Applying Social Ecology to Environmental Collaboration: Input from Practitioners Working in Agency Settings

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Introduction

The focus of this paper and qualitative research is on community-based collaborative efforts relating to natural resources and the particular involvement of government employees in these efforts. Community-based efforts stem from the social movements of the 1960s combined with growing skepticism of government environmental policies. As a result of the "participation explosion" of the 1960s, there was an increased demand for citizen involvement in public policy development and implementation which, combined with uncertainty regarding the government agencies' ability to create representational policy, resulted in a call for decentralization. While the federal government did respond with increased stipulations for public participation, community involvement within this established framework was minimal and as a result grassroots efforts were cultivated. Individuals and communities are now more directly involved than before, but the necessity of government involvement cannot be ignored. Collaborative efforts, therefore, face a challenge in finding a balance between local culture and community involvement, and the need for governmental support and adherence to regulation.

My research will explore this environmental movement, beginning with a historical overview of the evolution of collaborative efforts. I will then discuss James Kent Associates' (JKA) social ecology approach, which both embodies and is a direct result of the collaborative movement. In an effort to understand "what works" in relation to collaborations, I will then analyze qualitative data collected from practitioners working within the government setting and applying the JKA social ecology approach. A guiding research question is how can government employees effectively interact with and support collaborative community efforts? In other

words, how can communities and agencies effectively work together toward holistic and sustainable environmental policies?

Methodology

James Kent and Kevin Preister, founders of the Center for Social Ecology and Public Policy, provided a list of 21 JKA trained social ecology practitioners. These practitioners work for a variety of governmental employers including the Marines, National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, and Willamette National Forest. The practitioners voluntarily completed a survey, sent by email, which included open-ended questions on the *rationale* for community-based efforts, the *obstacles* or institutional barriers that such efforts face, the *efficac*y of collaborations, and *trends* that they predict for the future. In addition, the practitioners were specifically asked to describe the applicability of the JKA social ecology approach.

The Evolution of the Community-Based Environmental Management Movement

Collaboration efforts reach back to the 1940s when the government began, for the first time, to solicit public input for policy decisions. In 1946, congress passed the Administrative Procedure Act (APA) which established guidelines, though minimal, for public involvement in administrative decision-making (Koontz et. al. 2004). Though the effort to involve the public is worthy of recognition, they were lacking in their understanding of administrative processes, thus enabling the greatest "public" influence to be dominated by organized interest groups (Koontz et. al. 2004). Corporations were particularly dominant during the newly required "notice and comment period" and the lesser organized community citizens were not generally incorporated into the decision-making process.

In the 1960s several additional policies were passed by Congress in response to a forceful political movement, demanding increased citizens' rights and involvement in public

policy. The "participation explosion" was grounded in growing skepticism regarding overarching governance and, subsequently, a growing demand for devolution of federal power to state and local levels (Koontz et. al. 2004). One of the most influential policies from this era is the Economic Opportunity Act, passed by Congress in 1964. The act established the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) which was tasked with providing Community Action Programs that were "developed, conducted, and administered with the maximum feasible participation of residents of the areas and members of the groups served" (Koontz et. al. 2004). While the aim was "widespread participation" among traditionally underrepresented populations, the reality was less than ideal, characterized more often by antagonism. However, the combined effort to involve the public and move away from "command-and-control" federal policies did lead to key legislation and recognition that government was only one of many agencies providing services. A twofold response emerged from the governance transition; (1) "the rise of intergovernmental and network arrangements, which reduced the role of government in public policy, public administration, and public management" and (2) "the provision for public participation, which increased the role of nongovernmental actors in these processes" (Koontz et. al. 2004).

Collaborations became more commonplace with an increase in intergovernmental networks and provisions for public participation supported by the ratification of several federal environmental policies signed into law in the 1970s. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), signed on the first day of 1970, established a Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and required that federal agencies conduct an environmental impact statement (EIS) for any project expected to have an environmental impact on communities. The EIS includes public hearings and solicitation of public opinion. A draft of the EIS is made available to the public and they have a specified number of days to respond.

In 1972, following the enactment of NEPA and with the efforts of the CEQ, amendments were made to the Federal Water Pollution Control Act. Included in the changes was the establishment of a structure for regulating water pollution as well as additional provisions for public participation in the regulation process. Similar amendments were made to the Toxic Substance Control Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, and pesticide legislations (www.epa.gov). Additionally, the Endangered Species Act (ESA) was created in the 1970s in response to diminishing species' habitats and populations due to widespread development. While community collaborative efforts helped to apply the pressure necessary to initiate the ESA, the policy does not require community-based collaborative efforts. It does, however, offer incentives for collaboration in the form of financial support such as matching grants at the state and local levels (Koontz et. al. 2004). According to Koontz et. al. (2004), the ESA is one of many "command-and-control" environmental policies coming out of this era which, instead of facilitating collaborative efforts, has turned out to be divisive in nature. For example, because of ESA regulations, developers and others interested in utilizing habitats are encouraged to do so before a threatened species is listed as endangered.

