



Forest and Rangeland Management in the Intermountain West

Emerging Opportunities for Collaboration

A policy brief from the Colorado Institute of Public Policy
at Colorado State University

August 2006

In 2005, Colorado State University formed a committee of scholars to identify trends in forest and rangeland management in the Intermountain West. Primary contributing authors of this paper are:

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Executive Summary

Forest and Rangeland Management uses current examples from the western U.S. to examine the principles of collaborative resource management. It finds evidence that groups can be innovative and effective, particularly when they take time to form a legitimate process and share authority. A good collaborative process can help federal land managers, state legislators and employees, landowners and community groups to fashion broadly supported land management policies.

Key points:

- Collaborative management defined page 1
- Sound resource policy integrates economies and environments page 2
- Keys to meaningful collaboration page 3
- A brief history of Western resource collaboration page 3
- Five characteristics of successful collaborative groups page 7
- Four common problems with community-based policy making page 8
- Where to go for more information and resources page 10

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Resource Management in the Intermountain West

Sometimes, history does speak—and western resource history demonstrates that collaborative management can be effective in sustaining both communities and the environment. In this, the United States is not unique: research from around the world documents a growing understanding that policies and bureaucracies work better when they involve local people and their knowledge

Community-based policy making is a collaborative process in which local stakeholders, both governmental and non-governmental, have some shared decision-making authority, responsibility, and accountability for policy creation and implementation.

of the particular places in which they live (Colfer, 2005; White & Martin, 2002). These local-national partnerships offer a way to combine national expertise with local interests.

All partnerships, however, are not created equal: as this paper illustrates, practices that favor some citizens over others or ignore local people do not work, or do not work very well. In contrast, effective practices are typically inclusive, and emphasize a flexible process that allows for outcome evaluations and subsequent policy revisions.

U.S. forest and rangeland management has been largely controlled by federal legislation and performed by centralized agencies, such as the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. Federal rules do not always permit meaningful local participation in planning or decisions, and some local communities have found themselves frustrated in their efforts to influence land management. The July 2006 BLM grazing regulations appear

to continue this practice: while they stipulate that comments from the public be local, in that they “must address the management of a specific allotment,” they also state that the BLM is no longer required to involve the public in “matters such as day-to-day grazing administration,” though it may voluntarily decide to do so (BLM, 2006).

Many stakeholders affected by these policies believe that federal regulations and agencies are ill-equipped to keep pace with fast-evolving ecological realities, social values, and changing

demands on public and private forests and rangelands (Brick, Snow, & van de Wetering, 2001). In recent decades, rising numbers of Westerners have sought to create locally informed, locally appropriate management plans. These plans often integrate resource management and community development in order to advance both environmental sustainability and economic security. Today, some local and federal land managers are working together to create flexible, responsive management groups that are more accountable to local people.

Some, though not all, of these management plans can be termed *community-based policy making*. Under this arrangement, local landowners, citizens, and organizations work with government officials to develop, implement, and review forest management plans, grazing regulations, wilderness protection strategies, and other policies enacted across public and private boundaries. *Community-based policy making is a collaborative process in which local stakeholders, both*

governmental and non-governmental, have some shared decision-making authority, responsibility, and accountability for policy creation and implementation.

cycles of intensive resource extraction (Power, 1996). When the resource is depleted, or the market price changes, local jobs vanish and the town disappears. In contrast, community-based

Wallowa Resources: Sustaining Environments and Local Economies

(Adapted from Red Lodge Clearinghouse)

The "timber wars" that wracked the Pacific Northwest through the 1980s and early 1990s left a legacy of fear, bitterness, despair, and contention in Wallowa County, Oregon. Declining timber supplies on federal lands, a string of lawsuits, and growing competition made it difficult for Wallowa County's forest products industry to operate profitably. When the Chinook salmon was proposed for listing under the federal Endangered Species Act, conflict between natural resource users and the environmental community led to gridlock.

