



# Subsistence Hunting in a Global Economy

## Contributions of Northern Wildlife Co-Management to Community Economic Development

by

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The management of northern wildlife and the advancement of community economic development may appear to be distantly related endeavours to some. Indeed, for most North Americans living in more southern latitudes, wildlife resources are perceived as having limited economic value to communities, producing revenues only as related to the industries of wilderness tripping, big game hunting, and nature tourism. Yet in Arctic and Sub-Arctic regions of Alaska and Canada, where local economies are supported with a mix of cash income and traditional subsistence harvests, styles of wildlife management and approaches to economic development are intimately linked.

In order to understand these linkages, it is first necessary to extend the conventional notion of economics. As scholars of development have pointed out, there are actually two sectors of the economy, one formal and another informal. The formal sector is easily comprehensible to those of us immersed in western industrialized life, and has been the primary focus of most CED efforts. Business development programs, the creation of local enterprises, and job training programs all represent formal economic methods for improving community economic progress. Serving as indices of success in the formal sector are GNP and GDP along with unemployment and income rates.

The informal sector is, by definition, difficult to measure. Generally based on non-monetary exchange, private ownership of modes of production, and family, informal economic activities have been defined as those transactions which provide for subsistence

and do not increase profits or accumulate capital for its own sake. The time a parent takes to prepare the family dinner, the labour of planting a home or community garden, and the work of helping a neighbour split firewood are all examples of informal economic exchange. Both sectors exist in all communities; their relative size and importance tend to differ.

In many native communities of the North American Arctic and Sub-Arctic, the informal sector is based largely on subsistence hunting and traditional uses of wild foods. Moose, caribou, whales, ducks, fish, and other wildlife continue to provide substantial portions of indigenous people's diet (50% and higher in the case of some households). The co-operation traditional to subsistence hunting in the north is still much in evidence. In traditional times wild foods were distributed amongst kinship groups. Today many of those traditional patterns of reciprocity remain, but so do new forms of sharing between communities. As an Alaskan Gwich'in Indian explained, "We are subsistence people. Our 'occupation' is hunting and fishing. This way we can feed our families and trade with our people. Caribou from the Chandalar will give red meat to a family in Fort Yukon, while Yukon River fish find their way to a family in Chandalar."

Managing one's household economy also includes wisely managing the resources on which it depends. Many small native communities continue to manage fish and wildlife resources with their own time-honoured systems of authority and knowledge. As experience has shown northerners, the consequences of an individual's greed and resource overexploitation can have immediate costs. Overharvesting a trap line one year can lead to a crash in the population of a species the next year and a shortfall in cash income. Shooting the lead caribou during a herd's migration may divert an entire herd, shifting its winter range and limiting an entire community's harvest for the remainder of the winter. While many of the components of this holistic management system are practiced today, they sometimes function independently of and in conflict with government policies.

This is not to imply that indigenous people of the north live in a time warp. The modern-day subsistence family depends on the tools of the trade, most of which are expensive. Snowmobiles, gasoline, fishing nets, and sleeping bags are necessities. Northern subsistence households also enjoy many of the modern conveniences of life, and are saddled with the economic demands which come with their acquisition. While furbearing species like beaver and muskrat served as important cash commodities after "contact," today's subsistence family generates much-needed cash as wage-labourers, part-time workers and trappers, professional business people, traditional craftmakers, and seasonal workers. A highly-integrated interdependence between formal and informal economic sectors has evolved. As a result, households need to find economic opportunities which accommodate the demands of subsistence expenses and schedules.

This presence of a formal cash economy in tandem with a vibrant subsistence economy creates a contradiction and concerns for many southerners. These feelings are generally accompanied by the assumption that a subsistence lifestyle, modern technologies, and a strong conservation ethic are incompatible. Conditions of northern subsistence

communities also stand as an enigma to social theorists who predicted that the introduction of capitalism would bring an end to Natives' interest in hunting.

