

## CHALLENGES OF PROTECTED AREA MANAGEMENT TO COMBINE NATURE PROTECTION AND RECREATIONAL USE

Siikamäki, P.<sup>1</sup> & Kangas, K.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Oulanka research station, Thule institute, Liikasenvaarantie 134, FI-93999 Kuusamo, Finland  
(e-mail: pirkko.siikamaki@oulu.fi)

<sup>2</sup> Oulanka research station, Thule institute and Department of Biology, University of Oulu,  
P.O.Box 3000, FI-90014 Oulu, Finland

### **Abstract**

Even though urban forests are important areas for forest recreation, nature-based tourism is still concentrated on pristine environments like national parks. Moreover, the expectations on protected areas as a tool for regional development in peripheral areas are growing all the time. Indeed, many national parks have multiplied their visitor numbers in last few decades. Due to the increasing amount of visitors the nature is exposed to more extensive wear and disturbance, which may threaten not only the conservational but also the recreational values of these areas if the change is not under control.

The crucial question is whether nature-based tourism can enhance and promote conservation and the socio-economical well-being of surrounding communities as intended by sustainable tourism development strategies. The development of tools for the management of tourism in protected areas has been in the front line because of the apparent need for compromises between tourism use and nature protection to ensure the primary purpose of nature protection areas. In Finland, Metsähallitus is currently developing and testing a management and planning framework for Finnish national parks and protected areas. This Finnish version is based on Limits of Acceptable Change, LAC framework and is guided by the nine principles for sustainable nature-based tourism. The indicators, standards and management actions of the pilot version are mainly defined by the manager not through a process with the involvement of different stakeholders and local residents. Oulanka National Park, ONP in north-eastern Finland was one pilot area for testing the LAC-method. We analysed the outcome and the success of currently conducted LAC-process in ensuring the ecological and socio-economical sustainability of nature-based tourism and recreation in ONP. One crucial component for the management, channelling and planning the recreational use within a protected area, is exact information on the spatial distribution of use. We will present preliminary results on an intensive data collection on visitor numbers and spatial patterns of visitor use in ONP.

### **Key Words**

Protected area, nature-based tourism, Limits of Acceptable Change, biodiversity, visitor monitoring