By 1992, a collaborative group of farmers, ranchers, private forest owners, tribal officials, and Forest Service personnel were informally addressing salmon habitat restoration. The county officially adopted the restoration plan outlined by these stakeholders in 1994. That same year, county officials and residents began to form a group that focused on how to benefit from restoration-based forestry on a long-term basis—a group that became Wallowa Resources. Helped along by funding from Sustainable Northwest, community members formed the goal of applying sustainable resource use and conservation-based development across the county. Wallowa Resources also received a five-year Ford Foundation grant for community-based forestry.

In 1999, Wallowa Resources signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Forest Service. The document called for cooperative watershed management in the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest. In June 2004, the Forest Service announced a timber sale that was not appealed—the first in nearly a decade.

Wallowa Resources has partnered with private landowners, the Nez Perce Tribe, and the Forest Service on projects including restoration work along the Wallowa River, treating noxious weeds, and surveying plant and animal species. The group has also partnered with a local timber mill on several projects, including a retooling of the mill's equipment to handle small-diameter trees and the creation of a new, for-profit business. Located in the town of Wallowa, the post-and-pole facility specializes in value-added wood products.

The trust and collaborative capacity built in this process has created regional momentum. Along with a diverse group of stakeholders, Wallowa Resources and the Hells Canyon Preservation Council are in the process of establishing a long-term Stewardship Authority in the Upper Joseph Creek Watershed and completing the Lower Joseph Creek Watershed Assessment.

More information on these efforts is available at www.redlodgeclearinghouse.org

Community-based policy making is more than local control of natural resources. At heart, it reflects a commitment to a process that can create policies for healthy communities through sustainable land and resource use decisions. Local communities in the West often see only short-term benefits from the boom-and-bust

policy making can link resource use and conservation with local, long-term community development. Perhaps the best incentive for a community-based process is that it attempts to circumvent the misunderstanding, acrimony, ecological problems, and lawsuits that have often afflicted public lands management. This

policy brief provides broad background and criteria for readers interested in collaborative management to assess their own efforts and locate additional resources. In doing so, it

- Describes national and regional trends that favor increased local participation in management decisions;
- Provides a historic framework for understanding community-based policy making options;
- Identifies characteristics of successful collaborative management groups, such as inclusiveness, accountability, information sharing, and flexibility; and
- Discusses common challenges to this approach, such as the slow pace of change and a distrust of consensual decision-making.

Why Now for Community-based Policy Making?

In the West, where resistance to strong federal authority has a long tradition, the 1980s and 1990s saw a resurgence of “sagebrush

rebellions” among those who claimed that federal and national interests should have less authority over local lands and roads (Cawley, 1993; Davis, 2001). Distrust of federal management and frustration with polarized national politics has led local stakeholders to seek pragmatic alternatives to unsatisfying judicial and legislative measures. In some cases, cattlemen are talking to environmentalists—and finding that they sometimes share common interests in the face of external pressures.

Collaborative Management in the Western Past

Creating a constructive relationship between local and federal power in the American West is not a new problem. Indeed, western history holds many precedents for contemporary efforts to bring local people into partnerships with federal agencies. John Wesley Powell—explorer, scientist, and a principal founder of the U.S. Geological Survey—formulated plans for dividing the West into “watershed

Resource Advisory Councils: Learning from Mistakes

In 1935, the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) implemented local advisory grazing boards in the West. The Grazing Board program was intended to use local stockmen’s knowledge to inform DOI decisions about the maximum number of livestock that could graze an allotment. In later years, the boards essentially failed to incorporate a range of local stakeholders and fell out of favor.

In the 1990s, then-Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt created resource advisory councils (RACs) to replace the rancher-dominated grazing advisory boards. He asserted that advice from local boards that represented a larger array of land use values should be given greater weight by public land managers. In Colorado, a 1994 analysis of RAC meetings concluded that ranchers, environmentalists, and other key stakeholders were working together in a more productive fashion. Key components of this success were:

- A critical mass of constituency groups, including local (not merely national) environmental representation; and
- A collaborative monitoring process, to ensure that land use decisions reached were implemented as agreed upon by RAC members.

commonwealths" in which farmers and ranchers would manage local resources cooperatively (Powell & DeBuys, 2001). Although never formally implemented, Powell's plans provided a useful model for later notions of land stewardship.