While the call for public participation and collaborative efforts was growing in the documentation required by legislation, the reality of such efforts taking place was quite a different story. Koontz et. al. (2004) elucidates several criticisms of the 1970s programs. First, while legislation called for public participation, the formal system and complex procedures did not change, limiting any substantial influence coming from the public. In addition, the public most likely to succeed, managing to penetrate the daunting bureaucratic system, were the best organized and often times privileged groups with strong interests. Lastly, the programs requiring participatory involvement were not always effectively implemented (Koontz et. al. 2004).

Even with the significant environmental legislations which came out of the 1970s, the era was marked by a decline in public participation on the federal level (Koontz et. al. 2004). In response to inaccessible federal systems and formal procedures inhibiting individual or lesser organized group involvement, grassroots or local environmental efforts began to grow. One of the underlying values and motives of these efforts was the importance of diverse stakeholder input and their involvement in the decision-making process (Koontz et. al. 2004). Federal agencies were under pressure to recognize the demand for collaborative efforts and 18 federal agencies responded to these demands by adopting management approaches including collaboration as a major component (Koontz et. al. 2004). These agencies include the Bureau of Land Management, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Fish and Wildlife Service, to name just a few.

In addition to federal agencies, states have also embraced the collaboration concept. In numerous states including Oregon, Ohio, Florida, and West Virginia, support for collaboration equates to financial and technical assistance for watershed management efforts involving community-based coordination among numerous stakeholders (Koontz et. al. 2004). The current trend is a shift away from the "command-and-control" federal policies and in the direction of more localized collaborative efforts involving diverse stakeholders such as federal employees, the state, interest groups, and local community members.

According to Weber (2000), the current environmental movement can be described as Grassroots Ecosystem Management (GREM) and is a synthesis of past environmental movements. GREM "seeks to devolve significant authority to local, place-based alliances (networks) of affected stakeholders from the community and relevant federal, state, and local agencies" (Weber 2000). The Conservation Movement, associated with leaders such as Gifford

Pinchot, was viewed by critics as putting the needs of humanity (often times economic needs) before the preservation of nature. Preservationists, on the other hand, who are commonly associated with John Muir, put the priority of nature before the needs of humanity. The GREM movement, a synthesis of these and other environmental movements, does not place the priority on either humans or nature but emphasizes the need to involve local communities, on a case-by-case basis in policy decisions (Weber 2000). Thus, "GREM participants endorse a results-oriented approach emphasizing on-the-ground ecosystem conditions as the basis for decision making and evaluation of policy success" (Weber 2000).

A historical overview of federal environmental legislation demonstrates the advancements that have been made within the formal context, recognizing the need for increased public participation in policy decision-making processes. Social movements of the 1960s not only emphasized citizens' rights in relation to war and race relations, but also demanded that citizens have the right to be more directly involved in the domestic public policy arena. Several pieces of legislation were passed in the 1970s which included provisions for increased public participation. Though the ideals were documented, however, the reality was still severely different and local communities responded with grassroots efforts. By 2000, 30,000 participants and 200 rural communities across the U.S. were involved in GREM efforts (Weber 2000). Because this is a relatively recent trend, we have yet to establish whether or not collaborative environmental efforts are sustainable and effective. The remainder of this paper will explore unanswered questions related to the efficacy of community-based involvement in environmental management.

Do Collaborations Work?

Steven L. Yaffee and Julia M. Wondolleck from the University of Michigan's School of Natural Resources and Environment conducted an assessment of 200 "successful" collaboration cases. Their research is presented in the book, *Making Collaboration Work: Lessons from Innovation in Natural Resource Management.* Their findings indicate that collaborative processes "are achieving ecological results while also improving community-level communication and cooperation" (Yaffee & Wondolleck 2000). An examination of these "pioneering" collaborative efforts provides lessons for future environmental management decision makers who strive for both scientific integrity and public acceptability.

The first lesson is that successful collaborations help people to identify common interests and work toward common goals. Sharing a commitment to "place" often helps people get beyond political or ideological differences in recognizing their interdependence and common concern for a geographic location. For example, the Applegate Partnership in Southern Oregon unified loggers with environmentalists. Jim Neal, a logger and participant explains, "once you can sit down and talk about a definable piece of land, you can get beyond philosophy, and things start to fall together" (Yaffee & Wondolleck 2000). Another related lesson is the importance of focusing on "interests, not positions" and establishing ground rules early in the process. These too were patterns among the more successful collaborations.

