

Final Report

***Property Lines and Forested Landscapes:
Collective Action for Trans-Boundary Natural Resource Management
in Northeastern Oregon***

Submitted to the
Ford Foundation's Community Forestry Research Fellowship Program
c/o College of Natural Resources
University of California, Berkeley

November 1998

by
Sissel Waage
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Environmental Science, Policy and Management
University of California, Berkeley
Berkeley, California 94720
e-mail: swaage@nature.berkeley.edu

Introduction

I returned to California in late August 1998 following seventeen months of residence in Wallowa County, Oregon (May - August 1996, June 1997, and September 1997 - August 1998). The past year has been extremely rewarding and I am looking forward to data analysis and dissertation writing. This report is a first step in that direction. I will first summarize my research activities over the past year. I will then briefly discuss some of my current theoretical findings, with the caveat that they are still under development. Finally, I will end with a note on my plans for next steps.

Activities: September 1997 - August 1998

This research focused on the question: why do private landowners and public land users initiate collective action for trans-boundary forest management? I also asked whether, and how, collective action and forest management planning changed resource decision-making and management. I collaborated with both Wallowa Resources, a community-based organization, and a broad range of community members in conducting this research.

During the first few months of fieldwork, I sought to understand private landowners' and public land users' factors of decision-making, in general, and specifically, reasons for initiating a collective action effort. Following several months of research, I began to focus on analyzing how the regional and national political economy affects individual landowners' and public land users' decision-making in Wallowa County. The objective of this component of research was to understand the context in which private landowners' decision-making processes occur. Finally, I sought to further contextualize participation in collective action by examining the local history of organizing.

In my mid-term report, I described five broad areas of activity. Between January and August 1998, I continued to build on those functional lines of inquiry, which included:

- conducting over 110 semi-structured interviews with both participants and non-participants in the process of drafting the Wallowa County – Nez Perce Tribe Salmon Recovery Plan, to understand the process of, and reasons why, people organized and drafted the plan;
- attending all local meetings related to natural resource management and other relevant issues, to observe local decision-making in general, and resource management politics, specifically;
- reading through select back issues of the local newspaper from 1898 to 1998, to analyze the context in which local natural resource management decisions have been made;
- gathering aggregate data on the local socio-economic context, historical timber harvesting levels and changes in forest composition and structure, in order to conduct quantitative assessments of local trends; and
- collecting primary data on historical resource use, social organizing, and USFS/community relations through oral histories and archival research, to understand the historical context in which people have engaged in collective action.

I maintained a focus on both individuals and collective action because it is ultimately the men and women working - with chainsaws, single grip harvesters and barbed wire fencing materials - who determine whether collective plans are implemented across the landscape.

I continually discussed findings and next steps with Wallowa Resources staff. Conversations often drew on, criticized and re-framed research approaches and analyses. My thinking about factors in local natural resource politics and landowner decision-making has greatly benefited from these interactions with Wallowa Resources staff and discussions about effecting social change in the county.

In an effort to broaden the reach of my contacts, I also worked with a variety of community members on other on-going efforts. For example, one-fifth generation Wallowa County family asked that I help in organizing questions for their elders and documenting their family history. This historical project is still underway and I am providing assistance with typing.

Preliminary Findings & Analysis

Wallowa County's collective action effort began in 1992. The Snake River Chinook salmon was proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act. Representatives of Wallowa County's private landowners, public land users, and local government joined with the Lapwai-based Nez Perce Tribe¹ to collaboratively draft a watershed-based salmon habitat recovery plan for the entire county. Independent work on the land was put aside to assess the inter-dependence of drainages in the county. Following over a year of analysis, a management plan for every watershed in the county was completed in 1993. The local government integrated the Wallowa County – Nez Perce Tribe Salmon Recovery Plan into the county land use plan. Group members then set their sights on regional and national decision-making processes, with the hope that their collective action effort would provide entrée to policy discussions that they had not gained as individuals.

