

Culture and Conflict in Winter Recreation: Insights from a Qualitative Study at Mt. St. Helens

Jennifer D. Gilden
Institute for Culture and Ecology
P.O Box 6688
Portland, OR 97228-6688
www.ifcae.org/projects/mazama1/

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Abstract

This exploratory study uses multiple methods to describe recreational group interactions and conflict at Mt. St. Helens in southern Washington State and to develop a basis for future recreational conflict studies in the Cascade Mountains of Washington and Oregon. Interviews conducted for this study indicate that Mt. St. Helens is a popular recreational site due to its status as an active volcano and its proximity to several urban centers. The variety of recreational activities taking place at Mt. St. Helens make it an ideal microcosm in which to study the interactions between recreational groups.

Unlike many recreational studies that are based on mail surveys, this study uses an inductive, ethnographic approach using in-depth interviews with key informants representing recreational management and recreational clubs; a brief on-site survey of visitors, documentary research, and participant observation. These methods helped to identify underlying causes of conflict and produced insights about the holistic nature of recreational group interactions that may not have surfaced using traditional recreational research methods. We found that experiences of conflict were influenced by such diverse factors as weather, funding structures, historical claims to recreation areas, social networks, and social capital.

Keywords: winter recreation, conflict, volunteerism, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, social capital

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Introduction

Mt. St. Helens is an active volcano close to several major urban centers, including Portland, Oregon, and Seattle, Washington. The variety of recreational activities taking place at Mt. St. Helens make it an ideal microcosm in which to study the interactions between recreational groups.

The objective of this exploratory ethnographic study was to learn about the culture of winter recreation at Mt. St. Helens, including the level of recreational conflict and the underlying causes of such conflict. Findings would be based on interviews with resource managers and recreationists, documentary research, and participant observation. The study was intended to be a modest pilot study that would highlight topics for future research on winter recreation in the Cascade Mountains of Washington and Oregon. However, the results suggested that ethnographic research methodologies could be useful in studying all forms of recreation.

The study was funded by the Mazamas, a recreational club based in Portland, Oregon, and planned in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service. Both organizations were concerned about a perception of increased recreational conflict in the Cascade Mountains, of which Mt. St. Helens is a part. The Mazamas, who primarily represent climbers and other non-motorized visitors, were primarily concerned about interactions with snowmobilers at Mt. St. Helens, while the U.S. Forest Service was interested in learning about the effectiveness of winter recreational management at the site.

Most research on recreational conflict uses a survey-based approach to examine factors such as conflict perception, acceptance of different user groups, and values. This case study takes a different approach by using ethnographic methods. Ethnography, as a verb, is defined as “the collection of data that describe a culture” (Bernard, 1994, p. 17). Ethnography is an inductive process in that it uses “direct observation to confirm ideas, and the linking together of observed facts to form theories or explanations of how...phenomena work” (Bernard, 1994, p. 6). The specific ethnographic methods used in this study will be detailed later in the “Methods” section.

The use of an inductive process allowed the emergence of three important themes: underlying causes of conflict, territoriality (or place attachment), and social organization. Each

of these factors plays a part in social capital, which emerged as a way to illuminate relationships among recreationists and between recreationists and forest managers.

Ethnographic methods offer a way to study conflict from a holistic perspective that can benefit resource managers. Public lands agencies are under pressure to integrate the perspectives and needs of diverse user groups, and effective management benefits from an in-depth understanding of the social and political context in which conflict and cooperation take place.

Historical, Political and Geographical Context

The historical, geographical, and political context of recreation at Mt. St. Helens helps explain current relationships between recreational groups. Unless otherwise noted, contextual information for this section was provided in interviews with Mt. St. Helens National Volcanic Monument (MSHNVM) staff and by reports published on the Monument website (MSHNVM, n.d.; Nieland, 2000; Nieland, 2001).

Mt. St. Helens lies within the Gifford Pinchot National Forest in southwest Washington, close to the cities of Vancouver, Washington and Portland, Oregon. The 110,000-acre Monument was established in 1982, two years after the eruption of Mt. St. Helens on May 18, 1980. At present, Marble Mountain Sno-Park and Cougar Sno-Park are the only formal winter recreation areas available at Mt. St. Helens.

Long before the eruption of Mt. St. Helens, its beauty and proximity to urban areas made it a popular destination. The north and south sides of the mountain were used by different recreational groups – the north by climbers, and the south by snowmobilers. By the late 1970s, snowmobilers accounted for approximately 95% of those using the south side. In response to their increasing numbers, snowmobilers petitioned the Forest Service to join the new state Sno-Park system. As a result, Cougar Sno-Park was established in 1978.

The eruption of Mt. St. Helens on May 18, 1980 changed the face of recreation on the mountain. Although many recreational services were suspended for several years after the eruption, the mountain gained international attention and the number of visitors to the area grew enormously. By the time plowing on the south side of the mountain resumed in 1987, according to Jim Nieland, the recreation manager for Gifford Pinchot National Forest, demand had quadrupled.

Because the eruption destroyed the north side of the mountain, the focus of winter recreation shifted to the south side. Climbers, skiers and snowshoers moved into an area that had previously been used mainly for snowmobiling. At the same time, the eruption increased the area open to motorized recreation. A lahar, or mudflow, cleared the trees from a large area southeast of the mountain, making it more accessible to snowmobiles.