Two additional lessons are identified by Yaffee and Wollondeck. The first is the recognition that successful collaborations are "built on human relationships." In the process, this equates to activities such as field trips, group meals and hiking through or cleaning up the land while building a sense of community. Secondly, Yaffee and Wollondeck (2000) assert that successful collaborations tend to be run like an entrepreneurial endeavor. In other words, "they established relationships, secured resources and institutional support, marketed the effort, and

pushed for effective implementation." The key to promoting an entrepreneurial approach is persistence. Yaffee and Wollondeck (2000) conclude that while collaboration cases indicate successes, the real test will come with time and in comparing the results of these efforts with the baseline of what would have been achieved otherwise.

Critiques of Collaboration

Several graduate students from the University of Michigan's Ecosystem Management Initiative, part of the school of Natural Resources and Environment, conducted a study of ten collaborative partnerships in an effort to assess their effectiveness. Because each case is unique and does not necessarily involve "hard data," outcome measures are difficult to establish. In addition, outcome measures for one partnership may vary drastically from another. One of the more conclusive aspects of their research was a discussion of the critiques of collaboration.

A common critique is that local environmental interest groups are not adequately able to defend their interests in the face of industrial or developmental interests. There is an intrinsic power imbalance which results in co-optation of environmental issues. For example, "it is argued that environmental representatives cannot adequately defend their interests when faced with industry representatives" (Brittel 1997; Moldavi 1996). Another common criticism is that local "ad-hoc" groups may not necessarily know any better than federal entities solely because they are geographically associated with the area being affected. Given too much influential leeway, local groups may destabilize well founded standards established by legislation such as NEPA, undermining federal authority (Blumberg 1998). A third critique, echoed throughout the literature, is that collaborative efforts result in a "lowest common denominator solution" (McCloskey 1996). Finally, because all community members and interests cannot possibly be represented, the full range of options may not be considered. Collaborative efforts are

demanding and only certain community members can follow through with the process, limiting the scope of representation. Participants are also self-selected not only due to time constraints, but also interests and resources. These and other selection constraints can result in a biased sample of participants with "like" perspectives (Sommarstrom 1998).

While a truly grassroots, citizen-oriented approach would include a perfectly random and diversely representational group of participants, it is an unrealistic expectation. Any collaborative effort will incorporate more views and citizens than would be involved otherwise. Further, we must recognize that the traditional "command-and-control" format, requiring government employees to solicit input from the public, is intrinsically biased toward the most opinionated and/or well organized community members. Again, any efforts to directly involve public input apart from formal regulations and settings, is a move toward grassroots involvement and expansion of community participation. Even with movements toward increasing community participation, we must continue to ask how truly grassroots these efforts are. Is the diversity of the community represented? How can collaborations be designed and conducted in a manner which is true to the culture of local communities without undermining government involvement?

The Social Ecology Approach

James Kent Associates (JKA), LLC is a nationwide consulting firm which attempts to incorporate informal community networks into the environmental policy implementation process of government agencies. Their social ecology approach strives for "cultural alignment" between formal institutions and everyday community members (Preister and Kent 2001). Their approach is applied most often in the area of natural resource management and frequently involves working for the Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management. Their social ecology methodology includes three phases:

1) The Discovery Process for which practitioners strive to "enter the routines" of the community, identifying major trends, concerns, and issues. The aim is to identify informal networks of communication and community care takers. During this phase they identify and map "human geographic boundaries" – how people describe themselves in relation to the land.
2) The Human Geographic Issue Management System (HGIMS) is a GIS based method, used to translate findings from the Discovery Process into a manageable, spatially mapped format for the formal agency. These maps are based on the cultural indicators, identified during the Discovery Process, "reflecting the actual ways that people identify with and distribute themselves on the landscape, and by which they distinguish their area from others" (Preister, 2003).
3) The final phase involves programs, public policy, and planning, all of which, with the aid of the HGIMS, "become community-based products that are outgrowths of the experience that has developed, and codify practices between formal and informal systems that have already become routine" (Preister, 2003).

The JKA approach recognizes and strives to remedy some of the limitations experienced by collaborative efforts. They directly address the critique of limited or self-selected citizen representation by intentionally entering into a community and seeking out the informal networks that may not otherwise be represented. The Discovery Process additionally alleviates the concern of "like-minded" citizens' interests being disproportionately represented. With their GIS-based human geographic mapping system, they also bridge a gap between ethnographic research aimed at establishing community empowerment and public agencies accustomed to working with quantitative data.

