

**Summary:**

# **Sustainable tourism management in nature areas**

The increase in tourism activities in natural areas, greater diversity in tourist interests and the introduction of new types of holiday activities represent processes that can be observed in contemporary society. Such developments have led to greater attention and concern about the environmental and experiential effects of outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism activities.

The first part of this report discusses the utilization and adequacy of the available techniques that are being used to handle problems and conflicts ensuing from these developments. The management tools that have been developed and applied – mainly in a North American context – emphasize measurement of factual problems and elaboration of standard procedures for resolving conflicts. The techniques use zoning-based models with regard to the visitors' motives and activities, e.g. the *Recreation Opportunity Spectrum* – ROS. Other derivatives of the ROS model are also being used in North America; e.g. *Limits of Acceptable Change* (LAC), *Visitor Impact Management* (VIM) and *Visitor Experience and Resource Protection* (VERP). Although these kinds of instruments have been tested in a Norwegian context, these planning methods are not yet an integrated part of the management system for natural areas in Norway. Traditional outdoor recreation in Norway, which is generally simple, non-commercial and not dependent on heavy equipment, is currently being given priority by the Norwegian nature management authorities. As yet there have been relatively few attempts to monitor the environmental and experiential impacts of nature-based tourism or outdoor recreation activities.

Rural tourism is by definition located in regions with scattered settlements, which means that these types of mainly small-scale tourism activities take place within, or very close to, natural areas. Rural tourism is founded on the natural or human resource base of rural communities and exists predominantly in a symbiotic relationship with other local economic activities. In peripheral and economically marginal areas, rural tourism may contribute to vigorous developments in local communities. In England, the planning approach to rural tourism development is based on an idea of integrating a variety of economic, social, cultural and natural elements, and England has therefore been chosen as a case study area in the second part of this report. The objective in England has been to co-ordinate the interests of the visitors, local economics and other local stakeholders with the protection of biodiversity and the safeguarding of landscapes intact as well as the natural and cultural resources.

Whereas planning efforts have traditionally been quite fragmented between different sectors in society, recent attempts now focus on handling the array of

interests and concerns in an integrated, over-arching strategy. Social benefits for the population at large are also a part of this holistic approach, and accessibility for all social groups (e.g. disabled visitors) is emphasized in the English rural tourism strategy. An illustrative example can be found in the management of national parks in England. In the planning for the national parks, the objectives concerning maintenance of environmental and cultural heritage are combined with other crucial aims, such as experiential qualities (the visitors' experience and understanding) and social and economic progress for the local community. The national park authorities are instructed to work in close partnership with local authorities and local private interests.

Negative effects of tourism activities are not only a threat to the natural resource base and the well-being of the local inhabitants in or close to natural areas, but such harmful consequences may also in the long term undermine the livelihood of the tourism industry itself. Tourism development may be self-destructive in the longer run if its underlying natural or cultural resources are jeopardized. Thus the tourism industry itself depends on sustainable management. The third part of this study therefore focuses on the Norwegian planning system with respect to management of outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism. The Norwegian planning system is rather complex. Many societal sectors are involved in or affected by the planning process, and responsibilities and functions are ascribed to a number of different levels within the public administration system. The legal system regulating the use of outfields and natural areas is also multifaceted. However, the traditional public rights of access to natural areas (*allemannsretten*) form a management regime that still has a strong position in Scandinavia. The tourism industry itself, it seems, has in reality a modest influence in the planning process. However, the industry may contribute to a sustainable practice especially by adopting self-regulating principles.