Between the 19th and 20th centuries, western land and resource management shifted from primarily local to predominantly national control. During this transition, communities and government officials attempted to balance local interests and federal authority. The first U.S. Forest Service rangers carried a small manual, the *Use Book*, which instructed them to pay attention to the needs of local small producers (Steen, 1991). These instructions sometimes resulted in constructive compromises, such as the 1932 Handshake Agreement that set aside prime huckleberry lands exclusively for the Yakama Indian tribe while allowing non-natives to harvest adjacent areas (Fisher, 1997).

To achieve its promise, community-based policy making must take into account the successes and failures of past partnerships, and it must do so with an understanding that *success depends in large part upon inclusive, participatory processes*. As the Resource Advisory Council example illustrates, when "local interests" come to mean "exclusive" interests, the process and outcomes usually fail.

Added together, these and other seemingly anomalous cases demonstrate a rich, sometimes overlooked, tradition in the West of local participation in the resolution of resource conflicts. None of them, of course, provides a perfect model for dealing with today's problems. Yet it is remarkable that one of the federal government's first scientist-bureaucrats

imagined a landscape of local watershed commonwealths, and that U.S. Forest Service rangers and Yakama Indians communicated around the campfire. History does tell a story of bitter conflict over western American resources, a story made more bitter by the expansion of federal power and local alienation. But the past also provides examples which can inform and inspire an alternative American West founded on inclusiveness, participatory processes, and a productive tension between local and national interests.

Local Responses to Federal Management

Not surprisingly, western resistance to highly centralized federal authority intensified in the 1900s, as the government expanded its powers over public lands. Two primary local responses to federal regulation of natural resources have emerged in recent decades. One response is regulatory, involving a struggle over what level of government may regulate resource management. The other is procedural, emphasizing the use of inclusive processes to find policy solutions.

In the early 1990s, the populist "county rights" movement, a part of the larger "wise use" movement, reemerged (Switzer, 1997). The county rights movement catalyzed in two places: Nye County, Nevada, and Catron County, New Mexico, where federal environmental regulations limited local access and commercial use of public lands and natural resources (Conable, 1996; Van Deren, 1998). The county commissioners enacted ordinances that effectively declared federal ownership of public lands unconstitutional, and ordered county sheriffs to arrest federal officials who

enforced environmental regulations. This action reflected the long-standing antagonism of many public-lands-dominated counties toward federal management policies (Krannich & Smith, 1998). These and similar ordinances were eventually ruled illegal by federal courts.

approach to resource management conflicts. Instead of passing county rights ordinances, these counties created Wallowa Resources (Oregon) and the Public Lands Partnership (Colorado). These groups provide forums for dialogue among diverse interests, and organize

Gunnison Sage Grouse: Private Lands, Public Policies

The Gunnison Basin in western Colorado holds the largest remaining population of the Gunnison sage grouse (Sisk-a-dee, 2006). In the early 1990s, the Gunnison sage grouse was headed for the federal Endangered Species list. To reverse the grouse population's decline and preempt regulatory action under the Endangered Species Act, the Gunnison Sage Grouse Working Group (GSGWG) was established. Group members include federal, state, and local agencies as well as representatives of environmental and other local groups.

The group's Conservation Plan was completed in 1997. It advocated the use of a rangewide management plan that would encompass both public and private lands in an effort to secure breeding and living habitat for the sage grouse. The plan also accepted the need for compromises between human and animal activities: it acknowledged recreational viewing of the grouse's spectacular mating rituals as a popular pastime, but recognized that the human presence potentially contributed to the bird's shrinking numbers. To develop protocols for viewing, and to help monitor and manage the programs called for in the Conservation Plan, a non-profit, community-based organization called Sisk-a-dee formed in 2000. The GSGWG and Sisk-a-dee continue to work with public officials and private land-owners to find resource management solutions that allow wildlife viewing, ranching, and other human activities compatible with the Gunnison sage grouse's habitat and population. A third group, the Gunnison Sage Grouse Strategic Committee, formed in 2005 to act in an advisory capacity. The Committee is currently developing a strategic plan for the recovery of the grouse that focuses on private land and county-level methods of protecting the bird and its habitat.