Individual versus collective action has long been a tension in “small”² family-owned natural resource-based businesses in the U.S. These conflicting impulses are reflected in the history and politics of the midwestern cooperative movement as well as contemporary “wise use movement” organizations. In working collectively to either negotiate better prices or promote private property rights, “small” land-based businesses have recognized the power of organization while holding steadfastly to the ideology of independence. Private landowners' co-existing preference for independence and willingness to coordinate have become a key pieces of the puzzle around implementing ecosystem and watershed-based natural resource management. As agencies and ecologists have embraced landscape scales of analysis and watershed-based approaches to management, advocates of these efforts also assert that implementation often requires coordination of resource use across property lines and agency jurisdictions. Currently

¹ Descendents of the Nez Perce nation form a diaspora, spanning three reservations in Idaho, Oregon and Washington as well as many towns in the U.S. and Canada. However, the U.S. government recognizes individuals registered on the Lapwai, Idaho reservation as descendents of the nation due to their signing of both the 1855 and 1863 treaties. The Wallowa County/Nez Perce Tribe Salmon Habitat Recovery Plan was written in collaboration with the Nez Perce Tribe from Lapwai, Idaho.

² In this study “small” land-based businesses are defined as primary producers, who sell their products for processing and have no control over the products following this initial sale.

autonomous individuals and entities would become interdependent in management decision- making.

The magnitude of these challenges has led proponents to largely focus implementation of watershed and ecosystem management on public lands. However, in the western U.S., miles of riparian zones are privately owned. Private lands are also increasingly the focal point of resource use, as ecological change and, to a lesser extent, policy change, has diminished the level of timber harvesting on public lands. Given these patterns of land ownership and resource use, watershed-based management plans without private landowner participation have the potential to be empty shells.

Despite the potential importance of private lands in watershed-based management, current public policy tools for encouraging private landowner collaboration are few and only moderately effective. Environmental policy has relied on legal and regulatory mechanisms. On private lands these tools are either logistically impossible to enforce - due to the amount, size and distribution of ownership - or tied up in legal challenges based on property rights. To foster cooperation across ownerships and jurisdictions, public policy analysts must develop a diversity of approaches to working with private landowners in the same way that ecologists have devised a wide range management tools.

As a step toward developing multi-ownership collaboration in resource management, this study has sought to develop an improved analytical framework for understanding collective action among private landowners and public land users. Based on preliminary analysis of the data, I argue that current theories of collective action fail to explain the organization of private landowners and representatives of the Nez Perce tribe around salmon habitat recovery in northeastern Oregon. Neither motivated exclusively by personal cost/benefit analyses nor short-term economic gains, the collective action effort in Wallowa County was primarily a function of ideological beliefs and, secondarily, long-term resource access concerns.

The relative importance of these factors is closely related to the context from which they emerge. Globalization of markets in the 1980s and 1990s coincided with increased federal regulation and bureaucratization of natural resource use. Private landowners feared shrinking control over both use and sale of natural resources. Their inability to affect complex markets has combined with concerns about greater limitations on resource use. These two factors have led “small” family landowners to focus attention on ideologies of self-determination and long-term resource access issues. This focus coincided with Nez Perce priorities and enabled the formation of a unique alliance.

Are private landowners acting against their short-term economic self-interest by organizing around ideology and seeking to increase social networks? In my dissertation I will argue that within a globalized economy landowners’ economic self-interest must be understood in new terms. Reacting to a lack of control over short-term economic issues and a sense of diminishing control over resource use, private landowners are seeking to ensure access to resources over time. They have focused on ideologies of self-determination and roles of the State. These decisions do not simply ignore all economic factors. Rather, private landowners’ collective action has been supported by some of the vertically integrated resource companies which buy their raw products, with the hope that efforts will secure a continued flow of resources over time. In areas with only one timber buyer or cattle feedlot, it is in a producers’ best interest to maintain positive relations with these monopoly representatives. Thus, with the support of natural resource corporations, economic self-interest of “small” private landowners has shifted to a focus on ideology. However, these ideologies, and the efforts that they animate, are fundamentally about self-determination within the context of maintaining access to resources.