Around 1987, the Monument began considering development of a new sno-park and the enhancement of an existing sno-park. The Monument held planning meetings and invited the public to attend. Apart from one representative each from a mountain climbing and hiking club, no nonmotorized users attended. In contrast, snowmobile clubs were active in generating funding, attending meetings, and writing letters. Nevertheless, Monument managers were aware that nonmotorized users would use the sno-parks, and were aware of potential conflicts between user groups. Planning went ahead without substantial involvement from nonmotorized users, and in 1988 Marble Mountain Sno-Park was built and separate trails for motorized and nonmotorized users were created at Cougar Sno-Park.

Today, Marble Mountain Sno-Park draws the most visitors of any winter recreation destination in southwest Washington, and it accounts for about half the winter recreation use in Gifford Pinchot National Forest. Mt. St. Helens receives approximately three million visitors per year due to its status as an active volcano and its proximity to several major urban centers, including Portland, Oregon, and Seattle, Washington. During winter, the two sno-parks (or winter recreation areas) at Mt. St. Helens receive 50,000-80,000 visitors per year.

Snow sports at Mt. St. Helens take many forms, including winter climbing, ski mountaineering (ascending and descending on skis), cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, sledding, innertubing, backcountry camping, snowboarding, and snowshoeing. Other activities include dog-sledding, dog-assisted skiing, and combinations of sports, such as snowmobile-assisted snowboarding.

From 1996-1999, approximately 60% of all visitors to Marble Mountain Sno-Park were snowmobilers, and 30% were skiers or other nonmotorized users. The proportion of nonmotorized users is growing, due mostly to an increase in snowshoeing and winter mountaineering. National snowshoe sales have been increasing by 25% per year (Snowsports Industries America, 2002). Since snowshoeing requires no special training or skill and very little equipment, it is widely accessible to the general public. At the same time, cross-country skiing

declined dramatically in the decade prior to 1998 (C. Maguire, Washington Parks and Recreation Commission, personal communication, April 12, 2000) and continues to decline (National Sporting Goods Association, 2004). Winter climbing, ski mountaineering and snowboarding is considered a “minority use” of the mountain; about 10% of the year’s total climbing permits, which average 16,000, are issued in winter.

Recreation on Mt. St. Helens is managed by separating users spatially and temporally, and through access quotas. Trails are designed to separate motorized users from nonmotorized users. Trails include groomed and ungroomed routes that are open to both snowmobiles and nonmotorized users, trails that are closed to snowmobiles, and snowmobile-only trails (Figure 1). Most snowmobilers start in the Marble Mountain Sno-Park and travel east along a shared road to their preferred recreation areas. Snowmobiles are permitted to the summit of the mountain, while certain areas around the eruption zone are closed to all recreationists. Winter climbers also use the Marble Mountain Sno-Park to begin their ascents of the mountain.

There have been attempts to ban snowmobiles from areas on Mt. St. Helens. In 1996, the Oregon Nordic Club sent a letter to the Monument stating their opinion that snowmobiles should be restricted to areas below timberline. In response, the Forest Service called a series of meetings between snowmobilers and nonmotorized users in 1999. No satisfactory agreement was reached, and the issue remains unresolved.

Recreational visits to the mountain are also managed temporally. Mt. St. Helens is a very popular climb, and climbers must plan months in advance in order to reserve a climbing permit. Climbing permits are required year-round for anyone climbing above 4800 feet. These permits are free during the winter, but from April 1-October 31 they cost \$15 each. From May 15 to October 31, the number of climbers is limited to 100 per day to avoid environmental damage to the mountain. The dates and fee system have implications for contact between motorized and nonmotorized visitors that will be discussed in further detail below.

Washington’s sno-park funding system plays an important role in recreational management at Mt. St. Helens. Funding for Washington sno-parks comes from sno-park permit fees, snowmobile registration fees, and Washington fuel tax refunds for snowmobile programs. Funding for sno-parks is spent in direct proportion to the types of users at each sno-park, and because there are more snowmobilers than nonmotorized users at the Cougar and Marble Mountain sno-parks, the funding that comes from these groups is proportionally greater. In fact,

Monument staff note that if it weren't for snowmobiles, there would be no sno-park program at Mt. St. Helens as it currently exists.

Washington snowmobilers also contribute to the expense of maintaining the sno-park by paying a fuel tax. Fuel taxes paid by snowmobilers are refunded as a "non highway use of fuel," and the funds are provided to winter recreation programs for use in plowing sno-parks, grooming trails, maintaining facilities, providing signage, and conducting safety and education programs for snowmobilers. The funds are not used for nonmotorized trails, though nonmotorized users benefit from road plowing and other programs. Similarly, sno-park funds from nonmotorized users are used for nonmotorized trails.

Prior Relevant Research

Recreational conflict has been the subject of a great deal of research, much of which is based on quantitative data gleaned from written surveys (Blahna, Smith, & Anderson, 1995; Carothers, Vaske, & Donnelly, 2001; Gibbons & Ruddell, 1995; Manning & Valliere, 2001; Ramthun, 1995; Vaske, Carothers, Donnelly, & Baird, 2000; Vaske, Donnelly, Wittmann, & Laidlaw, 1995). Ethnographic methods are rarely applied to recreational conflict studies, even by anthropologists. Instead, anthropologists have focused on the cultural implications of tourism (Erve, 2000, Smith, 1989), ecotourism (Weaver, 1998), the cultural context in which leisure takes place (Just, 1980), and the culture of leisure groups, such as sports teams (Sands, 1999).

