

CHAPTER 15: WHY COLLABORATION AND ALTERNATIVES

I. INTRODUCTION

Overview

There are a variety of ways an individual can deal with environmental and natural resource issues they are concerned about. Individuals interviewed in our case studies chose to use collaborative processes involving diverse stakeholders. For non-agency participants, involvement in a collaborative partnership is often a deviation from more typical advocacy actions such as attending public hearings, lobbying, appealing agency decisions and even litigation. For agency participants, collaborative partnerships are a new input channel to assist with resource management and coordination with other stakeholders.

In order to understand why the number of collaborative partnerships are increasing throughout the country our research attempted to clarify why each individual has chosen this form of resource management and what they felt would have occurred had the partnership not formed. Those interviewed were asked, given all the options available to participate in natural resource decision-making, why they chose the collaborative approach. Secondly, they were asked what they believe would have occurred with the resource issues or problems had the partnership not formed.

The reasons why individuals have chosen to participate and what they felt would have occurred without the partnerships vary according to numerous factors. By analyzing the reasons why individuals chose to participate as well as what would have likely occurred, we hope to provide insights into the individuals' motives for choosing an alternative path to deal with issues and problems.

Why Collaboration? Summary of Core Findings

There were various responses individuals gave when asked why they chose to participate in a collaborative partnership. The reasons given generally fall into the following categories:

- Empowerment of stakeholders: The collaborative approach allowed their perspective to be heard by others, was a way to take action and to stay aware of activity.
- New strategy: The partnership provided a break from traditional strategies that were not effective and a different approach was appealing.
- Direct stake or responsibility in management of resource: Individuals had either a financial, legal or strong personal stake in the way the resource was managed.
- Coordination: To avoid duplicate work, accomplish more, and gain pooled knowledge individuals chose collaboration.
- Community building: Individuals wanted to improve relations, diffuse tensions, and get to know other members of the community.

- Threat of government action and/or lawsuit: Possible or imminent government regulation or lawsuit triggered participation.

Alternatives, Summary of Core Findings

When participants were asked what they felt would have occurred with the resource issues and problems had the collaborative partnership not formed, they gave a large range of responses that tended to overlap. Responses generally fell into the following categories:

- Continuation of current management strategies
- Loss of holistic thinking and awareness toward issue
- Continued contentious atmosphere in community
- Government intervention would occur
- Increased harm to resource would have occurred

II. WHY COLLABORATION? SPECIFIC FINDINGS

Empowerment of stakeholders

Members of the Nanticoke Watershed Alliance, Three-Quarter Circle Ranch, Clark County HCP, Scott River CRMP, Northwest Resource Advisory Council, and Animas River Stakeholders Group partnerships mentioned some form of empowerment as a reason why they chose a collaborative approach to managing the natural resource issues. Empowerment can be found in a variety of ways. To some it means having their interests expressed and heard while for others it is a way to build knowledge of what is going on or to take action.

Having influence over the outcome was a driving force behind many members' choice to participate in a collaborative partnership. Local gold miner Ann Schrieber said the Clark County HCP gave her, "a voice to fight the agencies." Members of the Animas River Stakeholders Group felt the collaborative partnership was a way to enable the community to participate in the decision-making process at both the state and federal levels. Similarly, hunting outfitter Jim Allen a member of Three-Quarter Circle Ranch partnership concerned with wildlife management said: "Getting involved might provide a chance to influence policy and management trends on public lands."

The desire to ensure their interests or expertise was heard by the partnership was another form of empowerment that drove individual members to participate in collaborative processes. Dennis Hall is the Executive Director of Operation Future Association, a farmer's stakeholders alliance. When asked why Operation Future chose to participate in Darby Partnership, Hall stated, "They had their agricultural interests...and did not see anyone at the table that was really doing that." Similarly, Mark Zankel, Nanticoke Watershed Alliance participant and TNC representative noted: "This way we could provide input based on our understanding and areas of expertise and to look for opportunities to work together with the Alliance on various projects."