In addition to the Discovery Process and creating GIS maps with culturally relevant findings, Kevin Preister, a long standing JKA associate, provides trainings for agency employees on discovery work. Incrementally, the JKA social ecology approach has been incorporated into the public policy process with the support of key individuals working for agencies such as the BLM. Social ecology practitioners working within the agency setting, however, are limited by the characteristics of their own organizational culture. Several questions stemming from this particular scenario guide the remainder of my research. From the view of government employees, how effective and sustainable are community-based collaborative efforts? What are the limitations encountered by social ecology practitioners working within public agencies?

Input From the Practitioners

I received seven email survey responses from social ecology practitioners working within agency settings. The survey included four sections – *rationale, obstacles, efficacy*, and *next steps* - and a final question on the uniqueness of the social ecology approach. Respondents' names will be kept confidential throughout the report. They come from diverse backgrounds with years of experience working for agencies such as the BLM, Forest Service, and several national forests and national monuments.

Rationale

Why is community-based work important? What trends or conditions favor or disfavor more community-based approaches?

Respondent 1 offers NEPA compliance and agency need for public support as rationale for collaborations. Further, "successful public support protects cultural and natural resources from commercial exploitation – just look at recent actions by the House on the 'budget cut bill' that removed the Arctic Wildlife Refuge from oil exportation in spite of the high priority of the White House" (11/21/05). Respondent 2 concurs that community involvement helps managers to understand their issues and "improves development of land use plans by realistically tailoring

the decisions to the community." However, there is a "developing 'paranoia' about government becoming more knowledgeable about private citizens' beliefs" and, as a results, some citizens are becoming less interested in sharing their opinions (11/21/05).

Respondent 3 writes that it is "important to learn what the real issues are, not just the perceived ones. Too often, agencies only hear what formal leaders in communities want them to hear." Agencies must build trust within communities and may in turn identify opportunities that they would not have otherwise (11/21/05). Respondent 5 further adds that "we live in a democracy; our citizens don't want to be informed regarding public lands, they want to be involved" (11/30/05). Respondent 6 takes the rationale even a step further, advocating that it is not only the citizens' right or desire to be involved, but the obligation of any land management agency to involve community because "without community-based relationships, we have no intrinsic mandate to our actions" (11/28/05). Respondent 6 further explains that fewer and fewer agency people live within the communities affected by their decisions. Thus, they are removed from real community knowledge and "when politics (the hierarchical structure) becomes the driver in decision-making, people feel alienated because the linkage to their reality is tenuous, at best" (11/28/05).

Respondent 4 prefers the term "community-based ecological stewardship" to "social ecology" as the former infers that humans "come into balance with nature" while the latter lacks this inference. The preferred term is described as: "a place-based process for citizens, government, and science to build common knowledge and vision, and to share responsibility for a productive and sustainable relationship between people and the land" (11/27/05). The respondent believes "that the promise of a better future lies at more local levels of society and that it is through the process of 'community-based ecological stewardship' that trust and

improved exchange of information can be restored for the sake of solving at least some of the problems and issues we face as a society." This process "will eventually force more honesty, good will, and purpose into the nation's political and economic systems" (11/27/05).

Obstacles

What are the institutional barriers that inhibit uses of social ecology/community-based approaches in your office? What policy or logistical factors influence the success or failure of community based approaches to natural resource decision making?

Respondent 1 asserts that the first agency barrier, inhibiting use of social ecology approaches, is "the need for enough money to truly engage and understand public dynamics" (11/21/05). A second institutional barrier is the Federal Advisory Committee Act which "prohibits non-federal individuals and entities from being involved in the decision-making process" (11/21/05). A final set of factors are the "very inflexible and complex contracting laws that often prevent federal managers from hiring the right mix of contractors" (11/21/05). Respondent 2 feels that the biggest barrier is the inability to dedicate the ample time necessary early in the land use plan development process (11/21/05). Further, there is not enough time for sufficient follow-up once initial discussions have occurred. Building upon the idea of limited time and human resources, Respondent 7 emphasizes that both are already "very limited and stretched due to budget constraints" (12/10/05).

Respondent 3 feels that community-based or social ecology processes are repressed primarily by "lack of awareness of social ecology and community based management" and "lack of social ecologists in the agency" (11/21/05). Government employees can be hesitant to try something new or to try an approach that "was not invented by the agency" (11/21/05). Further, "there is a false belief that it will take too much time and be too expensive" (11/21/05). Respondent 3 goes on to discuss the problem of a lack of incentive for leaders within the agencies to endorse using a social ecology approach, therefore limiting the training opportunities

and ability of employees working under them to pursue such methods. In fact, "decision-makers who take the time to learn and listen are not rewarded for delivering a more effective program" and "staff who attempt to use social ecology or community based approaches are sometimes perceived as 'selling out' the agency to the community" (11/21/05). If the agency response to community needs is lacking or slow, any trust that the community has will dissolve.