A great deal of recreational research as sprung from Jacob and Schreyer's (1980) goal interference model, where conflict is defined as "goal interference attributed to another's behavior" (p. 369). Four contributing factors to goal interference include activity style (the meaning individuals assign to an activity); mode of experience (the extent to which visitors are focused on the environment or activity); resource specificity (the significance of the resource to the individual); and tolerance for lifestyle diversity.

Vaske et al. (1995) studied social values (or social acceptability) conflict, which can occur when there is no physical contact between groups, simply because people object philosophically or morally to particular activities being conducted in certain areas. Vaske studied hunters and non-hunters, and discovered that even when non-hunters did not encounter hunters, they perceived conflict simply from knowing that hunting was occurring in their vicinity. Carothers et al. (2001) replicated the methods used by Vaske to study social values and

interpersonal conflict reported by hikers, mountain bikers, and people participating in both sports. Carothers notes, “If an event is not observed and not considered to be a problem, no conflict is apparent. Similarly, if the event is not observed but judged problematic, the evaluation must stem from a conflict in social values” (pp. 57-58).

Several researchers have studied the social acceptability of “nontraditional” activities, defined by the National Park Service as “certain outdoor recreational activities which are not necessarily dependent upon park resources for their realization, and which do not constitute traditional or customary uses” (U.S. Department of Interior, 1978, Chapter 7, p. 7). Research on “nontraditional” activities is applicable to this study of Mt. St. Helens, where visitors are increasingly turning to new activities such as snowmobile-assisted snowboarding. In their study of llamas in the backcountry, Blahna et al. (1995) explored the social acceptability of nontraditional activities in recreational areas and found that factors such as safety and philosophical appropriateness were important elements in visitors’ assessments of the nontraditional activities (p. 201). Vaske et al.’s (2000) research on conflicts among skiers and snowboarders concluded that traditional recreationists (skiers) were less tolerant of nontraditional recreationists (snowboarders) than vice-versa. White and Schreyer (1981) conducted similar work on nontraditional activities, asking National Park visitors to rate the appropriateness of 22 different activities ranging from traditional to nontraditional. Seven activities, including snowmobiling, were rated as most inappropriate.

A substantial amount of research has focused on the asymmetrical nature of conflict between motorized and non-motorized visitors. Knopp and Tyger (1973) explored snowmobilers’ and cross-country skiers’ values regarding land management and control over recreational activities in Minnesota, finding that the presence of snowmobilers strongly impacted skiers’ recreational experience, while skiers had little impact on snowmobilers. Similarly, Jackson and Wong’s (1982) study of snowmobilers and cross-country skiers in Alberta, Canada identified asymmetrical perceptions of conflict and a lack of understanding of other recreational groups. Nielsen and Shelby (1997), Adelman, Heberlein, and Bronnicksen (1986), and Gramann and Burdge (1981) similarly found asymmetrical relationships between motorized and nonmotorized recreationists.

Asymmetrical conflict studies focus on resentment of one recreational group by another. However, groups may also have asymmetrical relationships with management, where one group

has more leverage than another group. Our research found this to be the case at Mt. St. Helens. Social capital, a concept developed by Loury (1977), Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988), helps explain why some groups may have more influence over recreational management than others. Under Bourdieu's (1986) definition, social capital derives from actual and potential resources resulting from a network of relationships or membership in a group. Coleman's (1988) definition focuses on individual social capital, or how individuals can use their social networks as a personal resource. Social capital remains a nebulous term, and there is little agreement on the definition (World Bank, 1998; Grootaert, 1998).

Cohen and Prusak (2001) provide a working definition of social capital as “the stock of active connections among people: the trust, mutual understanding, and shared values and behaviors that bind the members of human networks and communities and make cooperative action possible” (p. 4). Group recreation, club membership and civic involvement are commonly identified as activities that nourish social capital (Hemingway, 2000; Putnam, 2000), and social capital depends on face-to-face encounters, connectedness, reciprocity and trustworthiness (Beem, 1999; Putnam 2000). In his book *Bowling Alone* (2000), Putnam makes an explicit link between social capital and recreational activity (among other factors). He argues that social capital has declined in the United States, reflected in a lower rate of civic and associational involvement.

Groups that have high levels of social capital have more power to achieve their goals (Putnam, 1993, online). Putnam writes, “Stocks of social capital, such as trust, norms, and networks, tend to be self-reinforcing and cumulative. Successful collaboration in one endeavor builds connections and trust—social assets that facilitate future collaboration in other, unrelated tasks.” Coleman (1988) notes “Social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible” (p. 98).

Putnam (2000) differentiates between two types of social capital—“bridging” capital and “bonding” capital. Putnam writes, “bridging social capital can generate broader identities and reciprocity, whereas bonding social capital bolsters our narrower selves.... Bonding social capital constitutes a kind of sociological superglue, whereas bridging social capital provides a sociological WD-40” (pp. 22-23).

Volunteerism plays an important role in the relationship between recreational groups and recreational managers at Mt. St. Helens, and has been identified as an important contributor to

social capital (Arai, 2000, Ginsburg & Weisband, 2000; Saguaro Seminar, 2001). Indeed, volunteering has been called “the heart of social capital” (de Raad, 2003). Campbell (2000, online) writes that “Volunteer activity builds social capital, and smoothes the way for collaborative efforts, including efforts directed at effecting political change.” In a national study of community benchmarks for social capital, “giving and volunteering” is listed as a benchmark of social capital, along with social trust, political participation, civic leadership and associational involvement, giving and volunteering, faith-based engagement, informal social ties, diversity of friendships, and equality of civic engagement (Saguaro Seminar, 2001, pp. 8-10). Arai (2000) emphasizes the political capacity of volunteering and examines the connections between individual action, collective action and social capital.

