

Northwest Science Forum

Northwest Science Forum provides an opportunity to articulate and discuss scientific issues in a less structured format than peer-reviewed articles. The Forum publishes short articles, opinion pieces, and letters with a focus on science and natural resource issues in the Pacific Northwest. Although the Forum is not peer-reviewed, it is edited for format and clarity. Articles should generally be less than 2000 words and contain minimal literature citations. Letters in response to articles are particularly encouraged; the original author will normally be given a chance to respond to the letter as well. There are no page charges or reprints associated with the Forum, and participants need not be members of the Northwest Scientific Association. Please send all submissions, including two hard copies and an electronic copy (any recent version of Word or WordPerfect for DOS), to the Editor.

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Challenges and Opportunities in Collaborative Natural Resource Management

Collaboration, community dialogue, partnerships, cooperation, participation, and consensus. Each of these words reflects aspects of a current trend towards more local and regionally based decisions in natural resource management. Local planning groups such as the Quincy Library Group in California, the Applegate Partnership in Oregon, and Henry's Fork Watershed Council in Idaho are, in spite of their problems and controversies, familiar components of the natural resource management landscape, and often held up as models for future land management (Brick, 1998).

For well over a decade, federal, state and local officials have been encouraged to embrace and use collaborative approaches to decision making. Recently, the Clinton Administration's *National Performance Review* presented a number of recommendations intended to improve government in general, and the process of federal rulemaking in particular. The "reinventing government" report urged federal agencies to expand the use of alternative dispute resolution techniques, and in particular, make greater use of regulatory negotiation (National Performance Review, 1993). A follow-up report, *Common Sense Government*

(Gore, 1995), highlights additional successful reinvention efforts throughout the federal government, many of which involve alternative dispute resolution and negotiation processes. In addition, state legislation promotes negotiation and collaboration in siting disputes and land use planning (Bingham and Miller, 1987; Rabe, 1994).

In attempting to respond to this encouragement, several federal resource management agencies and many states have begun to institutionalize collaborative resource management and planning efforts. For example, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management set up Resource Advisory Councils (RACs) in 1995. These are locally based, collaborative groups that provide advice to BLM on a variety of issues affecting the management of public lands. The Forest Service uses collaborative planning and consultation in developing many of its National Forest Management Plans. Further, in his Fiscal Year 1996 Report, Chief Michael Dombeck of the U.S. Forest Service cited "collaborative stewardship" and "partnerships" a number of times as guiding principles for the how the Forest Service will conduct their work in the future. Finally, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

has used consensus processes to deal with endangered species and development conflicts.

Agency participants at all levels of government have been struggling to define what this new trend implies for them, as they attempt to shift towards a more collaborative style of decision making. A broader question asks what this trend towards consensus building and collaborative management means for the role of agencies, policymakers and decision-makers in natural resource management.

Why Collaborate?

In the last decade or so, resource managers have experienced a significant increase in and proliferation of the number and types of interest groups, or stakeholders, demanding to be heard and incorporated into the policy making process. It is hoped that by working collaboratively with stakeholders before decisions are made or policies are adopted, more complete information will inform the policy maker (Ozawa, 1991; Yaffee and Wondolleck, 1995). In addition, mutual understanding of the issues at stake will be fostered, as will communication and trust between the parties involved (Carpenter and Kennedy, 1988; Wondolleck, 1988). Hence, acceptable decisions will result rather than decisions that are contested in lengthy judicial or administrative appeals processes (Bingham, 1986; Susskind and Cruikshank, 1987).

As two analysts correctly stated, "land managers...are at their wits' end in trying to placate all of them...and are part of not one, but several, triangles of interests. Perhaps a new term for this changed situation would be 'tangles' of interests. Each knot in the tangle would represent what is now called a stakeholder" (Clarke and McCool, 1996). The responsibility, wanted or not, of untangling the many interests in order to make management decisions has fallen to resource management agencies and managers. Responding to this new reality requires those managers to play a variety of new roles if they hope to be successful in untangling the interests and needs of multiple stakeholders in order to make required resource management decisions that can be successfully implemented.

Balancing New Roles in Collaborative Processes

One recent study presents a new conceptualization of agency roles in collaborative processes, drawing from the experiences of natural resource managers and environmental regulators at the federal level (Wondolleck and Ryan, 1997). If they were to be effective, each of the collaborative processes required that the agency participants adopt new and different roles. The experiences of agency participants in these different settings suggest a new conceptualization of agency behavior—one that merges the distinct yet essential roles of *leader*, *partner* and *stakeholder*. Furthermore, and contrary to conventional wisdom, if agencies acted as only a facilitator of the process, this was found to be ineffective and inappropriate in most cases.