According to Respondent 5, bureaucratic culture and fear of the unknown are the primarily obstacles inhibiting the use of community-based approaches. Staff members and line managers "cling to old paradigms" and fear losing control. "Bureaucratic inertia" is a major hindrance associated with "all the problems that plague large formal systems… too many organizational layers, information and time loss between levels, slowness to respond, carrying old, out-of-date issues that the communities have long forgotten, etc." (11/30/05). In addressing the second question regarding policy and logistical factors that affect the success or failure of community efforts, Respondent 5 stresses that governmental fiscal policies "are actually moving in a direction away from collaboration" (11/30/05). For example, "many cooperative agreements are now being treated like contracts; this inhibits more flexible financial transactions, slows agency's response time and puts partners ill at ease" (11/30/05). Another example is that "potential partners are being 'vetted' (background checks, business information) against a set of criteria alleged to prevent embarrassment to the government or avoid partnering with those that have sued us" (11/30/05).

Respondent 6 discusses the agency culture and its heavy reliance on and attachment to "hard data" and "hard science" as a major hindrance to community involvement. Though the collaboration movement has evolved, agency culture has not evolved with it and the mentality remains - "we know what's best and our mind's already made up" (11/28/05). Thus, "until we

can value 'soft sciences' and the anecdotal data this is collectible, it will be difficult to achieve success. The failure is ours; our inability to trust that we actually can make better decisions using community-based approaches" (11/28/05).

Respondent 4 offers an extensive analysis of the primary three obstacle areas: 1) community, 2) science and information, and 3) government. The following are lists of the primary obstacles for each area, pulled directly from the survey response.

Obstacles and Challenges

Community:

- Distrust toward outsiders and government
- Many rural communities are often socially/politically/economically aligned toward an economic view of nature. (See notes under science)
- Developers view landscapes as "real-estate."
- Natural resource dependent industries have often created a "jobs or environment" mentality among locals.
- It is almost always (with respect to the previous three bullets) the case that the economic interests decide the political orientation for the community.
- Environmental issues are often seen as standing in the way of economic opportunity, and residents who hold those interests and concerns sometimes are dissuaded from voicing them.
- Difficult for many people to participate in the process because of other demands.
- Many locals have grown to depend on their political representation to defend their interests.
- Many newcomers have not been effectively integrated into the community. New values are sometimes not welcome.
- Open communications and sharing of different perspectives and values are often not encouraged, and can even be disallowed in many small communities. You either conform to prevailing belief systems, or you're out.
- Communities themselves are mostly divided by interests that tend to pass information among members according to interest, but not between them.
- "Self worth, self esteem, and even careers" are often defined by many of the above factors. Change is difficult.

Science/Information:

- Science has, over the years, become highly divided and influenced by economics, politics, and other interests.
- The "sciences" related to renewable resource management (e.g., forestry, rangeland management, wildlife management) have historically been oriented toward changing natural systems for purposes of optimizing certain economically valuable components at the expense of others.

- Depending on your interests, you seem able to find science and/or scientists to support you and argue against other scientific information.
- People tend to only trust science and information that is aligned with their interests.
- Scientists, themselves, remain divided over many issues, even though they may share a common purpose and/or interest.
- Many people tend to think of science as something that works against them and their interests, rather than for them.
- The science of ecology (again, in the traditional sense, not social ecology) may now lack the internal discipline needed to effectively define and characterize healthy and sustainable ecological conditions. Common principles of ecological health and function are needed.
- Effective means (i.e. contact points) for communicating science to people are often lacking.
- Scientists are often seen as not respecting local knowledge.

Government:

- I believe the greatest challenge is the idea that government must be run as a business, with accountability for tangible outputs being the primary measure of success. This tends to deny any government role related to social outcome and change.
- The major political parties both create and thrive on perceived differences, rather than commonality. When in office, they also tend to create and exercise policies accordingly.
- Government operates hierarchically, with policy and actions passed down from above. This violates the very idea of community-based ecological stewardship, which, as you note, is a grass roots process.
- The higher one goes in government, there is a tendency toward less, not more, real understanding of what community-based stewardship is really about, and what is required to support it.
- Different government agencies do not tend to work together toward the same purposes. In fact, different offices and divisions within the same agency are often guilty of this too.
- Government programs tend to operate separately, without the coordination and collaboration needed to support landscape stewardship (11/27/05).