While the groups have had some successes, challenges remain. Some worry that the collaborative process is too slow to help the Gunnison sage grouse, whose numbers continue to dwindle (Clifford, 2002). Others contend that scientific evidence about what the sage grouse needs is being overruled by specific development and ranching interests (High Country Citizens' Alliance, 2006). Currently, the groups continue their implementation and review process, in the hopes of engaging more public and private land managers in a voluntary effort to restore the species.

While these ordinances were ultimately unsuccessful, litigation remains a popular local response to attempted federal regulation.

The second response arose as a result of discomfort with the character of the county rights movement. Facing pressure from county rights supporters, citizens and county commissioners in places like Wallowa County in Oregon, and Delta and Montrose counties in western Colorado, tried to find a different

broad-based participation in ecological and community assessments. Finally, they implement projects otherwise constrained by conflicting jurisdictional and land ownership patterns (Christoffersen, 2005). By combining concerns over ecosystem health and community well-being, groups like these have created space for effective community-based policy making.

As these stories illustrate, it often takes a pressing, specific issue to create the momentum necessary for a collaborative group. And some issues may not be appropriate for a community-based, collaborative response. Community members should assess whether the scope of the problem, timing, and motivations are right for a community-based approach (Red Lodge, n.d.).

What Does Community-based Policy Making Look Like?

Community members who want to create new institutions to deal with the inter-relationship between natural resource stewardship and community development have many options. In recent years, new governmental, quasi-governmental, and non-governmental (often non-profit) organizational arrangements have emerged (Baker & Kusel, 2003; Weber, 2000; Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000). These organizations can convene participatory processes, administer government contracts, provide technical assistance to landowners, and hire and train local workers. In doing so, they have the potential to incorporate the interests of local stakeholders in areas where federal land management and community development issues overlap (Aspen Institute, 2005). They also have the potential to create a more inclusive group, in which multiple interests are assured of more equal weight and responsibility in the decision-making process.

To be sure, there are tradeoffs involved in creating any group. Broadly speaking, less inclusive groups (such as groups that are composed solely of government agency representatives, or a few local interest groups) can often make decisions faster and more

efficiently. These groups, however, tend to have long-term problems with legitimacy and accountability that undermine policy effectiveness. More inclusive groups, while less efficient in the short-term, may create more durable and widely supported policies. Their mix of networks also helps coordinate local, regional, and national responses to ecological issues.

In addition to incorporating local needs and interests, community-based management rests upon scientific evidence. A community-based approach, however, means that local stakeholders should be involved in decisions about what kind of scientific data should be gathered, and how it should be evaluated (Gunderson, Holling, & Light, 1995; National Research Council, 1996, 1999).

As stakeholders begin to form community-based management groups, they must decide what type of organization fits their needs, and what kind of decision-making processes they will use. To do so, stakeholders must understand their own communities: Who should be sitting at the table? Communities with deep divisions and disparate interests may need to invest considerable time in getting the right people around the table, which is necessary to promote a sense of the group's legitimacy. Only then can the group begin to make decisions that will be accepted by a wide range of community members. Other communities may be able to achieve an inclusive, representative structure with fewer members, but may still need to network with local and regional groups for their policies to be effective.

Common Characteristics for Success

A growing literature on “best practices” commonly lists the following items as attributes of successful community-based policy making (Moote, McClaran, & Chickering, 1997; Red Lodge, n.d.; Webler & Tuler, 2001; Webler, Tuler, & Kruger, 2001):