Territoriality, place attachment, and sense of place are overlapping concepts that describe individuals’ connections to a geographic location (Cortner and Moote, 1999; Williams and Stewart, 1998). Williams and Stewart (1998) describe the role “sense of place” has in natural resource management, noting that by “putting the human bond with nature in the foreground, rather than treating it as an interesting but insignificant feature of the background for resource planning, managers can begin to give the relationship between people and the land the careful, systematic attention it requires and deserves” (21). Territoriality or place attachment can also contribute to social capital by strengthening bonds between individuals (Cortner and Moote, 1999).

To summarize, most traditional recreational research is narrowly focused and is not intended to describe a holistic view of a complex conflict situation. Bury, Holland, and McEwen (1980, p. 401) note, “to understand and affect the course of any conflict, resource managers should know the values, motivations, aspirations and objectives of the parties involved.” While understanding these factors is vitally important, a more comprehensive view that recognizes the social, political, institutional, environmental, and economic bases of recreational conflict is also needed. Indeed, Schneider (2000) notes that “methodologically, a quantitative bias, lack of emic knowledge and outdoor focus further impede the advance of recreation conflict research and its subsequent management. The initial quantitative bias in recreation research may have limited explicit investigations of conflict’s connotation to visitors; but what is preventing such inquiries in 2000 and beyond?” (p. 129).

Methods

As noted in the introduction to this paper, this project was designed as an exploratory study that would be used to identify future research on recreational conflict in the Cascade Mountains. Ethnographic research is an inductive, rather than deductive, process; instead of beginning with a theory and hypothesis, it begins with observation, detection of patterns and themes, formulation of a tentative hypothesis, and finally development of theories. Once a theory is developed, an inductive approach may be used to test the theory and validate the information. This project took an inductive approach that used four different methods.

First, ethnographic interviews were conducted with ten key informants. Key informants are knowledgeable “experts” who can provide an overview of their area of expertise. Tremblay (1957, p. 689) noted, “In using key informants, we are not randomly sampling from the universe of characteristics under study. Rather, we are selectively sampling specialized knowledge of the characteristics.” In this study, the key informants included agency staff and recreational interest group representatives (five representatives of the U.S. Forest Service, including Gifford Pinchot National Forest and the Mt. St. Helens National Volcanic Monument; one Washington State recreational management official; one snowmobile club representative; one representative of a ski mountaineering group; and two representatives of Nordic (or cross-country) skiing interests. Informants were selected for their roles in management or in clubs that were active at Mt. St. Helens.)

Bernard (1994) describes four types of ethnographic interviews: informal interviews (unstructured, uncontrolled conversations); unstructured interviews (in which “you sit down with an informant and hold an interview” based on a clear plan but “characterized by a minimum of control over the informant’s responses” [1994, p. 209]); semistructured interviews (based on a written list of questions that are asked in consecutive order); and structured interviews (“in which all informants are asked to respond to as nearly identical a set of stimuli as possible” [1994, p. 210]).

The interviews with key informants conducted for this study were semistructured interviews averaging one and a half hours in length. Six interviews were conducted in person at the informant’s workplace, while four were conducted over the phone. Since the informants’ areas of expertise differed considerably, the questions asked of them were tailored to their particular area of expertise. The primary objective of interviews with managers was to gather

context about the history of recreation at Mt. St. Helens, management practices and funding, recreational conflict, and efforts to manage conflict. Interviews with club representatives focused on general perceptions of conflict and inter-group interactions, volunteerism, and larger contextual issues such as conflict in other locations.

Second, the principal investigator and an assistant conducted 19 in-person, semistructured interviews with 28 recreationists (some in pairs or groups) who were present at the Marble Mountain and Cougar sno-parks on February 16 and March 3, 2001 (Table 1). The interviewers approached each party present in the parking lot of Marble Mountain and Cougar sno-parks on those days (a “party” is defined as a group recreating together). However, all interviews on February 16 were conducted in the Cougar Sno-Park, because a heavy snow had closed the road to the Marble Mountain Sno-Park. The interviews remained in the parking lot for the first half of each day, approaching each party in the lot. At the end of the day, the researchers returned to contact any visitors they may have missed in the morning. Usually, visitors were interviewed when they were loading or unloading their recreational gear into cars or trucks. They were asked to participate in an interview, and, if agreeable, were interviewed immediately.

The sno-park interviews lasted 10-20 minutes and provided an overview of how users felt about their recreational experiences at the moment of interaction. The interviews were based on a set of standard, open-ended questions, samples of which are provided in Table 2. Many of these questions led to follow-up questions or discussions. Four interviews were begun and aborted because the recreationists declined to be interviewed. Interviews were transcribed and entered into The Ethnograph, a qualitative data analysis software program that allows the user to code and sort interviews. Interviews were labeled with 84 codes created by the researcher, such as “aesthetic preferences,” “carrying capacity,” “climbing fee,” “snowmobile emissions,” “etiquette,” “funding,” and “territoriality.” By sorting through the codes, common themes and connections emerged.

Third, in the spirit of participant-observation that characterizes anthropological research, the author and her assistant cross-country skied several times at Marble Mountain and Cougar Sno-Parks to observe interactions and conditions first-hand. These experiences provided context and an experiential understanding of conditions at the two sno-parks. No evidence of conflict was seen or experienced by the researchers. Technical difficulties (specifically, the lack of a snowmobile trailer and transportation) prevented us from snowmobiling.