Troy Rarick, co-owner of a mountain bike store and member of the NW RAC, said the reason he got involved was "The age old answer, if you don't get involved, you can't complain when things don't go your way." On a different note, T. Wright Dickinson, Chair of the NW RAC, thought that it was the partnership that empowered each interest, "When you get a diverse group together and agree on something it is a very powerful force to be reckoned with."

New strategy

Many participants were driven to collaborate out of frustration. In general, they felt the top down management approach of agencies was not working, wanted to avoid litigation and were drawn by a different process and the prospects for innovative solutions to old problems.

Several members of the McKenzie Watershed Council were drawn to the collaborative process out of concern that current management strategies were not sufficient to protect the McKenzie River's pristine conditions. According to Louise Solliday, a member of the McKenzie Watershed Council, "There was growing recognition that the regulatory framework was not going to bring about recovery...People realized that we could no longer manage river systems as segments or agency interests, but needed to begin to manage whole systems."

The belief that the collaborative partnership model provided a novel approach and prospects for innovative solutions to resource management also drove participation. Ron Cunningham, an agency representative for Three-Quarter Circle Ranch chose the collaborative process because he felt the resource was his responsibility, "as well as a desire to do something innovative." Similarly, Bob Lanka, also a member of Three-Quarter Circle Ranch, said that given historically bad communication with landowners he wanted to "try something new."

Greg Sherman an environmental engineer and member of the Owl Mountain Partnership chose to collaborate, "To avoid lawsuits and public hearings...that don't come to successful fruition." Sherman also noted that lawsuits and public hearings did not work effectively and tended to "polarize the community" therefore making the collaborative approach more appealing. Similarly, Lisa Jo Frech from the Nanticoke Watershed Alliance stated, "You can accomplish a lot through litigation, but at what cost?"

Several members of Blackfoot Challenge, Owl Mountain Partnership as well as the NW RAC have the belief that the "standard top down approach" cannot work to solve the resource problems in their region. A new strategy of localized input was appealing to several members. Don Peach, Mayor of Rangle Colorado and Co-Chair of the NW RAC chose to participate because, "I always believed much better work comes from the grassroots up than decisions from D.C. or the state level." Greg Neudecker of USFWS and member of Blackfoot Challenge stated, "It is the future of natural resource management. Unless you get local people involved, you may win your battles but ultimately lose your war."

Direct stake or responsibility in management of resource

Although nearly every participant interviewed had some stake in the resource being managed, certain individuals chose to highlight those stakes as reasons for choosing to participate in a collaborative partnership. Individuals' stakes ranged from direct financial interest in the resource, to legal responsibility, to feeling personally vested in the protection of the resource.

Farmer and rancher members of Scott River CRMP were concerned with how the potential Coho listing would affect their businesses. A realtor and representative from DuPont chose to participate in the Nanticoke Watershed Alliance due to their direct financial interests within the watershed. Mike Terry from DuPont spoke about his company's stake in saying, "We do not have a right to work in the community, it is just a privilege so unless we meet the requirements of the community, we lose that privilege." Similarly, Weyerhaeuser's Barb Blackmore, a member of the McKenzie Watershed Council, spoke about her company's incentive. "I think for a long time we've felt as a company that we need the public support as our license to operate...if you don't have the public supporting you as a company, it's just a matter of time before you're litigating."

Several ranching members of Owl Mountain partnership also spoke of the economic benefit from projects on their land and education that choosing to collaborate has produced. Verl Brown a member of Owl Mountain Partnership said the education has led him to "change my grazing practices over the last five years" which has led to "more grass for my cattle and more grass for wildlife." Jack Haworth added that, "Our allotment was one of the first to have a project done on it." Furthermore, several members of Owl Mountain Partnership, including Haworth, felt it would have been more difficult to renew their BLM grazing permits without the partnership. According to Stephen Porter, a member of Owl Mountain Partnership, "The ranchers on Owl Mountain Partnership are ten steps ahead when it comes to range reform ... those members working to alleviate problems on their land will be the first not to lose their permits."

