

The role of wildlife in developing place meanings

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Abstract

Subsistence use – hunting or gathering wild, renewable resources for personal consumption – is integral to the economies and cultures of many families and communities in Alaska, in addition to supporting residents’ conceptualization of the landscape they inhabit. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the intensity of place values associated with landscapes in Interior Alaska among residents defined by their subsistence on wildlife populations. We drew from data collected during a regional mail-back household survey of communities located along the George Parks Highway, between the community of Talkeetna and the city of Fairbanks. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis were used to evaluate the dimensionality of a psychometric scale that we developed to measure 12 place values in consultation with local NPS partners and a volunteer group of Denali region stakeholders, representing a diversity of perspectives found in the region. Our results indicated that residents reported the highest value for the Denali region as a place inhabited by wildlife unique to Alaska, and reported the lowest value for the Denali region as a place to earn income. Residents who were subsistence users, compared to those who were not, reported higher valuation of the landscape as a place to relax, recreate, and harvest resources. These results can be used to better understand values held by both subsistence users and non-users in the state of Alaska, and inform strategies for navigating contentious natural resource and wildlife management issues.