Fourth, the study includes information from relevant documents produced by the Mt. St. Helens National Volcanic Monument, Washington State Snowmobiles Association, Oregon Nordic Club, Mt. St. Helens Trac-Riders, and other relevant organizations.

Quotations from the Sno-Park interviews are included in this paper to provide examples of interview findings. Pseudonyms were used to provide limited identifying information. These quotations, and indeed the entire interviews, were intended to document the perspectives of the interviewees.

RESULTS

The results of the study are divided into three sections that explore conflict and its underlying causes; territoriality, or place attachment (related to Jacob and Schreyer's [1980] concept of resource specificity); and social organization. Because this study was based on qualitative anthropological research, the results are presented as general summaries of interview findings.

Diversity of recreational uses. Winter recreation at Mt. St. Helens takes many forms. On one day, the researchers observed people who were climbing, ski mountaineering (climbing with skis), sledding, snowmobiling, innertubing, backcountry camping, snowboarding, and snowshoeing. Of those who participated in full interviews in the sno-parks, 13 said they participated in only non-motorized winter sports (cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, climbing, or snowboarding). Five participated in snowmobiling and a non-motorized sport (cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, or winter camping), and 10 participated only in snowmobiling.

Conflict and its underlying causes. Although during the planning stages for this research the Mazamas and Monument managers expressed concern about recreational conflict, the visitors interviewed for this project expressed an unexpectedly high level of tolerance for other groups. Several expressed their belief that the mountain should be shared. The following quotes illustrate this perspective:

Now if we're talking about snowmobilers, I don't have a problem with them. I know some people do, and I guess some people have had bad experiences. I haven't. They've been kind to me; they've been really courteous, and I also try not to get in their way...I

think we can have both up here. I think there's places where, yeah, snowshoers or skiers should just be able to go, and there should be places for snowmobilers. [Tom, cross-country skier, 35]

I don't mind other users. Actually, I don't mind snowmobilers. Most snowmobilers are pretty pleasant. I just—the noise of the snowmobile itself, that's what bothers me. And after they go by, that cloud of blue smoke that hangs for a while. [Fred, snowshoer/skier, 50]

We always make a point, when we're snowmobiling, we're very polite to anyone else that's on cross-country skis or snowshoes. We slow way down, don't make a lot of noise, and when we've been snowshoeing and cross-country skiing, they've done the same for us. I think everyone seems to respect each other. [Jeff, 27, snowmobiler/snowshoer/cross-country skier]

While the people we interviewed expressed little vitriol toward the other groups, snowmobilers seemed aware of the possibility for conflict.

We don't complain about the dog sleds or the cross country skiers. I'm sure they've probably got an opinion about us. [Laughs] They don't bother us. [Greg, snowmobiler, 24]

I don't know if it was the cross country skiers, I'm not sure...[but] they think that it's environmentally unsafe to have motorized equipment up here. I heard they wanted to get rid of it up here. I think that would be too bad. That's what makes it a great country. Respect what other people do, and...run safe, play by the rules. ... Never had any dispute. Don't want any, either. [Dean, snowmobiler, 33]

[Leonard, 36, snowmobiler]: The only encounters that I think that we've had aren't necessarily any arguments. You can just tell the disgruntled looks in their faces—maybe they were trying to enjoy a nature moment or something and—

[Monica (no age given), snowmobiler]: --some big old loud monstrosity comes rippin' by em.

[Leonard]: Which, you know, fair is fair. That's OK.

[Jerry, snowmobiler, 44]: Sometimes you hear rumors about them undoing your hitches on your trailers or something. You know those tree-lovin', [inaudible]-huggin' [laughs] No offense, but they all are, you know.

[Hugh, snowmobiler, no age given]: To each his own, but...

[Researcher]: Have you ever seen that actually happen?

[Jerry]: No, and thank God. I don't want to be a part of it. Just leave me alone. I'll leave you alone. It's fine if you don't like me, or believe in what I do.

Although most of the snowmobilers we spoke with reported no negative encounters with nonmotorized users, they expressed concern that nonmotorized user groups would lobby for them to be banned from Mt. St. Helens, as they have been banned from other areas. When this study was conducted, the National Park Service had placed restrictions on snowmobiles in 27 national parks and monuments, including Yellowstone National Park (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2000). The snowmobilers we interviewed were well aware of these restrictions and feared that similar restrictions would take place at Mt. St. Helens. Snowmobilers said,

If it happens at Yellowstone, I think it will just snowball from there. I really feel that that will be the landmark case that will decide snowmobiles' fate in the future. Which would be sad, because then you're taking away a person's right to live in the United States, to open freedom. [Len, snowmobiler, 36]

Whatever chance they'll get, they'll screw us. Clinton closed up 40 million acres of public land to the public. You can't use it! What good is it if your kids can't even get on it? It's there for our use. [Gary, snowmobiler, 46]

A post on the Washington State Snowmobile Association's (WSSA) website expressed similar concerns:

Mt. Spokane State Park riding areas are still open in the face of non-motorized users trying to ban snowmobiles. The same type of issue is still not resolved at Mt. St. Helens where Oregon non-motorized users are still working to shut areas down... (WSSA 2000)

Although cross country skiers and snowshoers reported few problems with snowmobilers, climbers and others who frequent the area above timberline told a different story. Recreationists who encountered snowmobiles above timberline said they felt their safety was compromised by sharing the steep slopes with such heavy and fast machines, and that snowmobiles' noise and emissions interfered with their experience on the mountain. As an Oregon Nordic Club representative said,

The issue is keeping snowmobilers off the upper mountain—they just don't belong there. It's really a major complaint... You'll be skiing along and suddenly your world is shattered. It's not like encountering snowmobilers on the trail—they totally dominate things as long as they're there because of the lack of trees. Even if they were silent, the safety issue is still there...

