fennell et al 2008: 64). As noted above, current visitor management is not strongly linked to ethical decision making. But to be fair, very little management across the natural resource or the services domains (or elsewhere for that matter) are rooted within moral philosophy. In the protected area recreation domain, ethics does get some attention, with proponents of such an approach sometimes calling for either a 'wilderness ethic' or a 'land ethic' to help guide recreation management decisions. Oelschlaeger (1995) for example, argues that much nature-based recreation is governed by the same anthropocentric orientation held for all nature. He calls for recreation to be recontextualised through Leopold's land ethic.

But ethical frameworks differ substantially in their approaches and outcomes i.e. who gets what, and how the environment fares in the process. So it is useful to consider a holistic (or hybrid) ethical approach to natural area

resource management decision-making. Decision making rarely takes place from one ethical domain with it being more likely that ethical agents employ a diverse mix of ethical views in deciding on what is the ethically correct path to follow (Reidenbach and Robin 1990). Fennell et al (2008) argue for the benefits of an ethical triangulation (deontology/teleology/existentialism) approach. They believe that those who commit purely to one theoretical approach over others rule out the acceptance of decision-making that is premised on multiple perspectives. Schumann (2001) also promotes a 'moral principles framework' consisting of five complementary moral principles: utilitarian ethics; rights; distributive justice; ethics of care; and virtue ethics. And to provide guidance within the business management realm, Jones (1991) has developed a 'moral intensity' framework that consider six dimensions of the moral issue under consideration.

Schumann (2001) acknowledges that people may be generally unaware of these various theoretical ethical approaches, but that they use them in everyday decision making. While this may be so, there is a case that where decision making involves public-domain, scarce-resources that this be more transparently and vigorously based on a comprehensive ethical framework. Such a framework may assist protected area managers in examining various perspectives and making informed choices about recreation activities/development and ultimately arriving at a proper (ethical) decision or action requires (Fennell et al 2008). The paper discusses such an ethical framework for evaluating and considering 'messy' recreational activities and their place within protected areas. The case of heli-hunting in New Zealand is introduced to illustrate how such an approach could be used.

'Heli-hunting' or, helicopter-assisted guided trophy hunting, is a niche tourism activity within some national parks of New Zealand. Hunters (usually wealthy middle-aged male Americans) are transported by helicopter into the habitat of the target species (Himalayan tahr and chamois) high in the mountains. The helicopter may then be used to herd and haze the animals into a position from which they can shot. Because of this, the activity has been criticized on animal welfare grounds, and labeled 'unethical' by NGOs and domestic recreational hunters, who use more traditional hunting techniques. Yet the activity is supported by protected area managers as a means of 'pest' control (tahr and chamois are both introduced species, and national park legislation calls for their extermination). It is also supported by the tourism industry as an example of a profitable niche tourism product. Heli-hunting can be seen as an innovative way to generate a high yield income from protected areas while also contributing to their ecological integrity.

However, heli-hunting is a recreational activity that is

ethically ambiguous, raising questions about: animal rights and welfare; equity of access to resources within protected areas ('new' versus 'old' users); the use of technology (helicopters) to undertake what were 'traditional' activities; and potential discrimination against recreationists (the heli-hunters) who may have age-related mobility-disabilities that preclude them using more traditional hunting practices. Thus a number of tensions are observed, that are currently being played out within the legal domain, as heli-hunting operators defend their practice. We present heli-hunting as just one example of a number of ethically ambiguous recreational practices observed within protected areas.

- 
- Fennell, D., Plummer, R. and Marschke, M. (2008) Is adaptive co-management ethical? *Journal of Environmental Management* 88, 62–75.
- Jones, T. (1991). Ethical decision making by individuals in organizations: An issue-contingent model. *Academy of Management Review* 16, 366–395.
- Oelschlaeger, M. (1995). Taking the land ethic outdoors: Its implications for recreation. In Knight, R.L. and K.J. Gutzwiller (eds) *Wildlife and recreationists: Co-existence through management and research*. Island Press, Washington D.C. 335–350.
- Reidenbach, R.E. and Robin, D.P. (1990). Toward the development of a multidimensional scale for improving evaluations of business ethics. *Journal of Business Ethics* 9, 639–653.
- Schumann, P.L. (2001). A moral principles framework for human resource management ethics. *Human Resource Management Review* 11, 92–111.
- Smith, P.D. and McDonough, M.H. (2011). Beyond public participation: Fairness in natural resource decision making. *Society and Natural Resources* 14(3), 239–249.