Finally, several agency participants mentioned their legal responsibility for the resource or the fact that they were assigned to the partnership as reasons for their participation. When asked why she chose to participate in the Darby Partnership, Melissa Horton from NRCS stated: "I was assigned and that was fine." Agency representatives involved in Three-Quarter Circle Ranch also felt involvement was part of their public land management duties. Freemont County Extension Agent Ron Cunningham gave "responsibility in dealing with land management issues" as one of his reasons for choosing to participate in Three-Quarter Circle Ranch. Jerry Jack from the BLM noted that he was hired specifically to work with Owl Mountain Partnership because, "We [BLM] are the big gorilla up there (in North Park, Colorado)."

Coordination

Individuals also felt they could get more accomplished, gain a more complete understanding of issues, and would avoid duplication of efforts by collaborating in a partnership. In particular participants from the Nanticoke Watershed Alliance, Blackfoot Challenge, McKenzie Watershed Council, Darby Partnership, Three-Quarter Circle Ranch, and Owl Mountain Partnership all mentioned the need for coordination as a key element in their choice to participate.

Members of the Nanticoke Watershed Alliance felt that they would be able to accomplish a great deal more by convening as a group. In the McKenzie Watershed Council, Dorothy Anderson of Eugene Water and Electric Board noted, "The community has recognized that working together is the way things are done in Eugene." Similarly, several members of the Darby Partnership felt it would be impossible to get things done without collaborating with other stakeholders. Teri Devlin from The Nature Conservancy and member of Darby Partnership stated, "When you have 560-square miles of land drained by a system, it is ludicrous to think you can do anything by yourself." Mary Ann Core of NRCS and also a member of Darby Partnership similarly noted that the region was too large for any one individual to handle: "Because it is such a big monster, nobody wants to take it on alone."

Another driving force for choosing to collaborate was avoiding the possibility of duplicating agency efforts. Fremont County Agent Ron Cunningham stated as one reason for his participation in Three-Quarter Circle Ranch that, "I think we are also interested in preventing duplication of efforts when multiple agencies are working with the same piece of land." Owl Mountain Partnership, Darby Partnership and Blackfoot Challenge members had similar sentiments. Cary Lewis, a rancher and member of Owl Mountain Partnership, stated, "I could see a big benefit to seeing all the agencies agree and channel their energies toward one line, one way of doing something, put them all into one and we can get more done more effectively."

Community Building

Several individuals chose to collaborate in order to promote a sense of community, improve relations with other stakeholders or diffuse conflicts surrounding the resource. One important factor that participants considered part of building community was building trust among the diverse stakeholders and with agency personnel.

Several agency representatives from Owl Mountain Partnership, Three-Quarter Circle Ranch and Scott River CRMP mentioned the reason they chose to collaborate was to build trust and credibility within the community for their agency. Stephen Porter a wildlife biologist with the Colorado Division of Wildlife and member of Owl Mountain Partnership stated, "Government is not well liked in rural communities. We need to change the way we do business. The goal over time is to build credibility." Similarly, BLM range conservationist and member of Three-Quarter Circle Ranch partnership Troy Packer noted, "agency folks out here (in Wyoming) are often regarded with a bit of suspicion and generally distrusted

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because of the regulation and rules that are often seen a threat to business. Getting involved with the community at an eye-to-eye level helps to build those relationships."

Dennis Hall from Ohio State University Extension and Executive Director of Operation Future Association said he is a member of Darby Partnership because, "I am interested in citizenship and developing people in the community and am an advocate of win-win perspectives." Similarly, Lisa Jo Frech, Executive Director of the Nanticoke Watershed Alliance stated her reason for becoming involved: "I think that what we were able to accomplish in the long run is far greater because we have trust. There is not anybody that I would not call at the drop of a hat...I would not want it to be any other way."