Graffiti written in the climbing register (“Snowmobiles are antiquated”; “Snowmobiles are noisy and pollutive [*sic*];” “Ban snowmobiles from our national monument”) reflects these tensions.

Below timberline, the traditional conflict-management method of separating user groups seems to work well. The cross-country skiers, snowshoers and snowmobilers we interviewed were generally positive about the way the sno-parks and trails were designed.

It does seem like they have enough trails out here that are good—there are certainly options, especially if you go out by Marble Mountain, in terms of trails that are snowmobile [free], which is nice. [Susan, cross-country skier, 27]

Above timberline, where management has not attempted to separate users, more interactions occur, especially during periods of heavy snow.

Territoriality. All types of recreational users wish to establish and extend their claims to access areas of the Monument. Different user groups' resources and strategies for establishing and defending these claims vary considerably.

As noted in the context section above, snowmobiling took place on the south side of Mt. St. Helens for several years before the sno-parks were built and non-motorized recreationists began using the area:

"We always have and always will snowmobile above the tree line... We rode the mountain before and we should have the right to ride it even now. Our position is that we ride everywhere that we had before, and we've been assured by the superintendent that we could do that, apart from not riding in the experimental plots. We're hanging onto that."

[Roy, snowmobile club representative]

A sense of territoriality also derives from the fact that snowmobiling access to Mt. St. Helens is unique in the area. Snowmobilers said that they valued Mt. St. Helens because it is one of the few mountains in the Pacific Northwest where they can ride above timberline, and the only mountain where they can ride to the summit. Other mountains in the Pacific Northwest are either closed to snowmobiles or have very limited access. Snowmobilers also said they appreciated the wide-open spaces created by the eruption's mudflows.

In interviews, Monument staff reported that snowmobilers do monitor themselves closely. According to Monument staff, snowmobilers who are members of recreational clubs claim to be more responsible than independent "rogue" snowmobilers, and are willing to report violations by other snowmobilers. As a snowmobile club member wrote on the club website, "If we as snowmobilers can not police ourselves, someone else will do it for us, bringing a lot more restrictions than we currently have" (Mt. St. Helens Trac Riders, 2000).

Climbers also have historic claims on Mt. St. Helens. However, climbers' territorial claims were weakened after the eruption when climbing shifted to the south side of the mountain, which was already "claimed" by snowmobilers. Further, as noted above, snowmobile organizations were substantially more active than nonmotorized users in recreational planning on the south side of the mountain.

Social organization. Recreational groups on Mt. St. Helens organize themselves in quite different ways. Many snowmobilers using the Marble Mountain area are active in snowmobile clubs such as the Mt. St. Helens Trac Riders club, which organizes potlucks, volunteer activities, and other social gatherings. There are also close links between snowmobile clubs and between snowmobile and horse clubs; according to Monument staff, many of the people who snowmobile at Mt. St. Helens in the winter also ride horses there in the summer. In addition, observations indicated that snowmobilers are more likely to spend two or more days at sno-parks, staying in mobile homes and trailers.

Nonmotorized visitors, on the other hand, tend to be more independent in their activities on the mountain. Skiers and snowshoers usually do not spend the night at the sno-park, and tend not to congregate in large social groups while on the mountain. Solitude nonmotorized users mentioned solitude as a goal when visiting Mt. St. Helens:

I like the peace, the solitude, being able to see the places I go in the summer, but they look so totally different in winter...I'm looking for getting away from the noise and the hassle. [Fred, snowshoer/skier, 50]

When I'm up on the mountain, I don't think about work, I don't think about family, I just think about being here, hangin' out. I just really don't think about anything. You just sort of resist, survive—even though it's physically exerting to climb and board each day, when I come off the mountain I feel totally refreshed. Because my mind's been completely at peace for three or four days. [Brian, snowboarder/snowshoer, 34]

Skiers and snowshoers appear to be the least organized and most independent group of recreationists visiting the mountain. While a few local clubs serve cross-country skiers, most skiers and snowshoers we spoke with did not belong to any club. The quickly growing

population of snowshoers also means that many are new to the sport and are not closely identified with recreational clubs.

Nonmotorized users are also less likely to attend management meetings, according to Monument staff. When considering management actions, the Forest Service invites interested parties to attend public meetings in order to generate feedback on proposed plans. Snowmobilers, who represent a higher percentage of users, are much more likely than nonmotorized users to attend these meetings. For example, approximately 216 people attended a March 2000 Forest Service meeting held in Vancouver, Washington. Although nonmotorized user clubs put notices on their web pages about the meetings, Monument staff reported that the vast majority of attendees were snowmobilers.

According to Monument staff, volunteerism is closely related to social organization at Mt. St. Helens. Of the people interviewed, one cross-country skier volunteered on an Americorps program near Mt. St. Helens; one cross-country skier and one snowmobiler said they volunteered as Boy Scout troop leaders and visited Mt. St. Helens in that capacity; two snowmobilers said they didn't volunteer "because we don't belong to...the snowmobile club"; and two snowmobilers said they were actively involved in construction activities near the sno-park.