Efficacy

What works and doesn't work? How much do collaborative efforts stay on a formal level and how much is truly grassroots? If a grassroots approach is achieved, how is this done and maintained over time? Who are the contacts and how did you find them? How durable are community networks and the collaborative networks that they form with agencies?

According to Respondent 1, the ideal is to design and implement broad sweeping and friendly "scoping capacities" early on in the process to "ensure that significant issues/concerns are identified and, more importantly, understood." In other words, "manage the process, not the outcome." What does not work is to "pre-determine the decision and go through the motions

with the public and steer them to where you want the final effort to end" (11/21/05). In discussing the formal level versus grassroots, Respondent 1 explains that you must "'whittle and spit and drink coffee' BEFORE you ask for something." If there is not grassroots engagement early on in the process, "you will not be able to produce collaborative products that have credibility. The primary contacts may not necessarily be the designated contact or the named official.

Respondent 2 stresses that "surveys never work, but face to face discussions which allow enough time to develop even a temporary relationship, which allows for some trust building, seem to work" (11/21/05). The most sustainable collaborative efforts "seem to have some activity tied to them which is ongoing. One time efforts seem to start with enthusiasm, then drop away." Respondent 7 reiterates the preference for time and consistency - "the collaborative approach works when there is time to develop solid working relationships and trust. It often doesn't work well on time sensitive projects unless the relationships were already in place prior to initiation of the project" (12/10/05). According to the respondents, it is clear that time constraints are a serious consideration but exceptions may exist where trust has been established and/or ongoing activities are already in place.

Respondent 3 emphasizes that efficacy is a question of leadership and that "leadership must support and seek training for their staff and make community based planning and management valued by their staff." The agency must be committed to truly listening and responding to the community, building trust and following through. A major disadvantage is frequent employee turnover. If a leader comes along that values community input, establishes some trust, but then moves on, the sustainability of the relationship relies upon the next leader's

personal values and preferences. Respondent 3 adds that informal contacts must be found by entering the community through avenues such as businesses, parks, sports events, and schools.

Respondent 5 contributes that collaborative efforts can vary in formality depending on their funding framework. For example, they may require more formality if receiving grants and/or government funding. A grassroots approach can be maintained over time by the energy of a few citizens with strong interests. Self-interest is an unavoidable part of the process and the trick is "getting those (self-interests) out on the table, not positions, and finding that there is significantly more common ground when people focus on interests (11/30/05). It takes only a few "spark plugs" or a core group within a community to keep things going. The core group often consists of "an informal leader (not elected), one agency person and another citizen in the community." In closing, Respondent 5 points out that the most visible collaborative efforts are the ones that "throw rocks" at agency proposals and therefore tend to get left out of the process. Informal networks are critical to holding agencies accountable. Both Respondents 5 and 6 feel that informal networks are more sustainable when less reliant on agencies. "Ever-shifting staff, dollars, direction and priorities," according to Respondent 6, make any partnerships with the agency more vulnerable. If truly informal, however, "a network may go underground during times of high uncertainty, but it continues to function" (11/28/05).

Respondent 4 again offers a comprehensive list of principles that should guide collaborative efforts. These principles include: citizen empowerment, transformational leadership, inclusiveness, capacity building, applied science and information, cultural absorption, institutional change, collaboration, and ecological integrity. A more in-depth explanation of each principle will be included in the appendix (include and cite). The respondent feels unable to assess how well collaborative efforts manage to remain on the grassroots level, but does feel

that the "BLM comes the closest of any federal agency I know of at addressing the process through a truly grassroots effort" (11/27/05). Respondent 4 believes that collaborations can be durable "as long as principles of trust and empowerment are supported."

Next Steps

What trends are you seeing about the support for and practice of community-based approaches? What do you think the management world will look like in 5 years with regard to community-based approaches?

Because collaborations are such a trend, the collaborative process or new partnerships can be claimed too quickly and without justification. In considering future trends, Respondent 1 warns that "shallow and superficial efforts are the danger." Managers must avoid this and continue to find ways to engage the public. Respondent 3 ads that agencies are struggling to get beyond old paradigms and learn to be part of the collaborative movement. In five years, there will not likely be much change within the agency culture. However, two factors could speed up the process: 1) if new leaders are chosen who have experience with a social ecology approach and, 2) if communities with existing strong networks can help an agency to transition more rapidly (11/21/05).

