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1998

6-9-1998

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Citation Information

Elmendorf, Ev, "Conflict Resolution: A Field Perspective" (1998). *Outdoor Recreation: Promise and Peril in the New West (Summer Conference, June 8-10)*.

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Ev Elmendorf, *Conflict Resolution: A Field Perspective, in OUTDOOR RECREATION: PROMISE AND PERIL IN THE NEW WEST* (Natural Res. Law Ctr., Univ. of Colo. Sch. of Law 1998).

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**CONFLICT RESOLUTION
A FIELD PERSPECTIVE**

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**OUTDOOR RECREATION:
PROMISE AND PERIL IN THE NEW WEST**

June 8-10, 1998

Natural Resources Law Center
University of Colorado
School of Law
Boulder, Colorado

Conflict Resolution: A Field Perspective

by Ev Elmendorf

I. Summary

The ever increasing numbers of recreationalists on our public lands is placing recreationists of varying interests on the same trails and areas. Simply stated, when there are varying interests and opinions in a shared area, there is the potential for conflict. Conflict leaves the land manager with a questions of proper and appropriate intervention.

Winter and summer trails and recreational areas have traditionally supported certain categories of recreational use. Recreational use that seemed in the past to find a harmony with the environment and the other existing uses. The coming of age of the “baby boom” generation has brought concentration and sheer numbers of folks that enjoy and love our outdoor recreationalist environment. This love and enjoyment of the outdoors, has brought varying opinions and expectations of the experience that is sought.

Along with the increasing numbers, opinions and expectations, there are more and more new modes of recreating. The industry supporting the recreation business, has made it easier, more comfortable, more powerful, and continual creativity has provided new types of recreation. All to be shared on the same trails and areas that once supported singular and consistent recreation modes.

Conflict occurs when expectations do not match reality. The land manager is faced with some tough questions that need time , money and resources. In a time when budgets are decreasing and personnel are stretched. However, over the last ten years data has been collected that suggests, with patience, there are methods and answers that are effective in conflict resolution.

II. Conflicts and Expectations

- A. We are a society of opinions. What happens when those opinions become expectations?
 - 1. All recreationalists come to the outdoors with an opinion of how the outdoors should be treated. In all cases those opinions, informed and uninformed, become expectations.
 - 2. A picture is painted in their head of reality should be for their day, and when they meet another recreationists who does not have the same picture or expectation, there is a potential for conflict.
 - 3. The macro or big picture is lost. A personal ownership is attached to their expectation and a power struggle occurs.
 - 4. People begin to attack what they don't understand and there is a leap from expectation to conflict.

III. Case Study... Vail Pass Winter Recreation Area

- A. Vail Pass is located 90 miles west of Denver on the I-70 corridor. It is comprised of 50,000 acres heavily used in the winter months. Colorado Department of Transportation built a rest area at the top of Vail Pass which provides ample winter parking and a convenient backcountry trailhead.
- B. Historically the area has been used by both motorized and non motorized recreationists. 25,000 visitors frequent the area each winter season. In the winter 31 miles of trails are created, five backcountry huts (10th Mtn Hut Association, Summit Huts Association) , several outfitter /guides , and traditional destination trails that have historical and local significance. In the past five years there has been several new recreational uses that have required new planning.
- C. The area has 31 miles of groomed trails, many more of ungroomed trails and paths, both motorized and non motorized snowplay areas, hybrid areas (a designated trail for motorized access to the top of a non motorized area), snowmobile tours,

guided ski tours, snowcat guided operation, five backcountry huts, and many and varied uses such as snowshoers, dog sledders, skate skiers, snowmobilers, tele-skiers, private snowcat operators, hybrid snowboarders and skiers, and just about any other variety of recreational activity you could find on snow.

- D. As a result of the variety of recreationalists and uses, expectations have clashed and conflicts have resulted. Ten years of studying this problem has resulted in an evolution of management and a variety of solutions.
1. The first step is to define the expectations.
 2. Years of data has been sought and collected. This data has shed much light on the problems, expectations and expected results.
 3. The public has been sought out and involved for several reasons:
 - a. Empower the varying use groups to come up with some suggestions on how to work together.
 - b. Allow the public to distribute the suggestions back to their own groups.
 - c. Encourage the micro perspective to become macro through the altering of expectation and the understanding of perspectives of other use groups.
 4. Anatomy of a Task Force
 - a. Endeavor to bring together all interested parties and representatives of all uses incurring on the land.
 - b. Persevere in bringing everyone to the table and keeping them there until understanding and suggestions come forth that reflect the macro picture.
 - c. Prepare and publish a clear, concise mission statement.
 - d. Clearly define the problems, goals, possible solutions and alternatives.
 - e. As this process takes place, ensure that the representatives represent their specific user groups.
 - f. Endeavor to reach a compromise. Compromise is when all parties

are equally uncomfortable.

- g. Come up with suggestions that are supported by the Task Force and are not dictums to the managing agencies.

E. After collecting, studying and reporting all the data and suggestions, what are the underlying management principles?

1. Manage based on the principle of compromise.
2. Education is worth the time and effort , however the three year rule applies.
3. Utilize personal, positive intervention. The glue that often holds all this together is trained personnel in the field interactive with the visitors.
4. Manage for the whole, with special consideration for the pieces. A specific management plan that accommodates every demand is not feasible. However, some flexibility needs to be built in to allow for experimentation and altering with changing recreational needs.
5. Utilize user groups to gain insight, management suggestions and facilitate education.
6. Develop management plans that allow for alternatives and flexibility.
7. Understand that this is an ongoing, time consuming process and is applicable only when necessity demands.

F. There is a need to be progressive not reactive in the response to conflicts. Prevention may be the best cure. Alternative options must be considered such as mandated separation of use, establishing expectations through education and looking closely at what terrain is suitable for varying recreational needs.

III. Expectations...Can they be changed?

- A. As understanding takes place of the needs and expectations of recreationists, there is a need to understand when it is possible and appropriate to attempt to alter and change expectations. Data shows that 80% of recreationists will alter their expectations if it does not eliminate their experience all together. There are many

methods that have proven successful. The following are a few examples:

- ◆ Education (the three year principle)
 - ◆ Paint a new picture for the recreationists
 - ◆ Clear, concise education such as signs, maps, brochures
 - ◆ Personnel available to interact not lecture the recreationists.
- ◆ Utilize the data to help inform the public
- ◆ Honest communications that admits the management limitations, and invites input.
- ◆ Understand the categories of defiance that may cause future conflict.

IV. Future Trends

- A. A clear and progressive approach needs to be looked at that will define the possible “hot spots” for the future. In order to do so, a close look must be taken at the industries, population, demographics, recreational needs now and future, and available recreation resources. As this is studied, it must all fit into the larger picture of our environment and ecology needs.
- B. A creative and proactive approach must replace a reactive approach in the land management agencies.
- C. Study and understand what will happen when the generation following the “baby boomers” begins to recreate. What are their needs and expectations? How do they differ?
- D. How do management agencies look at the population and economic growth and the resulting demands on recreation.
- E. What are the technology trends? Where will they go with more power; technically advanced skis and snowboards, and new toys on the market?