These purely economic perspectives on northern life offer a limited view of northern native communities. Embodied in the subsistence way of life is the development of a self-image, the transfer of traditional values to young people, and the cohesion of social organization. Animals continue to assume a prominent role in the mythology and ideology of Arctic and Sub-Arctic peoples. These intrinsic values underscore the role of subsistence in a rapidly changing, modern-day environment.

Moreover, formal and informal sectors of a community are subsets of a greater world political economy. Northern indigenous people have been "discovered," "claimed," "explored," and "exploited." Today they struggle with an array of social pathologies, like drinking and suicide, which are the by-products of traumatic social change. In these respects, northern people have much in common with the third world. They differ in that they have been encompassed by some of the most powerful nations of the world and are left as small minorities within southern-based democracies.

Historically, community development efforts have come as a litany of southern-prescribed social improvement programs and imposed notions of economic success. Countless programs, offered by government and churches, have been engineered and implemented, and remain as vivid memories of imposition and failure in northerners' collective consciousness.

One of the early attempts at CED in Alaska and Canada was the introduction of large-scale reindeer herding as a means of insuring food supplies-irrespective of the possible contamination of natural stocks of caribou with domesticated animals. Alaska's 1971 Native Claims Settlement Act organized northern indigenous peoples into regional and village corporations, but neglected to secure priority rights for native subsistence hunting. Numerous mega-projects have also been proposed, ostensibly for the economic benefit of small communities, but generally accompanied by plans for a southward stream of benefits.

There is little disagreement that there have been positive changes, but there have also been important lessons. As Thomas Berger and others have written, given the remoteness, the low population, and limited infrastructure of these regions, it is likely that a healthy informal economy constitutes a necessary condition for sustainable development over the foreseeable future. Given the history of northern colonization, the current political reality of the north, and the normative nature of the idea of sustainable development, it follows that maintaining these cultural systems is best achieved through institutional arrangements which are backed with legal rights and support culturally appropriate systems of government/community decision-making. Arctic policy analyst Oran Young adds that the introduction of economic activities which undermine the socio-cultural bases of the existing informal economy are just as detrimental to sustainable development as economic enterprises which disrupt ecosystems.

It is in these conditions that joint government-native management partnerships have evolved.

### **Northern Wildlife Co-Management & its CED Efforts**

Wildlife co-management agreements are power-sharing arrangements in resource management. In Canada's and Alaska's Arctic and Sub-Arctic, co-management institutional arrangements represent an attempt to mitigate the cultural differences between "indigenous " and "state systems" of management.

Co-management agreements have proliferated in Canada. Many are the outgrowth of land claim settlements, federal government devolution, and court rulings giving First Nations peoples legal rights to access resources and play a role in management. Many of these agreements are implemented through management boards which typically function with representatives from agencies and communities.

In Alaska, co-management arrangements have evolved in the more adversarial conditions of American-style democracy. Consequently, some co-management bodies are structurally similar to recognized and funded special interest groups which have assumed certain management functions. Both Canadian and American initiatives, however, are driven and influenced by conditions of resource uncertainty, demands from outside groups, and an increasingly sophisticated native presence in the political arena.

Northern co-management agreements today take many forms and address a range of issues:

- \* The Porcupine and the Beverly Quaminuriak Caribou Management Boards focus on migratory resources, crossing several jurisdictions.
- \* The well-funded Alaska Whaling Commission has its own full-time staff and is involved in the co-ordination of scientific research, as well as the allocation of harvest to Inupiat communities.
- \* The Porcupine Caribou Management Board and the Alaska Whaling Commission, both concerned with trans-boundary species, are subsets of international regimes, and interact with international co-management boards.
- \* The claims relating to the James Bay and Inuvialuit agreements are examples of comprehensive native claims, each of which has produced a variety of co-management boards at the local and regional levels.
- \* The Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board differs from all these in that it is composed of multi-stakeholder groups of native, non-native, and government groups.
- \* The Mayo Renewable Resource Council is the first of a whole collection of new local joint management boards, created as a result of the Council of Yukon Indian Land Claims

process. The Mayo Council has no government agency representatives sitting as members, yet works with government agencies to manage its claim region.