Respondent 5 points out that retirement of the "old-style" managers will help the process along, but it will still be slow. The respondent refers to James Kent as often saying "it takes 7 years for changes to start showing up in government" and concurs that this estimate is relatively accurate. The hope is that "5 years down the road people will react to our stuff with an – 'of course we're doing things collaboratively' – and truly be doing so." Respondent 6 is also skeptical about anything beyond incremental changes. There is verbal homage paid to concepts like collaboration but, "when the rubber meets the road, by golly, we're going to 'get the job done'" (11/28/05)). The points of contact for community members are primarily with the line officers (those working out in the field) and they most often default to the formal network

system. Not only must the agency's organizational culture shift toward valuing community-based efforts, but agencies and communities are faced with the additional challenge of overcoming a history of broken promises and severed trust (11/28/05).

Respondent 4 feels strongly that "the last five years have seen many serious violations" of the principles that should be upheld by government (11/27/05). There is a lot of work to be done and the process will be facilitated more smoothly if the "political middle" is restored. A second major change that is required, "is the idea that we humans must learn to support natural systems and processes, both locally and at global scales, while staying socially and economically productive" (11/27/05). Though the respondent offers that there is extensive work that must be done for change to occur, the general feeling is optimistic and major changes are predicted for the next five years. Peering into the future, Respondent 7 feel that agencies will continue using more collaborative approaches and "will serve as land management facilitator versus worker bees" (12/10/05).

JKA Approach

What is unique about JKA's social ecology approach that you find useful in your work?

Respondent 1 explains the value of the JKA approach: "their data/process ensures that the issues/concerns are identified and understood early in the process and that KEY individuals are known" (11/21/05). Respondent 2 reiterates the importance of working from a base of contacts and follow-up with contacts later in the process which "helps validate early impressions and also helps develop a cadre of resources for follow-up needs" (11/21/05). Respondent 3 specifically appreciates the job training offered by JKA and the "teaching by doing" style they use. The social ecology approach is natural, makes sense, and it not expensive. Further, "the mapping of how people use the landscape at finer scales than provided by census data is invaluable." James

Kent Associates are willing to adapt their approach and improve their techniques with changing conditions and "every employee can benefit."

Respondent 5 simply states – "this stuff works." The Discovery Process "provides an understandable way of assessing on a real-time basis the current issues and who carries them. It's not overly complicated, citizens including agency folks can relate to it and it adds real value to the decision-making process" (11/30/05). Respondent 4 agrees with the value of the JKA approach but is concerned that issues identified during the Discovery Process may be "old-hat" issues, largely unrelated to current ecological stewardship efforts (11/27/05). Respondent 6 continues the Discovery conversation adding that "what emerges from Discovery is a robust image that has depth, dimension, and a living voice that speaks from the past and the present" (11/28/05). Further, "JKA's social ecology really asks the practitioner to seek knowledge through an ever widening, ever deepening exploration of the backrooms and the alleyways as well as the boardrooms and boulevards. Only this multi-dimensional knowledge-base provides the tools to work toward 'productive harmony' (collaboration)."

Conclusion

The most apparent conclusion is that we cannot easily make conclusions. This is due in part to the fact that collaborations are a relatively recent phenomenon. It was not until the 1990s, after several pieces of legislation endorsed community participation without follow-through, that grassroots, community-based efforts became commonplace. However, as we saw with the 10 cases examined by University of Michigan graduate students and the 200 cases reviewed by their professors Yaffee and Wollondeck, we still cannot make broad, sweeping claims that collaborations do or don't work or that they are more or less sustainable than other methods

currently being utilized. Their findings do indicate that communities benefit and that more ecologically sound solutions have been found with the involvement of diverse stakeholders.

The JKA social ecology approach is one methodology which strives to find harmony or alignment between agencies and communities regarding natural resources. Social ecology practitioners working within the agency setting offer a unique perspective on the collaboration movement, six of which responded to a series of open-ended questions covering four major themes – rationale, obstacles, efficacy, and next steps. While the diversity of their responses further emphasizes an inability to make general claims about collaboration efforts, they do illuminate the many challenges they face working within their own organization's cultural context. All concur that it is essential to involve local communities in public policy work. However, the obstacles and barriers they experience are pervasive and deeply rooted. A common theme stressed that there will be very little change within agencies unless the leadership changes first. The overall feeling of the responses to the *efficacy* and *next steps* questions indicates that we are on the right track; changes will be slow, but they will occur. One respondent included a list of favorable trends, all of which offer a hopeful outlook that may be realized with the dedication of these practitioners, working within agencies, toward increased community participation and empowerment.

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Appendix

Respondent 4: principles for efficacy

Citizen Empowerment – People need to meaningfully participate in making decisions that affect their lives and surroundings. It is through the social and cultural networks of place that people learn to manage and care for their social, cultural, and natural environments. Such knowledge tends to pass from generation to generation among people who live there. These geographically based social and cultural systems offer great potential for stewardship, provided that local people are empowered to form and work toward a shared vision of community health and ecological integrity.