The Washington sno-park program depends heavily on volunteer work, such as trail and building maintenance, litter cleanups, and construction of facilities. The 2000 Gifford Pinchot National Forest Annual Report (GPNF, 2000) notes that in 2000, 785 volunteers spent 36,619 hours maintaining trails, doing cultural resource surveys, patrolling wildernesses, and constructing recreation facilities (p. 1). In a list of volunteer activities taking place in 2000, the report identifies four snowmobile clubs and two horse clubs, in addition to recreational fishing clubs that participated in a steelhead survey. No ski or mountaineering clubs are listed.

Monument staff confirm that horse and snowmobile groups (who often have the same members) put in a considerable amount of valuable volunteer effort. Many of their activities, such as power-washing the snow shelter, refinishing picnic tables, and picking up litter, benefit all groups. Although hikers, skiers and mountaineers also volunteer, their contributions are less frequent, and often focus on activities that benefit a narrower set of users. One ski mountaineer, when asked the extent to which ski mountaineers volunteer at Mt. St. Helens, replied "zero." The same person noted that ski mountaineers might write a letter to the Monument expressing disgust with snowmobiles, but said, "We don't deal with trails. We don't think of trails as our

issue.” While climbers do have organized groups such as the Mazamas, their level of volunteering and participation in Mt. St. Helens management has been low. Ski mountaineers, who tend to be younger than climbers, are not widely represented among the climbing groups. However, some ski mountaineers and climbers do volunteer with the Mazamas and other groups to teach people about avalanche and climbing safety.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to learn about the culture of winter recreation at Mt. St. Helens, including the level of recreational conflict and the underlying causes of such conflict. Both social organization and territoriality play important roles in the relationships between user groups, including conflicts among users. However, other sources of tension also emerged. These sources are described in the following section on conflict and its underlying causes. Territoriality and social organization are addressed next.

Conflict and its underlying causes. None of the recreationists interviewed in the sno-parks reported first-hand experiences with conflict at Mt. St. Helens, though they did express an awareness that of the potential for conflict.

There are a few possible reasons for this tolerance. First, the trail system separates nonmotorized visitors from snowmobilers, and the level of separation appears to be sufficient for most visitors. Second, as interviews with snowmobilers and Monument staff indicated, snowmobiles felt that their sport was under scrutiny and policed themselves accordingly. Finally, displacement may occur when visitors who are aware of the presence of snowmobiles at Mt. St. Helens choose to go elsewhere.

However, interviews indicated that both nonmotorized visitors and snowmobilers were aware of tensions between the groups. Some contributors to this tension include the sno-park funding system; the fee, season and quota system for access to the mountain, and the implications of the season structure. These factors will be examined below.

The sno-park funding system, which was described in the context section of this paper, contributes to the political leverage enjoyed by snowmobile groups. Based on the proportions of nonmotorized users and snowmobiles—and the funding that each group provides to the sno-park system—it is unlikely that Monument managers will decide to close the entire area above

timberline to snowmobiles, as many climbers and ski mountaineers desire. Although Mt. St. Helens is one of the most climbed peaks in the United States, climbers are a small percentage of the total users of the area, and lack leverage in part because of the way the sno-parks are funded.

The fee, season and quota system also contributes to tensions. Monument managers say the fee system works well in addressing their goals of reducing environmental damage and crowding. However, the system also encourages people who want to avoid fees and quotas to climb in winter and spring instead of during the crowded summer months. Early May is the peak season for winter climbing, due to its relatively long days, better weather and snow conditions, and free climbing permits. Because user groups are not separated above timberline, encouraging more climbers in May effectively increases interactions with snowmobilers. This is especially true in winters with heavy snowfall, when snowmobilers gain access to areas that would otherwise be off-limits to their machines. During a winter of heavy snows in 1998-99, snowmobilers were present above timberline until late May and early June. During winters with less snowfall, contact decreases. Snowmobilers leave the mountain earlier in the season, and are less likely to roam into climbing areas.

Climbers also dislike the fact that they must pay a fee to climb after April 1, when they see snowmobilers ascending the mountain presumably for free. One ski mountaineer noted that there was “huge resentment” about this issue. Monument managers have considered changing the fee date to May 15, which is also the last day that snowmobiling is allowed at Mt. St. Helens. This change would help eliminate the resentment that climbers feel when they encounter snowmobiles above timberline, though it would not address safety or aesthetic concerns.

Territoriality. Snowmobilers’ sense of history, their volunteerism, their numbers, and Washington’s sno-park funding system to give them a claim to Mt. St. Helens. Jacob and Schreyer’s (1980) concept of resource specificity is applicable here. Mt. St. Helens represents a special resource to snowmobilers, and the right to roam the upper reaches of Mt. St. Helens is laden with both economic and symbolic meaning. In addition, snowmobilers note that their sport demands a larger spatial area than nonmotorized users generally use; and they point out that snowmobilers have considerable financial investments in their machines, which can cost \$3000-\$8000 or more. Their concern about maintaining access to Mt. St. Helens rises with broader political efforts to limit snowmobiling access nationally. Despite their aesthetic and safety

concerns, climbers and skiers do not feel that their access to Mt. St. Helens is similarly threatened.

Social organization. Interviews indicated that participation in management efforts varies by recreational type. The difference between the groups' engagement in management, their levels of volunteering, and their subsequent ability to influence decision-making is linked to how they organize themselves socially.

