



*/Summary Wildlife Economy RAP, Rewilding Sweden/*

Rewilding Sweden, as the second project partner in Norrbotten county, has had a clear scope on eco-tourism and on promoting a better understanding of the fact that nature protection does not have to stand in conflict with economic development. The geographic context of Rewilding Sweden's project activities has been the municipalities of Kiruna and Jokkmokk, Sweden's two largest (by area) municipalities.

From a policy perspective, attracting large scale industrial projects (mining, forestry, infrastructure, sustainable energy investments etc) is often perceived as 'the solution' to turn negative trends (many rural municipalities in Sweden suffer from demographic decline, decreasing tax revenues and, as a consequence, reduced public spending) in communities with scarce public resources. In the case of Norrbotten, this 'industrial' perspective has a negative impact on industries such as reindeer herding and tourism, not the least as large areas of land is allocated for large scale industrial investments. This is a problematic situation as many tourism entrepreneurs experience that politicians do not understand or highlight the positive contribution that they deliver to local communities. Many decisions are therefore made on the belief that traditional industries have a more positive economic impact than tourism. Hence, policies are not developed to facilitate eco-tourism and wildlife watching.

To better understand the challenges and opportunities related to eco-tourism and its possibilities to contribute to place-based economic and livelihood development, we have, as a vital part of our WLE activities, done participative workshops and interviews, using a bottom-up approach, with a wide range of stakeholders, both local and regional. Through these workshops many needs and wants has been aired and we have realised that these groups have many challenges in common. Additional interviews with relevant stakeholders have completed the workshops.

We have also come across useful insights and examples on good practice from other partners in the WLE project as well from case studies and study visits.

After analysing the input from workshops, interviews and other sources we have categorised challenges and problems under four main headings:

- Conflict of land use and goals
- Arctic tourism – not as any other industry
- Visitors / travellers (tourists) with a mission
- Eco-tourism – a true driver for sustainability

The above themes and the examples given have no easy solutions. Most of the problems are very specific and dependent on the context around them. During the

organized webinars and with the help of WLE “best practices” we understand that a strong base of ecotourism can help protecting and restoring biodiversity and create a strong economic growth in a region. The municipalities of Kiruna and Jokkmokk have ample opportunities, but it has been difficult for the entrepreneurs and small companies to communicate their importance and potential to politicians, potential new business owners and others. This in turn can make it difficult to get the attention of politicians and beneficial economic support. Issues lays in the lack of opportunities to meet and talk to politicians, non-eco-tourism guides and representatives from big industries. Another emerging challenge is how eco-tourism companies can manage to connect and communicate with locals. This is vital to develop tourism in a sustainable way.

However, we believe there is a great possibility to change this situation. With the suggested project outline below, specified in three different thematic actions, we have aggregated input from our activities in the WLE project into equally important actions – to promote a more sustainable, wildlife economy-based future for ecotourism in Swedish Lapland.

The objective of the proposed project is to highlight the fact that nature too seldom is considered an economic asset, making implementation of policies for nature conservation ineffective as such measures often are regarded only as an expense or, as often the case in rural areas, a serious threat to economic development, thus leading to a lack of local support. Due to the industrial history and tradition in northern Sweden, regional economic development policies up to date have not enough addressed nor capitalized on opportunities arising from nature development and conservation. In addition, mechanisms for re-investment of income from natural capital into nature and visitor management tend to be lacking. These factors, among others, often lead to difficulties and negative consequences, both economic and socially, both for ecotourism entrepreneurs as well as for other actors.

Preliminary project results in such a project, aggregated via WLE project activities, can be

- design and test of a (hybrid) format (model) for continuous stakeholder workshops, in order to facilitate a creative, innovative and problem-solving attitude between diverse interest groups, and to ensure a wide and participatory stakeholder approach (give voices to those who are concerned, not the least from the Sámi community).
- to develop a digitalised platform for mapping/collecting of operational data on land use (protected areas, greenfield etc), environmental impact of industrial business (forestry, mining, reindeer herding, tourism etc) to support analysis and sustainable decision-making.



- design and implement of eco-tourism start-up programs and of sustainable ecotourism business models, including visitor management and re-investment schemes.

During 2022 (Phase 2 of the project) these ideas will be further developed .The monitoring process in Phase 2 includes measures to involve relevant actions and stakeholders in the process, as well as a continuous dialogue with the Interreg Aurora programme secretariat to ensure a positive application and prioritisation process. Referring to project involvement by the County Administrative Board of Norrbotten (CAB), we see it as necessary to include knowledge and competence from different parts of the CAB administration in the development of this action. Land management, transnational network/ partners, ecology/environment, sustainability, rural development are just some examples.

We also expect some activities between the two actions could be jointly coordinated.