Transformational Leadership – Community-based ecological stewardship starts with transformational leadership. Transformational leaders are respected individuals with or without formal authority in communities and institutions that are willing to take risks to effect change. Their authority to act comes from within. They believe it's the right thing to do. They tend to have a strong vision of community-based stewardship and believe in the ability of people to work together for change. They lead from within by working through informal networks and using consensus-building processes to achieve results. Transformational leaders naturally extend and share leadership with others, listen carefully, willingly share their own resources and information, give credit to others rather than themselves, and work diligently toward broad understanding and agreement. It is important that managers recognize transformational leaders and support their work in community-based stewardship.

Inclusiveness – For ecological stewardship to develop and thrive, communities must become safe environments in which a wide range of information and values can be openly shared. The process must be deeply democratic with empowerment extending to all people from the community of place, as well as to people outside the community of place who want to contribute their knowledge. An inclusive vision, supported by the broader community of place as well as by the larger society, is one that can be successfully implemented.

Capacity Building – Community-based ecological stewardship relies on the capacity of people and institutions to work together in defining and pursuing common goals and objectives. This capacity mobilizes widely available knowledge, information, skills, and tools through trust, commitment, accountability, and the overall quality of working relationships. Building and maintaining capacity means honoring commitments to people, principles, and processes; bridging ideological, organizational and cultural boundaries; sharing information and resources; and acting in wholly trustworthy and accountable ways. Capacity can be judged and measured by the degree to which credible, useful, and constructive information is passed through the social networks of place, and through the support offered by the larger society, whose interests should also be considered and served. Building and maintaining capacity is a critical stewardship practice; it requires constant and lasting vigilance and attention.

Applied Science and Information – The stewardship process fosters mutual discovery and learning by all participants. Scientists involved in the process must gain and hold the trust of all concerned interests, and respect for local knowledge and expertise. The process of gathering and

analyzing information, then making needed adjustments is known as "adaptive management." Agencies and institutions must commit to serving community-based ecological stewardship with highly reliable, non-partisan, and interdisciplinary science, information, and expertise. Ideally, agencies and institutions work together at local and regional levels toward that end. With science and local culture effectively joined, applied science becomes part of the local wisdom.

Cultural Absorption – Another desired outcome of community-based ecological stewardship is for local culture to become the carrier of the information and knowledge needed to achieve a productive and sustainable relationship with its environment. When people work together to find more effective solutions, and are supported in doing so, the need for regulatory controls is lessened over time. For this to happen, institutions and communities must come together in a relationship of trust and mutual learning. Government personnel must learn to effectively communicate through local information and care-taking networks. And local people must work to overcome internal barriers to communication, including distrust toward "outside interests," newcomers, government representatives, and scientists. Local cultures must become more open to different ideas and information if they are to be able to support the stewardship process.

Institutional Change – Agencies should become more integral to local communities, including their social networks and culture. In doing so, they should represent their mandates and responsibilities, but strive to empower people with the information they need to succeed in the stewardship process. NEPA reviews can help support community-based ecological stewardship when used to reach out to the larger society for their input into the local process. Land use plans can include input from the stewardship process as planning alternatives. That input can be adopted when supported by pubic and environmental reviews**.**

Collaboration - Collaboration begins with formal or informal processes for identifying common goals and objectives and continues to evolve and strengthen as people and institutions work together to achieve a shared vision. Ultimately, collaboration should lead to new and lasting relationships for identifying and serving the common interest, becoming transformational to people and institutions while doing so. When mature, collaboration is characterized by:

- Individuals and organizations committed to shared goals and objectives
- Organizational alignment with, and support of, stewardship principles and practices
- Established joint strategies supported by agreed upon roles and responsibilities
- Goals that are jointly pursued through dispersed leadership with shared control
- Shared risk and accountability
- Pooled, shared, and leveraged resources
- Transparent procedures and processes that are openly accountable to other observers and interests
- Open door policies accommodating new people and ideas
- Consensus driven decision-making processes
- Adaptive mechanisms for accommodating change

Ecological Integrity – Ecological integrity implies an "ecological imperative," or a minimal and inviolate natural condition that must be met in order to assure persistence over time (i.e. sustainability). Such an outcome is only possible through a more common understanding and

respect for the design and function of naturally occurring ecological systems. When biologically intact, these systems make the most efficient use of naturally available energy, water, and nutrients. Ad they have the capacity to capture, fix, and cycle nutrients essential to sustaining productivity over time. When healthy, these systems are able to adapt to a wide variety of natural disturbances, such as fire, drought, and floods. Human uses and activities should, therefore, be understood and managed in the context of what these natural systems require. Human economics must adapt to support natural system economies if each is to be sustained.