The snowmobilers' community orientation works to strengthen social networks, generate a labor pool, provide a financial base, and reinforce members' sense of motivation. In addition, there are simply more snowmobilers than nonmotorized users using the sno-parks, so proportionally more would be expected to participate in management.

Motivation for being involved in management arises from a larger ideological battle for multiple use of public lands. Local snowboarders are politically supported by national organizations such as the BlueRibbon Coalition ("Preserving our Natural Resources for the Public, instead of from the Public"), the American Council of Snowmobile Associations, and the Alliance for America, a nonprofit organization concerned with "protecting the constitution, property rights, humans, and the environment." Snowmobilers are also supported by state organizations such as the Oregon and Washington State Snowmobile Associations, which promote motorized access to public lands.

Nonmotorized users do not have parallel associations. While environmental groups and coalitions such as the Sierra Club and the Bluewater Network focus some of their efforts on banning snowmobiling from national parks and restricting the use of two-stroke engines, the non-motorized recreational clubs that serve Mt. St. Helens are not typically politically active. Nonmotorized users' lack of involvement in management and volunteerism has reduced the power of their claims to the Marble Mountain and Cougar Sno-Parks, compared to those of motorized users. However, their lower levels of involvement do not necessarily reflect the intensity of their feelings towards the issue. Monument staff note that nonmotorized users can take very controversial stances at management meetings. One staff member said this behavior causes frustration among motorized users, and that "it embarrasses me as a nonmotorized user." Snowmobilers emphasize their efforts to be polite, law-abiding, and self-policing—and Monument managers notice and appreciate these efforts.

CONCLUSION

This pilot study emphasized the importance of context in understanding the bases of recreational conflict. As a result, territoriality, volunteerism and social organization emerged as important themes in this work. Each contributes to social capital, broadly defined. At Mt. St. Helens, snowmobile groups appear to have considerably more social capital at their disposal than other groups. This capital is based on their strong social networks (both within and between snowmobile clubs, and between snowmobile clubs and horse clubs); their friendly relationship with Monument management; a sense of their history on the mountain; considerable physical resources at their disposal; a willing corps of volunteers; and strong motivation for action, reinforced and supported by statewide and national organizations. Groups that maintain and develop social capital may gain leverage in establishing and maintaining claims to specific areas. As Putnam (2000) writes, “Community connectedness is not just about warm fuzzy tales of civic triumph. In measurable and well-documented ways, social capital makes an enormous difference to our lives” (p. 290).

Unlike most recreational research, this study used ethnographic interviews, documentary research and participant observation to explore recreational interactions. While this methodology does not allow the rigorous testing of hypotheses that characterizes traditional recreational research, it does allow context to emerge as a factor in recreational conflict and tension. Context is best explored in an open-ended format that includes both key informant and on-site interviews, and allows informants to freely raise issues and concerns.

This study suggests several areas for future research. [It would be valuable to] look further at the role of social organization and social capital in recreational management. Why do some user groups seem to enjoy more leverage with management than others? Why do some user groups participate in management and volunteerism to a greater extent than others? To what extent do nonmotorized users in other areas participate in management activities, and why? How can different user groups be brought into the management process, and what are the most effective ways for users to develop leverage with management?

Finally, it would be valuable to explore how anthropological research methods such as ethnography can be used to holistically describe recreational situations and relationships. While anthropologists have explored tourism, ecotourism, and the cultural context and implications of

leisure, there has been little anthropological focus on recreational conflict. Using anthropological methods could add breadth and context to the recreational conflict field.

This pilot project also highlighted several ways in which relations between nonmotorized and motorized users could be improved.

Separating users temporally (by shifting permit dates) or spatially (by creating a ski and climbing corridor) could reduce some of the tensions experienced above timberline. In addition, increased understanding of the recreational context could help recreationists reframe their perceptions. For example, users could benefit from increased education about each group's recreational goals, the role of volunteerism, the fee and permit system, the financial structure that allows sno-parks to operate, and upcoming management meetings and volunteer opportunities.

Understanding can be fostered in many ways, some of them less traditional than others. The volunteerism that is so important at Mt. St. Helens could be used as a way to increase understanding and tolerance by inviting motorized and nonmotorized visitors to volunteer together on activities that benefit all users. Volunteering during the summertime would remove the recreational trappings that differentiate users, provide an informal opportunity to get to know members of other groups on a personal basis, and increase participants' connection with recreational managers.

Similarly, a group comprised of motorized and nonmotorized users could engage in each others' activities, collaborate on volunteer projects, and help bridge gaps in understanding and break down stereotypes. Such "collaborative learning" approaches have been successfully used to address natural resource allocation issues in watershed councils and other venues (Daniels & Walker, 2001). Collaborative learning encourages resource users to think differently in order to improve a situation, rather than solving a specific problem. A "collaborative recreation" group of this kind could be supported or facilitated by Monument managers, if not by recreational clubs themselves.

Some groups may be less interested in collaborating than in advancing their political interests. Volunteering is a simple and effective way for all groups to increase their social capital in regard to recreational management. Volunteering is a pro-active approach that sends a positive message, builds connections with management and other groups, and helps develop territorial claims. Groups can increase their influence over management decisions by encouraging their members to attend meetings and write constructive letters to management.

Similarly, creating coalitions and building connections with other groups is a proven way to increase political power and build motivation.

In summary, recreational managers, user groups, and researchers would benefit from understanding the implications of such contextual factors as territorial use claims, recreational funding mechanisms, related political struggles over public resources, social capital, weather patterns, group usage patterns and volunteerism.

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