- **Inclusiveness.** Everyone who might be affected by a specific plan—from interest groups to the general public—is involved in the planning and decision-making process. Inclusiveness helps to prevent the “takeover” of a group by a few influential individuals. It may be in planners’ best interests to ensure that members of the public, and not only interest group representatives, are at the table; some studies indicate that the general public often holds beliefs that are more moderate and less polarized than interest group members (Moote et al., 1997, p. 879).
- **Meaningful participation.** People tire of attending “town meetings” that don’t result in real changes. Research suggests that there are specific ways to invite meaningful community participation (Chess & Purcell, 1999; Renn, Webler, & Wiedemann, 1995; Rowe & Frewer, 2000).
- **Accountability.** All participants share decision-making authority and are responsible for that decision. Accountability implies that information is widely available and policy outcomes are monitored to ensure that they are implemented according to the original agreement. Both inclusiveness and accountability foster a sense of the group’s legitimate right to create and enforce decisions.
- **Information sharing.** Members participate in a dialogue, rather than in one-way, top-down communication. Participants should gain an understanding of each other’s values, interests, and concerns, while recognizing constraints on decision making (Moote et al., 1997). Local knowledge is particularly important when it comes to choosing among possible management strategies. Such information helps create an adaptive management process in which continuous measuring and monitoring provides information on how current strategies might be improved (Buck, Geisler, Schelhas, & Wollenberg, 2001; Stankey, Clark, & Bormann, 2005).
- **Flexibility.** The group develops a process for changing rules and policies. Insights gained from past experience with both group processes and policy outcomes need to be evaluated and incorporated so that plans can be improved (Webler et al., 2001). Flexibility makes it more likely that the group can survive changes in membership and direction.

It is important to note that participants in the process usually have different definitions for each of the terms above, and place different emphases on their relative importance to a “good” process (Webler & Tuler, 2001). Groups should spend time discussing their definitions, and the values and beliefs that underlie these ideas (Colorado Institute of Public Policy, 2006; Moote et al., 1997). Flexibility, including the willingness to create a process that serves the needs of the group, is therefore perhaps the most important attribute of successful community-based policy making.

Common Challenges

Even groups that meet the criteria for a successful process face significant challenges. For example, the typically slow pace of collaborative decision making can drive participants away, because they feel their time is being wasted. Community-based policy making groups should explicitly address the following needs (Moote et al., 1997; Red Lodge, n.d.):

- **Tangible outcomes.** People will make the rational choice to stop investing time in something that they think has no results. Generally, members want to start making policies right away. Finding a small point upon which members can agree, and working quickly to address that problem, can build trust and relationships that will aid in grappling with larger, more contentious issues.
- **Rules of operation.** A clear meeting structure builds trust and helps newcomers learn how to interact with the group. The group should establish rules of procedure that help members to understand the group's purpose, its meeting structure, what role each representative plays within the group, and what authority their decisions will have.
- **Explicit decision-making mechanisms.** The group must decide what kind of discussion and decision-making processes to use. This includes understanding when to end discussions, and how decisions will be made. There are a wide range of decision-making possibilities, from simple voting majorities to types of group consensus (CDR Associates, 2003; Isenhardt & Spangle, 2000; Lynn & Colorado Institute of Public

Policy, 2006). Community-based policy making does not automatically mean consensus-based decision making; and consensus-based decision making almost never means that a group is completely in agreement. Groups must understand their needs and constituencies to create effective decision-making rules; if members have deeply held and divergent values, consensus decision-making may not be feasible (Moote et al., 1997). For a group to be accountable, however, members must uphold the decisions that result from their agreed-upon process.

- **Knowledge of limits.** Group members must understand the limits of each representative's power, and the limits of their authority as a group. Agency representatives may be authorized to enact guidelines endorsed by the group, but they do not usually have the power to change the structure of their agency or its mission. A group decision may be binding and enforceable by agreed-upon penalties, or it may simply be advisory. Voluntary policies are difficult to enforce, and there are limits to "shared" authority when, legally, federal agencies have sole responsibility (Moote et al., 1997). Understanding what the group can and cannot accomplish helps members to be more realistic and more positive about the outcomes of their involvement.

The Future of Western Resource Stewardship

Even policy failures sometimes have a silver lining, in that failures can create opportunities for change (Cuny, 1983). In the last century, the loss of forest land, the overgrazing of

public domain rangelands, and the soil erosion that accompanied the Great Depression all paved the way for considerable experimentation—successful and otherwise—in resource management. Today, the depletion and pollution of aquifers, the invasion of exotic species, and the transformation of ranching and forest industries offer similar opportunities to reassess existing policy processes and change how we conserve and create value from natural and community resources.

