

Marine Life Protection Act; a Tribal Science Perspective

Michael Belchik,
Yurok Tribal Fisheries Program

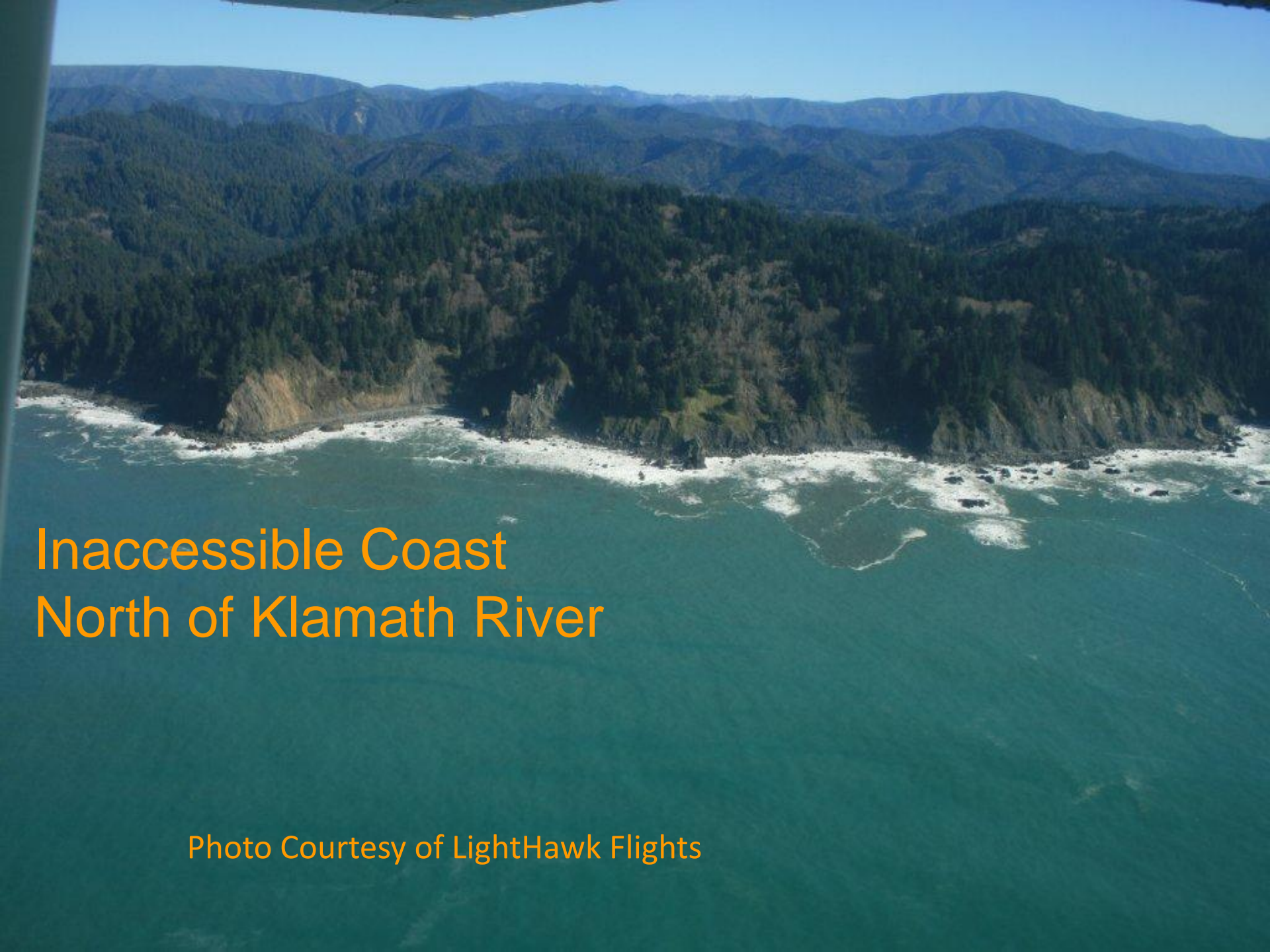


Levels of Protection

- Question to be answered: “How much will an ecosystem differ from an unfished ecosystem if one or more proposed activities are allowed?”
 - Let’s stop right there: in land management the idea that “human-free” is the natural status of an ecosystem has been discredited. For example, intense study has taken place on Native American fire management and its relationship to landscape. Redwood National Park has incorporated Native American fire management concepts to its management of Bald Hills area to preserve prairie systems that provide habitat for key species such as Roosevelt elk and golden eagles.

Levels of Protection Assumption

- Any extractive activity can occur at high intensity.
 - Assumes that recreation harvest will occur to the maximum extent permitted by law
 - Fails to take into account Yurok Tribe's experience and ability to manage its natural resources
- Some things may change, some won't.
 - Access is a huge issue in this area;
 - Regulations may change, cliffs won't



Inaccessible Coast North of Klamath River

Photo Courtesy of LightHawk Flights

Yurok Tribe Public Safety; Enforcement of Tribal Conservation Regulations



Level of Protection Conceptual Model

- A model is only as good as its founding assumptions;
- Flawed assumption of maximum harvest has caused entire model to render faulty decisions regarding level of protection;
- Issues of scale are not addressed; (is the concern the level of use at access points, or is the entire section of coast line considered as a whole with regard to ecosystem function that is assessed)
- Issues of natural mortality are not addressed (i.e. what is it that really controls populations of target species)

Level of Protection Conceptual Model (continued)

- Assumption (2) “For the purpose of comparison, an unfished system is a marine reserve that is successful in protecting that ecosystem from all effects of fishing and other extractive uses within the MPA.
 - With regard to local shoreline systems, where there is access, there are no “unfished” systems, people have coexisted with these resources for many thousands of years; the appropriate conceptual organization foundation is that systems have been managed, and what is seen is the result of millennia of management
 - However, there are many local examples of smaller unfished areas that are not currently in a marine reserve of any kind, but are simply difficult or impossible to access, or fishing is extremely limited due to weather, waves, and access (false Klamath, Lost Coast, etc); i.e. even though the entire area has been fished for millennia, parts of it remain inaccessible due to natural features;