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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Locally based, non-profit land conservation organizations, also known as land trusts, are “one of the fastest growing segments of the environmental movement” (Hocker, 1996). This growth can be explained, in part, by their success at protecting significant amounts of land, and by their origins in and ties to local communities. In 1950, only 53 land trusts were active in the United States; by 1980, that number had grown to approximately 400. Over 800 were operating by 1990, with more than 1200 active today (Land Trust Alliance, 2001). The amount of land protected by these organizations has also increased dramatically, from approximately 1.9 million acres in 1990 to 6.4 million acres in 2000 (Land Trust Alliance, 2001).

Why have these organizations been so successful? According to the former president of the Land Trust Alliance, an umbrella group serving land trusts around the country, their “effectiveness has come in no small part from (their) local focus, their knowledge of local issues and people, and their consistent presence in their communities...the local, place-based nature of land trusts is still one of our greatest strengths” (Hocker, 2000, p. 3). Landowners usually are comfortable working with local land trusts “precisely because land trust leaders are typically their neighbors or at least residents of the same region” (Hocker, 1996, p. 250). Although national organizations have also been very successful at conserving land, they are occasionally limited in effectiveness by their distance from local concerns. As one land trust staff member explains, “bigger is not necessarily better. While a large land trust may have more impressive experience, it will not necessarily have good connections within a local community--and it may even be regarded with suspicion as an outsider” (Clarke, 1997, p. 10). Thus, the local, “grassroots” nature of the land trust movement is a critical factor explaining the success of these non-profit organizations.

It is interesting to note, however, that as the number of local land trusts has grown, so has the number of large-scale, collaborative initiatives between land trusts and both private and public partners. As two land trust professionals explain, “with the proliferation of small local land trusts in the 1980s and early 1990s, we have seen a

corresponding bloom in the frequency and variety of partnerships between local and regional land trusts” (Ames and Muir, 1995, p. 8). Partnership types range from the cooperative agreement between the township-based Old Mission Conservancy and the overlapping, multi-county Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy in Michigan to the consulting consortium created by the Compact of Cape Cod Conservation Trusts (Slee, 1999). Additionally, “formal cooperation between government agencies and private land conservation groups at the state or local level--the organizations typically described as land trusts--has grown tremendously over the past decade” (Endicott, 1993, p. 195).

Most intriguing, however, are the collaborations that span even larger scales. Efforts are in place that look beyond working with immediate geographic neighbors or local political boundaries and focus instead on working within the boundaries of an ecological region. This landscape-scale emphasis is evident in efforts as diverse as the Blufflands Alliance, a cooperative initiative involving land trusts working along the Mississippi River in Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Minnesota; the Michigan Dune Alliance, concentrating on the freshwater dunes of eastern shore of Lake Michigan; and the newly-formed collaborative initiative working in the alpine ecosystems of Wyoming, Idaho, Montana, and southern Canada. According to the former president of the Land Trust Alliance, “there are many other good examples of land trusts thinking regionally” (Hocker, 2000, p.3).

The trend towards larger-scale, cooperative work leads to a series of critical questions:

- Given that the success of local land trusts depends in large part on their grassroots origins and connections, why are these organizations joining together to create large-scale, regional initiatives?
- What challenges are they facing in these efforts? Do the benefits of working regionally outweigh the costs?
- If so, which structural elements of each cooperative effort would participants keep in the future, and which would they change?

This thesis aims to explore answers to these questions, with the hope that the lessons learned will offer useful insights and ideas for other local land trusts that may be thinking about the costs and benefits of working regionally. Specifically, the rationales for collaboration will be discussed in Chapter Four, the factors contributing to the success of collaborative efforts in Chapter Five, the challenges of working collaboratively in Chapter Six, and potential future changes in Chapter Seven.

WHY ARE PARTNERSHIPS DEVELOPING?

Given the locally based origins of many non-profit land trusts, why are these organizations joining together to create large-scale, regional initiatives? Answers to this critical question can be found, in large part, through an examination of the well-developed body of literature on collaboration. As such, general texts on collaboration, as well as on more specific natural resource, non-profit, and land trust collaborations are examined below.

Collaboration theory owes much to the pioneering work of Gray, and especially to her classic text, *Collaborating: Finding Common Ground for Multiparty Problems* (Gray, 1989). Acknowledging the growing interdependence of all aspects of society, she proposed an increase in the use of collaborative processes for dispute resolution and advancing shared visions. Most directly related to the questions at hand was her finding that the recognition of the need to address a shared problem often drives partners together towards collaboration. Gray explained that partnerships often form when “a critical situation exists that is not being addressed by traditional means” (Gray, 1989, p. 185). Additionally, she felt that the problem being addressed by the group must be “a microcosm of a major social problem” (Gray, 1989, p. 185). Third, the fact that “the problem creates a negative image and negative consequences for the community” also was seen as a factor driving groups to collaborate (Gray, 1989, p. 185). Finally, Gray cited the fact that “the particular version of the problem is local to the community” (1989, p. 185) as a motivating factor for group formation.

Bennis and Biederman, in their inspirational *Organizing Genius: The Secrets of Creative Collaboration*, offered useful insights into the formation, atmosphere, and

leadership characteristics of seven collaborative projects they termed “Great Groups” (Bennis and Biederman, 1997). From the electric garage that produced the first Apple computer to the Manhattan Project, these groups also came together to solve a shared problem. Additionally, “Great Groups” demonstrated a common intensity of purpose, had extraordinary leaders, and recruited talented members.