local knowledge and experience. The process itself is an important outcome: conflict management and civic engagement are additional “public goods” that may emerge from a community-based approach to land management. How to structure the relationship between community-based policy and federal authority is an open question. Agricultural commodity policies associated with the New Deal were structured around county boards that shared responsibility with USDA for program management. Changes based on

State Partners: Colorado’s Water Roundtables

For some areas of Colorado, 2002 was the driest year in recorded history. Spurred on by a projected population growth of 65% by 2030, the state created an inventory of existing and future water needs. The resulting Statewide Water Supply Initiative report (November 2004) painted a gloomy picture of future demand that would far outweigh supply. To make matters worse, supply and demand reside in different parts of the state: 80% of Colorado’s water is west of the Continental Divide, while 80% of its population lives on the eastern Front Range. The projected need to move more and more water among basins and stakeholders made for a nervous, and litigious, climate. It became clear that there was no venue for pragmatic discussions about solutions that would be viable for multiple basins and multiple interest groups.

In 2005, the Colorado State Legislature responded by passing HB05-1177, which mandates “water basin roundtables” and a statewide Interbasin Compact Committee. The bill designates a wide array of representative interests that must sit on the basin roundtables, and requires each water basin to conduct a basin needs assessment. However, the state does not dictate processes: Basin roundtables can determine their own activities, or opt out of the statewide process without penalty. The state provides, upon request, technical assistance, funding for basin needs assessments and project grants. While the creation of the water basin roundtables came from “the top,” the implementation is local.

As this example illustrates, state policy can provide the impetus for community-based policymaking. In creating the water roundtables, the Colorado Legislature provided water basins with the encouragement and tools to address both basin and state water needs collectively and collaboratively.

Community-based policy making cannot, by itself, trigger definitive solutions to rangeland and forest management issues. But as the Colorado Water Roundtables illustrate, it can work alongside traditional policy channels. As is evident from past failures, the emphasis must be on the *process* rather than on mandated outcomes. There is no one policy that works in every forest and range in the West, but there may be a way to ensure that policies include

USDA’s experiences, both positive and negative, might include structuring existing federal programs (USDA and BLM) so that local boards would share local program authority. Federal law, settled and unsettled, would frame the legal limits of local participation.

The characteristics described above suggest that there might be ways to improve the local-federal

collaboration outlined in the 2006 BLM ruling. If the “interested public” is interpreted as only those who have a financial interest in the properties, environmental and recreational constituencies will have little chance to affect land management decisions via BLM working groups. A process that, by definition, favors specific stakeholders is more likely to suffer problems with legitimacy and long-term effectiveness. Future rulings could favor other stakeholders; but while national interest groups battle for dominance, local communities and environments stand to lose.

In principle, this ruling highlights the usefulness of third-party alternatives in providing a more inclusive and democratic process. In reality, it may mean that less-privileged stakeholders will seek other methods to influence land management decisions. Alternatives might include renewed legal challenges, or seeking support from state officials: in Wyoming, for example, the Governor has the support of ranchers, environmentalists, and even some developers in seeking to slow the pace of natural gas permits and drilling in the state (Bleizeffer, 2005).

Cooperative resource stewardship is part of the intellectual and cultural heritage of the West (Anderson & Hill, 2004; Fiege, 1999). In recent years, new community groups have greatly expanded this legacy. Community well-being is intimately connected with ecological well-being. And as many landowners know only too well, “public” and “private” are not meaningful ecological boundaries with regard to fires or invasive plant species. Community-based policy making does not mean replacing federal authority; rather, it means supporting a truly local interpretation of those policies, in order

to increase the effectiveness and legitimacy of resource management programs. The challenges facing community-based initiatives are to legitimate local interests, and to take responsibility for the achievement and enforcement of policy decisions. If successful, these groups capture the energy of local social networks and create accountability for federal policies. In so doing, community-based policy making may prove a useful tool for creating management strategies that are legitimate, environmentally sustainable, and economically viable.

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About the Colorado Institute of Public Policy

The Colorado Institute of Public Policy (CIPP) at Colorado State University was created to provide information for effective public problem solving. It brings together local practitioners and academic researchers to contribute to public policy discourse involving interactions among the environment, agriculture, and people in the Rocky Mountain West. More information is available online at www.cipp.colostate.edu.



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