\* A more far-reaching co-management arrangement is the Yukon-Kwukwim Delta Goose Management Plan which has both Alaskan and Californian agencies and resource user-groups as signatories. It grapples with the issues of users with significantly different traditions in hunting.

Co-management institutions which endeavour to help maintain informal economies are engaged in a daunting task. For participants directly involved in board activities, supporting the development of informal community economies requires blurring the boundaries which normally define the activities of government conservation agencies. Co-management contributions to CED also require that participants extend their concept of management beyond the conventional paradigm in which humans and nature are viewed as separate. They have to come to see the goal of sustainable resource use as an outcome of social-political conditions. Part and parcel of this process is the development of mutual awareness and trust between the parties implementing the agreements, as well as agencies, community members, and associated interest groups, while maintaining a perspective on the greater world and its political environment.

These are lofty goals. Yet there is evidence that so management arrangements are translating into effective efforts to defend northerners' rights and to actively support the formal and informal economic development of communities. Co-management contributions to CED have been categorized three ways:

- \* Confronting external threats to the resources of community subsistence economies from competing demands and values.
- \* Creating new and appropriate economic opportunities.
- \* Redirecting the flow of benefits from wildlife resources to communities.

### **1. Confronting External Threats**

Co-management institutions exist within and interact with a greater world of conflict and controversy. The science of resource ecology, for example, is increasingly used as a political instrument to advance special interests. Maintaining viable wildlife resources as well as user communities' rights to use them has therefore required defensive actions. Public awareness campaigns, projecting a clear voice in national and international debates, and creating networks of groups sharing compatible agendas are all examples of this area of work.

These contributions have two effects. First, they directly confront groups with competing demands and help define the rights of local users. Second, they leave community members with lasting skills of political experience. In more day-to-day terms, such work may require the careful review of development proposals and licence applications,

finding culturally appropriate ways to keep these communities informed, and gaining the attention of southern populations through the mass media. As a part of this process, community members have also to address the dissemination of misinformation and meet one-on-one with other political leaders.

The potential of co-management to serve communities' interests is illustrated by the response of Canada's Porcupine Caribou Management Board (PCMB) to the proposal to construct gas and oil facilities on the calving grounds of Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). Devoting substantial amounts of labour and financial resources, the PCMB has been effective in helping to shift the focus of the issue from wilderness preservation to matters of cultural survival, and in engaging Canada's Department of External Affairs to voice communities' concerns through diplomatic channels. The PCMB has also secured funding for a community awareness workshop on the issue and for community members to join an American grassroots advocacy campaign.

It is ironic that PCMB, which is in many respects an outgrowth of the mid-1970s Mackenzie Valley Pipeline proposal, is now so consumed by the ANWR issue. The difference today is that a legally-established institutional arrangement provides Canadian Porcupine caribou users a well-developed venue for voicing community management objectives.

The animal rights movement, with its concern for animal suffering, represents a recent external threat to subsistence peoples. Working with this issue have been several Alaskan native commissions concerned with marine mammal harvests. The increased popularity of the movement is leading other co-management boards to produce documentaries on the importance of wildlife to northern indigenous peoples.

## **2. Creating New & Appropriate Economic Opportunities**

Taking into account the interrelationships of formal and informal economies, co-management agreements in some cases are providing special funding for those who choose to pursue subsistence lifestyles. In other cases, co-management boards are helping to generate new employment and business opportunities which facilitate the development of modern subsistence lifestyles.