This argument will be substantiated in three analytical sections of my dissertation. First, I will examine historical relationships between changing vegetation composition, economies and ideologies in the area. I will argue that economic, ecological and ideological factors have historically interwoven to influence the decision-making of the various peoples who have inhabited the area. All three factors have changed over time, both affecting one another and the decision-making processes of resource users. Drawing

on archeological data, I show how the area has been a transitional zone ecologically and culturally. Change has been the hallmark of the region. Human survival has been contingent upon equally fluid decision-making. I will build on this argument by examining anthropological data on Nez Perce decision-making, with a focus on how ecological, economic and cultural factors interacted over time. In the final section, I will consider the role of ideology in resource use decision-making during the period of non-indigenous settlement in the late 1800s. I intend to show how different ideologies were territorialized, shaping both economic options and ecological systems. This section will conclude with the assertion that ideology has historically been a factor of resource user decision-making. Particularly for non-indigenous landowners, decision-making processes have not been exclusively driven by short-term economic concerns.

This history will provide the context for the second analytical section examining the forces that mediate contemporary resource access, use and control in Wallowa County. I will argue that interrelationships between the region's ecology, economy, and policies have led both private landowners and the Nez Perce Tribe, for different reasons, to focus organizing around ideological issues. Although distinct in approach and rationale, both groups are concerned with similar substantive issues of rights and access to resources. Relations with local resource processors have led private landowners to believe that they are unable to affect markets, commodity prices, or any short-term economic issues. Private landowners have instead focused on maintaining use of natural resources over time and gaining access to decision-making. These goals have shifted landowners' attention to locally shared ideologies about private property rights, independent landowners, and small, "non-intrusive" government. For very different reasons, the Nez Perce have sought to both maintain access to resources guaranteed in treaties and increase participation in natural resource decision-making in their historic homeland. I will conclude with the assertion that the collective action of private landowners and the Nez Perce tribe was built on shared ideologies and concerns that ecological, economic and policy changes are diminishing resource access and use.

The third section of my dissertation will examine the collective action effort around drafting the Wallowa County - Nez Perce Tribe Salmon Recovery Plan. I will first describe the process. The plan's form and content will be the basis for arguing that the ideological underpinnings of the collective action effort were altered and shaped by ecological characteristics. The mobility of salmon led to the decision to write a trans-boundary plan. Paradoxically, the effort to protect private property rights required looking at a landscape without boundaries. Building social networks with decision-makers necessitated a contradiction: distinct landowner and Native American rights across a non-bounded landscape. The group addressed this contradiction by embracing a "voluntary implementation" approach, which allowed the ideological moorings to remain firm despite the mobility of salmon. This discussion will lead into an assessment of the effects of the plan and collective action on the land. The section will conclude by asserting that this case illustrates how factors of decision-making interact, in general, and, specifically, how ideological positions within collective action can become fundamentally shaped by resource characteristics.

Finally, I will present an alternative framework to understand collective action. I will also draw out the implications of this case study for conservation efforts and the future of watershed-based resource management in the western U.S. I will end by arguing for policy makers' consideration of the interrelationships between land, economies and ideas in developing environmental policies.

Next Steps

I plan to continue my involvement with Wallowa Resources regarding this research. While writing my dissertation, I will periodically return to the county in order to discuss research findings. I will work with a range of local institutions to schedule and host multiple fora to discuss conclusions. Potential co-sponsors of these interactive sessions include, Oregon State University Extension Office, Wallowa County Museum and Wallowa Resources. Prior to completing my dissertation, I will summarize my

analyses in a few concise documents and provide copies to local libraries, county government, university extension service and the county museum.

I sincerely hope that this research effort has, and will, help residents of Wallowa County in their efforts to ensure the health of the people, communities, and natural resources of the area.