Several individuals also mentioned the desire to quell a contentious atmosphere within the community and put things on a more personal level as reasons why they chose a collaborative process. Geoff Blackeslee, member of the NW RAC representing The Nature Conservancy said, "I think it is a great idea to bring together a variety of backgrounds. Instead of dealing with issues, you are dealing with human beings. Issues remain important, but dealing with a person on a human level allows you to provide dignity and self respect to individuals' positions." Mary Higginbotham, a schoolteacher who recently moved to Lander, Wyoming from California, saw an opportunity in the Three-Quarter Circle Ranch partnership "to simply get to know the community better."

Threat of government action

The threat or perceived threat of a government regulation such as the designation of a Superfund site or endangered species listing was also a force driving participation. Hank Goetz of the Blackfoot Challenge did not believe the government should be making decisions on land in the watershed when he stated: "We were not happy just sitting back and having the federal government and developers make decisions about our land." Greg Parsons of the Animas River Stakeholders Group added: "In addition to being counterproductive, a massive regulatory sweep of the area would not be realistic given the fact that state regulatory agencies do not have the resources to handle these problems."

In the Animas River Stakeholders Group and the Scott River CRMP the potential Superfund listing and Coho Salmon endangered species listing respectively triggered participation. In the Scott River CRMP case, participants felt a well functioning CRMP could deter federal regulators from handing down an economically detrimental regulation.

III. ALTERNATIVES, SPECIFIC FINDINGS

A continuation of current management strategies

Many participants felt that, barring a collaborative approach, management of natural resource issues would have remained largely the same; with agencies promulgating regulations, limited public input and public hearings and lawsuits that caused polarization. Greg Parsons, member of the Animas River Stakeholders Group, described the traditional approach that

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would have continued in the Animas Valley: "Water Quality Control Division would gather data, show up in front of the Water Quality Control Commission and argue with parties who had enough money to be represented by lawyers and had an interest in terms of being represented. We would have had a few fights with Sunnyside Gold and a few comments from the county, but it would have been a battle. The battle would have been between us and the mining company, not the people who live in the valley. They would have no say."

Similar to Parsons, members of Owl Mountain Partnership, Darby Partnership, NW RAC and Three-Quarter Circle Ranch also felt traditional management strategies would have continued without the partnership's formation. Teri Devlin, member of Darby Partnership representing The Nature Conservancy, believes that agency personnel would continue their normal duties of managing the resource: "I think a lot of the agency personnel would have done their jobs and will always do their job." Most members of the NW RAC had similar sentiments best expressed by Don Peach: "We would go through the usual process. The BLM has some good people, they are very professional, and they would come up with plans. There then would be public hearings with a lot of arguments on both sides, and no doubt, suits filed." Peach continued to say, "I think we have avoided much of that."

Loss of holistic thinking and awareness toward issue

Collaborative partnerships often provide a holistic framework to deal with natural resource issues that allow greater awareness as well as coordination among various stakeholders. The loss of this framework of coordination and awareness was mentioned frequently when participants were asked what would have occurred had their partnership not formed.

Several participants felt that without this approach, issues would have been dealt with in a smaller, more incomplete forum. Kathy Smith, member of Darby Partnership representing NRCS, stated clearly, "Without the partnership things would not have been addressed on such a large scale." If the partnership had not formed Steve Feran, mining representative member of the Animas River Stakeholders Group, felt, "...a great deal of these issues would not have been answered as thoroughly." Stephen Porter a member of Owl Mountain Partnership representing the Colorado Division of Wildlife iterates similarly: "We would not have had such a large scale look at things."

According to a number of participants, the holistic framework set up by the collaborative partnership not only allowed for a more complete way to deal with issues, but also brought a greater overall understanding to the community. Increased awareness within the community augmented knowledge of stresses upon the resource. Many participants felt that greater overall awareness provided by the partnership would have been lacking without the collaborative forum. Tim Fox from the McKenzie Watershed Council believes that without the council, "An avenue of getting information out to people with an interest would have been lost and also having a voice of influence on those involved more directly in the issue...you get a lot of different perspectives on things that I don't think you'd get without it."