Among these, the Cree James Bay Agreement is noteworthy. Its special provisions offer a guaranteed income to heads of household who are involved in traditional harvesting activities more days than in wage labour employment (total 120 day minimum). This program is managed by a 6-person "Cree Hunters and Trappers Income Security Board" with three members selected by the Quebec Government and the other three by the Cree Regional Authority. Studies indicate that as a result of the program there has been a renewal of subsistence activities in Cree bush communities.

Approaching CED in a more conventional manner, the N.W.T. Community Renewable Resource Councils have recently called for the construction of a tannery in Fort McPherson. Building and operating such a facility in the community would create local

jobs, encourage traditional activities, and lower harvesters' costs of preparing furs. Another renewable resource council is awarding to several local families the contract to construct a back country conference center/education site. This is seen as a way to spread the profits and build commitment to the project.

Other income sources created by co-management include honoraria for the many hours board members spend in meetings, and jobs for locals who assist in wildlife research and in the collection of harvest data. Co-management has also assisted the development of modern hunting cultures by helping to establish training programs in bowcraft and by offering to local young people a scholarship program for training in resource management and biology.

### **3. Redirecting the Flow of Wildlife Benefits**

"Benefits" here refer to profits from wildlife-related businesses developed by white people after colonizing northern areas. Big game outfitting and non-consumptive forms of recreation, like wilderness adventure travel, are two good examples. Currently, the contribution of co-management to redirecting these benefits to communities and correcting "economic leakage" has been modest, but noteworthy.

Historically, the conflict between native and non-native hunters has been intense. Natives have long had fundamental misgivings about southerners' bagging of trophies for sport, and each group views the other as having a negative impact on wildlife populations. These concerns have intensified because of the issue of meat wastage. Since one function of wildlife management agencies is to issue commercial permits and to set and supervise commercial use policy, co-management negotiations and agreements create an opportunity to redefine rights and ensure the consideration of communities' values and needs.

In Yukon, outfitters have historically dominated many branches of government and captured wildlife management agencies for their special interests. Lucrative revenues seldom reach communities and the traditional lands through which clients and guides hunt and travel. The problems associated with non-native outfitters and southern hunters are exacerbated by the outfitters' hiring of non-native employees.

At present, much of the progress on this front is voluntary. The response from outfitters has been mixed. While some remain entrenched in their old views, others recognize the new northern political reality, the common interest in viable wildlife populations, and the need for change. More importantly, increased dialogue has served as the foundation for improved relations.

So, while several agreements have confirmed the hunting rights of powerful outfitting lobbies, new lines of communication have been established. Game not consumed by clients or outfitters is given to communities to avoid waste. Several communities have proposed establishing their own big game outfitting businesses. Another community is

considering a requirement that clients spend at least one night within its community. The hope is other local services may be developed.

In several national parks which are managed as part of co-management agreements, wilderness river guiding companies are required to dedicate a portion of their income to native organizations. These processes are reviewed by co-management boards.

### **Learning to Adapt: Grand Challenges & Signs of Hope**

These cases give some indication of the scope and potential of co-management contributions to CED. Institutional arrangements which make explicit the linkages between wildlife management and the choice of the resource user communities help northern indigenous peoples to avoid the morass of problems which have accompanied previous northern development efforts.

Given the nature of northerners' dual economy, wildlife co-management arrangements also help to maintain the interdependence of economic progress and resource stewardship in a fragile ecosystem. These links, in turn, serve as protection against inappropriate resource uses advocated by outside interests. Establishing partnerships between government agencies and communities helps to build mutual awareness and better work relationships for dealing with complex modern day problems. More importantly to CED, co-management arrangements offer another venue for achieving sustainable and self-defined approaches to progress.

Clearly, northern wildlife co-management arrangements are only one way for local communities to shape their economic development. With industrialized societies' increasing demands on energy resources, the continued degradation of the world's environment, and the globalization of economies, the pressures from the south are not likely to abate. While co-management boards are often too busy grappling with external threats to focus pro-actively on issues at home, these new institutions do offer some hope of finding a better sense of economic progress and northern justice.

