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Abstract
Wild Sky, a proposed wilderness in Washington State, has been a source of local contention since its inception. Drawing on the theories of political ecology, international conservation, and actor-based politics, this research seeks to understand the process of public participation in wilderness designation, the arguments both for and against Wild Sky, and how the wilderness proposal process could be improved. The paper begins with an outline of local and public participation in Wild Sky legislation, a discussion of “community,” and an account of how the 1964 Wilderness Act has been applied nationally and locally. This is followed by an analysis of interviews conducted with Forest Service employees and many of Wild Sky’s proponents and opponents. Advocates hope Wild Sky will boost the local economy, rehabilitate salmon runs, provide increased recreational access, and preserve an ecosystem typically excluded from wilderness – lowland forests and streams. Opponents see the proposal as an elite land grab that would exclude motorized recreation and prohibit the resource extraction historically important in the area. They argue that the land, logged a century ago, does not qualify as wilderness. Ultimately, the Forest Service will be charged with managing the land, but the Wild Sky legislation creates management expectations that will be difficult to achieve due to recent budget cuts and environmental regulations.

My research demonstrates that the lead actors in the wilderness debate have changed, with the voice of the timber industry replaced by more diverse opposition from motorized recreation. Although the Washington Congressional delegation strove to accommodate these various interests through public meetings and negotiations, the process could have been improved. Currently, the 1964 Wilderness Act does not outline a format for public involvement regarding Congressional additions to the National Wilderness Preservation System. However, this legislation should offer specific opportunities for public and local participation. Most importantly, in collaboration with the Forest Service and local communities, wilderness advocates and the federal government must be prepared to offer long-term support for wilderness through budget allocations and volunteer hours in...
The Wild Sky Wilderness is a 106,577-acre (431 km²) wilderness area in the western Cascade Range of Washington state. The wilderness is within the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest north of the U.S. Highway 2 towns of Index and Skykomish. The wilderness flanks, but does not include, the North Fork Skykomish River and the Beckler River. The Henry M. Jackson Wilderness is adjacent to the east and northeast. The highest point in Wild Sky Wilderness is 6,244 foot Gunn Peak. Prepared by the IUCN WCPA Wilderness Specialist Group: Sarah A. Casson, Vance G. Martin, Alan Watson, Angie Stringer, and Cyril F. Kormos, Volume Editors. Authors: Sarah A. Casson, Vance G. Martin, Alan Watson, Angie Stringer, Cyril F. Kormos, Harvey Locke, Sonali Ghosh, Steve Carver, Tom McDonald, Sharon Shay Sloan, Ilarion Merculieff, John Hendee, Chad Dawson, Susan Moore, David Newsome, Steve McCool, Roger Semler. The designation of geographical entities in this book, and the presentation of the material, does not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of IUCN or other participating organizations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, or area, or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. Is designated wilderness necessary in a national park? The wild, undeveloped areas of national parks (often called “backcountry”) are subject to development, road building, and off-road mechanized vehicular use. National park backcountry is protected only by administrative regulations that agency officials can change. Through the Wilderness Act, Congress recognized the intrinsic value of wild lands. Some of the tangible and intangible values mentioned in the Wilderness Act include “solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation,” as well as “ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.” People can recreate in Wilderness, though in most places individuals do so without mechanical transport. A designated wilderness area receives the government’s highest level of land protection and becomes part of the National Wilderness Preservation System. Q: What can I, or anyone for that matter, do in Wilderness? A: Just about anything that is lawful activity and does not harm the wilderness or require a vehicle is permitted. A list of popular activities: Hiking. Designated wilderness offers solitude, freedom, primitive recreation, challenge, risk, and personal connection with nature. The BWCAW allows visitors to canoe, portage and camp in the spirit of those travelers that came before them centuries ago. What’s Inside. Plan your BWCAW Trip . . . 2 Wilderness Permits: the Basics . . . 3 Leave No Trace Principles . . . 5 BWCA Wilderness Rules & Regulations 6. Smart and Safe Wilderness Travel . . . 8 Camping and Fire . . . 10 Winter Wilderness Travel . . . Accept the Wilderness Stewardship Challenge. Accepting the wilderness challenge comes process is necessary in order to protect that may impact the integrity of the with great responsibility.