

## The Environment in the Balance

### Evaluating Proposals for Resource Management in the James Bay Region: The Native Experience\*

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A. Resource Management Programs: Establishing Minimal Criteria for Evaluation. The announcement of the plans of the government of Quebec to expand and intensify the utilization of resources in the region east and south of James Bay has been accompanied by claims that the new resource users will protect the environment of the region and the native peoples who live there and already use many of the resources. These claims are based on the development of one or more adequate programs of resource management.

As concerned individuals and citizens want to make a public evaluation of these claims, the question arises for them: What are the criteria for evaluating resource management programs for this region? What minimal requirements must be met and what principles for setting guidelines are needed if a resource management program is to be successful?

We suggest that these criteria can be established on the basis of the resource use and management experience of the native peoples. The native peoples of James Bay appear to have successfully managed the resources of the region over the millenia that we presume they

\*The author must note that this brief is not intended to make any evaluation of the issues presently being considered by the courts in relation to the James Bay Hydroelectric Development Project, either directly or by implication.

have occupied it. No animals have become extinct during this period to our knowledge, nor has the environment been noticeably destroyed or degraded by these people. We propose the fundamental requirements and principles of the native resource management can be considered as minimal criteria to be used to evaluate future programs planned for this region. We say minimal criteria because of the general principle that the ability of modern technologies to disrupt environments is greater than the disruptive ability of the native hunters, and, as a consequence, the guidelines that work for the hunters are probably only a minimal list for industrial resources users.

The information I want to present is based on the results of a study I made in 1968 to 1970 of how one group of Indian people of the James Bay region, the hunters of the Waswanipi band, manage the animal populations which they hunt. On the basis of the other data available it seems likely that the requirements and principles of management found among the Waswanipi hunters are typical of the native peoples of the entire region. Confirmation of this must await more intensive studies of other groups.

B. Requirements and Principles for Resource Management Programs in the James Bay Region. The requirements and principles of Waswanipi resource management are respectively: a sound detailed knowledge of the environment, and a clear definition of the priority of ecological values. We consider each of these criteria in turn.

1. Requirements for Resource Management: Knowledge.

The knowledge of the Waswanipi hunters of their environment, of its climate, topography, vegetation, and especially its animals, is extraordinary not only for its detailed observations, but also for the complexity of the relationships understood, and for the general ecological principles that have been discovered on the basis of intensive knowledge of this single region. This knowledge can only be comprehended by realizing how intimately and thoughtfully the hunters live in their environment. Many of the understandings of the Waswanipi are almost identical with the understandings of science; indeed the overlap is extensive.

However, some parts of the knowledge that the Waswanipi find vital to their efforts to manage the animal populations of the region are not paralleled by scientific knowledge. When this knowledge is compared with scientific knowledge, it indicates that not all that needs to be known for resource management in the James Bay region is scientifically known at the present time.

That hunters should be experts on the environment in which they live is not surprising. Industrial resource use requires extensive knowledge over and above those kinds of knowledge which the native hunters possess, but a comprehensive resource management program would require the hunters' expertise as well. An effective resource management program requires both long-term research and experience in the regions and the participation of the native people.

The first criteria we propose for evaluating resource management programs is the requirement: has scientific research on the long-term ecological effects of resource use been completed?

2. Principles for Resource Management: Ecological Priority.

The knowledge and expertise of the Waswanipi hunters not only makes possible resource management, it makes such management necessary. The skill of the Waswanipi make it easy for them to be very effective hunters, and makes it necessary for them to set a limit on how many animals of each species to harvest.

The hunter must first decide how important, relatively speaking, are the various purposes for which he is hunting animals. People utilize resources for many purposes and this is as true for a hunter as it is of any resource user. In order to determine how, where and when to hunt, the hunter must decide which purpose is to be maximized, which is to serve as the primary standard by which to evaluate and guide hunting activity.

This ranking of purposes is guided by a series of principles. For example, the Waswanipi disapprove of killing animals to build a reputation or for self-aggrandizement. Good hunters are not necessarily those who kill a large number of animals, but those who "get what they need every year." The Waswanipi generally agree on a set of principles by which decisions about purposes and hunting should be made.

The critical point is that while the various purposes for which men hunt appear to be in conflict with ecological purposes in the short-run, the principles the Waswanipi cite make the ecological purposes primary, and evaluate and limit all the other purposes, (economic, social and political) by ecological considerations. While resource use continues to serve many purposes, the native peoples maximize various non-ecological purposes only in so far as these returns are compatible with ecological purposes.

This is the second general principle recommended to you. A resource management program that claims to take into account the protection of the environment should be evaluated by asking if it is based on this principle. That is, are the allocation of economic, social and political returns limited by considerations of long-term ecological stability?

We propose that these two general criteria, concerning knowledge requirements and priority of ecological values in resource use, constitute a minimal base from which citizens can evaluate proposals for management of resources in the James Bay region.

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