Another factor promoting collaborative group formation is a desire among natural resource managers to overcome the fractionalization of both ecological and administrative systems. Natural resource collaborations, in particular, have emerged in recent years in large part due to the particular challenges presented by the need to manage ecosystems across administrative and political boundaries. In “Cooperation: A Strategy for Achieving Stewardship Across Boundaries,” Yaffee explored the motivations that underlie cross-boundary cooperative behaviors. These collaborative efforts “all seek to overcome the inherent fragmentation in our society between multiple agencies, levels of government, public and private sectors, diverse interest groups, and different disciplines and value structures” (Yaffee, 1998, p. 299).

Third, although popular beliefs find altruism as a source of transboundary cooperation, it is also possible to find reciprocity; “people support each other because they know they will benefit in turn” (Yaffee, 1998, p. 302). Following the general principle of you-scratch-my-back-I’ll-scratch-yours, participants in cooperative efforts can, at times, meet personal goals most efficiently by being part of a cooperative effort. The pursuit of self-interested motives through cooperative action was found to be a driving force behind most collaborations by Axelrod in his pioneering text, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (Axelrod, 1984). Even if participants cite intangible benefits or larger, overarching goals as primary motivating forces, Gray also still found the ultimate rationale for participation to be self-interest. “Nor are stakeholders altruists pursuing some greater good,” she claimed. “Quite the contrary: even when collaboration is initiated in order to advance a shared vision, stakeholders are anxious to advance their own interests” (Gray, 1989, p. 112).

Wondolleck and Yaffee, in *Making Collaboration Work: Lessons From Innovation in Natural Resource Management*, took an extensive look at collaborative resource management initiatives across the country (Wondolleck and Yaffee, 2000). From the 200+ collaborative efforts that were examined, four primary rationales for collaboration were generated: 1) to build understanding through information sharing, 2) to make decisions and build support for them, 3) to build organizational capacity, and 4) to complete projects. In addition to these formative influences, collaboration was seen as a “strategy for achieving more sound and sustainable resource management” (Wondolleck and Yaffee, 2000, p. 45).

Much work has been done regarding non-profit cooperation with public partners. Endicott’s compilation, *Land Conservation Through Public/Private Partnerships*, provided excellent coverage of both national and local land trust partnerships with federal agencies, states, and local governments. Myers, in her chapter entitled “Direct Funding of Nonprofit Land Protection: A New Genre of State Land Conservation Programs,” examined four collaborative grants programs: the California State Coastal Conservancy, the Vermont Housing and Conservation Trust Fund, the Rhode Island Open Space and Recreation Grants Program, and the Iowa Resource Enhancement and Protection Program (Myers, 1993). These groups formed, in part, to accomplish a range of goals, including significant acreage saved, additional projects completed, increased funding for conservation, and increased land trust capacity.

Along similar lines, Griffith, in her draft *Report to Planning Committee on a Study of Three Collaborations*, offered useful insights into why public-private collaboration is necessary, what structural choices exist, and the elements of successful collaboration (Griffith, 2001). Primarily, she viewed collaboration as a vehicle to achieve institutional goals, alter power relationships, and coordinate the relationship between non-profit and government entities. She found “the ability to achieve a better service outcome than could be achieved by government or the non-for-profit sector acting alone,” as well as “each organization [being] strengthened through the collaborative process” as the two primary reasons collaborative groups exist (Griffith, 2001).

Along similar lines, Labich examined the rationale for the formation of public private landscape planning partnerships in Massachusetts (Labich, 1999). He found that

landscape planning partnerships were forming in this area for six main reasons. First, people in the area had a long history of working together in coalitions since the 1950's and 1960's. Second, the shifts in land protection funding from public to private sources were also found to be encouraging collaborative groups to form. Recent planning processes, as well as an increase in the general accessibility of landscape ecology theory, also promoted collaborative efforts. Fifth, the public-private land conservation efforts in Labich's study were found to be coming together in response to increasing threats of sprawl-type development. Finally, he also found partnerships arising as a logical outgrowth of an increase in both citizen participation and the incorporation of ecological concepts in land use planning over time (Labich, 1999).

Primarily focused on taking collaborative relationships to a more formal level (through mergers, consolidations, or joint ventures), La Piana's *Beyond Collaboration: Strategic Restructuring of Nonprofit Organizations* offered additional insights into the rationales behind non-profit collaboration (La Piana, 1997). Rationales for cooperation cited include financial pressures as government funding and charitable giving decline, as well as increased competition for staff and funds due to constant growth within the non-profit sector. La Piana also noticed the widespread desire to see collaboration among foundations as another driving force encouraging groups to coalesce. He explained that foundations, "frustrated by overlapping programs, service gaps, turf battles, and a lack of coordination, have begun to encourage, and in some cases to demand, closer collaboration between nonprofit organizations in return for new or continued funding" (La Piana, 1997, p.3). This sentiment was also noted in a roundtable discussion on partnerships sponsored by Harvard University: "partnership has become a mantra, like motherhood and apple pie," one participant commented (Institute for Cultural Landscape Studies, 1998, p. 2). Land trusts hoping to receive funding from these organizations must, in some way, meet these goals.

A funder as well as advisor, the Land Trust Alliance (LTA) has also been encouraging partnerships, mergers, and other forms of cooperation between trusts. *Exchange*, the journal of the Land Trust Alliance, is the only serial publication currently in print dedicated solely to addressing issues of concern to the land trust community. From 1994-2002, many articles were written in *Exchange* touching on partnerships and