Nancy Stewart, from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and member of Nanticoke Watershed Alliance, had similar thoughts regarding the ability of the community to receive more complete information. "The Nanticoke Watershed Alliance serves to bring things to people's attention that might not have gotten there as readily. Because it is so diverse, they are getting input and drawing many minds together. The public would have been less informed and involved. NWA has also provided a forum for issues that may not have been there otherwise." Melissa Horton who represents the NRCS on the Darby Partnership plainly stated that because of the partnership, "there has been an increased amount of public awareness of the resource, and its quality."

Increased coordination was an additional benefit of the holistic framework that may have been lost without collaboration. In the words of Jim Stone, local rancher and Chairman of the Blackfoot Challenge: "Without the Challenge we would just be out there all by ourselves trying to make a living. We would never have utilized the resources available like agency expertise." George Grier also noted the frustration from lack of coordination felt prior to the McKenzie Watershed Council's formation: "We had all the stuff we needed to be making more informed decisions about the health of the river, but no one was talking about it or could even view it."

Continued contentious atmosphere in community

Several members of the Darby Partnership, Blackfoot Challenge and Nanticoke Watershed Alliance expressed that without their partnerships, the contentious atmosphere within their community would have continued or degraded. Participants highlighted current or possible litigation to exemplify the contentious atmosphere within the community. Lisa Jo Frech, Executive Director of the Nanticoke Watershed Alliance demonstrated the point: "We would have gone through litigation. Some people would have stepped up to the plate and accomplished a thing or two and then would have burnt out. They would have been bitter and resentful but would still be in the watershed. It would be hard to find replacements for them. We would win a couple battles and lose a couple of battles but overall it would just be bloody."

Other collaborative partnership members thought that, without the partnership, there would have been the potential for more stakeholder frustration and unrest. Richard Clough of Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks and member of the Blackfoot Challenge noted: "Without a formal organization to handle these natural resource issues, there would have been more potential for issues to blow up whereas the Challenge attempted to handle these issues on an ongoing basis before they become contentious." Melissa Horton a member of Darby Partnership added similarly, "...a lot of people would have been frustrated in and around the stream. Many landowners were frustrated with all the loops with rules and regulations that they needed to jump through. I think [the partnership] simplified it for them."

Government intervention would occur

Individuals within the Owl Mountain Partnership, Animas River Stakeholders Group and Clark County HCP highlighted the fact that they felt there would have been some sort of government intervention had the partnership not formed. In each of these three cases, the participants felt government intervention would have been negative and these partnerships presented an improved alternative for their interests.

The most obvious alternative that came to the mind of several members of the Animas River Stakeholders Group was Superfund designation. Several of the landowners referred to Superfund designation as the "monster." The Upper Animas Basin was very high on the EPA's list of potential sites and the possibility of designation still remains. According to participant, Peter Butler, also former representative of the Friends of the Animas River and current member of the Colorado Water Quality Control Commission: "There would have been more impetus for the EPA to designate the site as a Superfund site using Superfund money and I think it would have been disastrous. There is already a great deal of antagonism in the area towards government agencies and to be honest, I am not sure that they know what ought to be done."

Members in the Clark County HCP expressed similar opinions. As ORV representative Mark Trinko states, "any federally imposed decision [that did not include all of us] would have been unenforceable...any law handed down would have been ludicrous."

Increased harm to the resource would have occurred

Participants in the McKenzie Watershed Council and the Owl Mountain Partnership believed the natural resource would not have been as well off had the partnership not formed. McKenzie Watershed Council members agreed that, if it were not for the formation of the watershed council, development would have continued in a way that was harmful to the watershed. Local resident Pat Thompson, highlighted this point: "Without [the partnership], encroachment of the development on the watershed would have had a detrimental effect. I don't think that water quality would have been maintained." Without the Owl Mountain Partnership, Verl Brown thought the benefits the projects had for the resource would have been lost. Brown mentioned one particular case, Hebron Sloughs, as an example: "We would not have done some good projects, such as the Hebron Sloughs, which have been very good for the land health."