Being a Leader

The leadership of the agency participant is fundamentally different and more central to the process because of their unique and distinct decision making authority. The agency provides an opportunity for collaboration to take place, and their presence and authority gives the collaborative process legitimacy. Additionally, because the collaborative approach tends to be a new one for *all* parties involved, the agency participant is the one that is most often looked to for guidance and leadership. In the context of the study, leadership was provided or clearly needed, in three realms: leadership of the collaborative process itself, leadership about the issues under discussion, and leadership about the decisions to be made.

Being a Partner

The cooperative, problem-solving dimension of a collaborative process provides the focus for parties to engage as partners in the effort. Partnership implies sharing a problem, opportunity or interest in common with other individuals or groups, and being willing to work together in order to solve a shared problem or pursue a common vision. Being a partner is a uniquely challenging role for agency participants, as it is the role that is least consistent with traditional agency procedures. As a result, numerous barriers were posed by the perceptions, stereotypes, and expectations of participants both from within the agency

as well as from other participant groups. At times, being an effective partner requires strong leadership, and this tension between leadership and partnership is a challenge experienced by many agency participants in collaborative processes.

Being a Stakeholder

Effective stakeholder behavior is a cornerstone to successful collaborative processes. Stakeholders should be clear about their interests, know how their interests are similar or different from those of other stakeholders, understand their priorities within these interests, and where tradeoffs might acceptably be made. Agency participants must be aware of what interests and responsibilities are unique to them, and ensure that they advocate for and accommodate those interests in any agreements that are reached. Perhaps the greatest failing of agency participants in this study was their lack of preparation and action in recognition of this stakeholder role.

What little attention has been given in the literature to the specific question of agency role has most often focused on facilitation (Carpenter and Kennedy, 1988). Some have argued that agencies should serve as the "facilitator of a community of interests" when working in collaborative settings (Sirmon et al., 1993). This characterization is both limiting and misleading, making agency officials less effective than they might be. Many collaborative processes do indeed need a facilitator to assist the parties in effective communication, negotiation and problem solving. But the facilitator should not be the same official who is responsible for representing the agency's interests at the table. Combined agency facilitation and representation proved to be not only ineffective, but also oftentimes counterproductive to the consensus-seeking objective of the process (Wondolleck and Ryan, 1997).

The tasks of being a leader, stakeholder and ultimately a partner imply an array of different skills, roles, and interactions with other participants in collaborative processes. These new skills and behaviors have implications for agencies and other decision-makers that attempt to undertake such efforts. It is apparent that at one level the contemporary resource management agency's role is far richer, more complex, and more difficult to fulfill than has been described in the theoretical literature. Agencies must at the same time fulfill

the multiple roles of expert, stakeholder, and decision-maker, and, most importantly, be an effective leader and partner in the decision making process. Unfortunately, there is no formula dictating when each role should be performed, or how to successfully play multiple roles simultaneously, which is what is required in collaborative resource management processes.

Collaborative Resource Management Challenges and Opportunities

Some critics charge that collaborative processes may totally disempower those citizens not represented by organized interests, and that only the "lowest common denominator ideas survive the process" (McCloskey, 1996). Others claim that collaboration on many resource issues is unlikely to succeed because the interests and needs of the stakeholders are so different that the chance of agreement is nearly zero. Still others are alarmed over the implications of including citizen participation on a par with bureaucratic experts, and the dissolution of hierarchical authority relationships in favor of shared power with nongovernmental stakeholders (Moe, 1994).

Despite these criticisms, the reality is that resource managers are now being called upon to "untangle" the many interests that want to participate in resource management decisions. Emerging issues in Pacific Northwest, particularly the impending listing of the chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*) as a threatened species, and the projected growth in population and related pressures on natural resources, are forcing managers to deal with these issues immediately. Policy makers and managers are *not* waiting on scholars to decide whether such collaborative arrangements are appropriate or not. They are choosing and using alternative institutional arrangements that defy traditional approaches to bureaucracy (Weber, 1998), and, admittedly, may be stumbling as they navigate along the way.

However, given the alternatives of policy gridlock and litigation, collaborative resource management does offer a needed forum and opportunity to begin to address multiple interests and make pressing management decisions. Resource managers will need to develop a variety of skills to help them successfully manage and participate in collaborative processes. Integral to their "untangler" role is a need to play critical

leadership, partnership, and stakeholder roles. In addition, skills and techniques are needed to help managers identify and measure what the key interests are and how to effectively incorporate those interests into the policy making process.

Further thought is needed regarding *what types* of decisions are appropriate for collaborative processes. It is clear that every decision cannot be made via a collaborative process. In fact, many

managers are bumping up against institutional limits in terms of how many processes can be initiated and managed, in addition to limits on the participation by key stakeholder groups. Finally, mechanisms to foster interagency cooperation and collaboration in such ventures are sorely lacking. Alternative institutional arrangements that foster collaborative management must be investigated and developed.

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