

CHAPTER 14: THREE-QUARTER CIRCLE RANCH CRM GROUP

Wind River Range, Wyoming
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This case demonstrates the use of collaborative decision-making to manage a western cattle ranch. Insights are gleaned about the complexities of running a for-profit farm with the input of multiple stakeholders and the unique impact of the landowner on the form, focus and nature of the Coordinated Resource Management process (CRM).

Interviews:

Tony Malmberg, CRM Chair, (3/18/99)
Jim Allen, Diamond Four Ranch, hunting outfitter, (4/14/99)
Ron Cunningham, Fremont County Extension, (4/5/99)
Marty Higgenbotham, Hudson Grade School Teacher, (4/5/99)
Bob Lanka, Wyoming Game and Fish Department - Biologist, (4/13/99)
Roy Packer, Bureau of Land Management, (3/30/99)
Bob Trebelcock, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, (3/29/99)
Jeri Trebelcock, Popo Agie Conservation District, (4/13/99)
Dick Loper, Praire Winds Consulting, (2/18/99)
Steve Wiles, CRM Partner, Realtor, Rancher's Management Co., (4/13/99)

PART I: BACKGROUND

Origin and Issues

Three-Quarter Circle Ranch CRM is a 33,000-acre cattle-grazing initiative that lies at the southern foothills of Wyoming's pristine Wind River Range, 30 miles southeast of Lander. Consisting of a mixture of deeded, federal and state lands,¹ the property balances a stock of 900 cow-calf pairs a year with preservation of a rich ecological landscape. Indeed, its steppe and upland sagebrush, steep mountain cuts, and riparian lowlands offer range of wintering habitat for large populations of deer and elk. So well run is the operation that the ranch recently won the Wyoming's Stock Growers Association Award for Environmental Stewardship (Grant, 1996).

Yet this picture belies the immense financial and cultural transition its owner has made to preserve the ranching way of life. In 1980, Tony Malmberg wondered if he'd still be in the cattle business by the end of the decade. Calf prices had fallen through the floor, interest rates were high and he faced a mountain of debt. "My grandpa and dad put this place together," Malmberg recalls, "and I guess it was my job to pay for it." At the same time, the West was confronting cultural changes. Wyoming had led the nation's growth

¹ Of the Ranch's 33,000 total acres: 5,400 acres are private land 2,500 acres are state lease, and 22,000 are owned by the Bureau of Land Management.

with a 20% population increase in the last ten years and there was rising sentiment among new residents that grazing damaged the land (Malmberg, 1999). When his father died in 1978, family members went their own way, and Tony found himself as a third-generation rancher facing a hostile environment.

Early stages

By 1988, Tony Malmberg was forced to declare bankruptcy on Three-Quarter Circle Ranch and worked in Wyoming's oil fields to make ends meet. His first effort at turning things around was to form a partnership with two local attorneys and an accountant who helped him repurchase the ranch. The partnership brought increased equity for operations but better management strategy was needed to fight an uphill battle against rising costs.

In 1989, a conservation district meeting opened a new possibility. Wyoming Department of Agriculture extension agents Grant Stumbough and Jim Swartz became aware Tony's ranching dilemma and suggested an innovative land management technique known as Coordinated Resource Management (CRM). Though the concept had existed since the 1950s, it was receiving revived attention as a landowner initiated tool for bringing together property owners, agency personnel, and members of non-governmental organizations to collaboratively manage private and adjoining public lands. With nothing to lose, Tony set out late that same year to give it a try.

Participants

The initial step was to tap long-standing relationships with agencies and individuals that Tony felt could bring new knowledge and ideas to the ranch. As Tony recalls, "I sat down with each and every one of the folks I thought could help me in Lander and personally invited them to the CRM. It was a very one-on-one process." Indeed, Tony drew on a range of expertise that continues today. Current participants number around 10 and include:

- Freemont County Extension
- Popo Agie Conservation District
- Natural Resource Conservation Service
- Bureau of Land Management (2 - wildlife biologist and range conservationist)
- Wyoming Game and Fish Department
- Hunting outfitter representative
- Local environmentalist

Because of his innate concern for the land as rancher, Tony also invited environmental organizations such as The Nature Conservancy, Trout Unlimited, Wyoming Outdoor Council, and a private environmental consultant to overlook the CRM's decisions. They declined to participate, however, citing that the ranch was a non-priority concern.

Organization and Process

In terms of current process and structure, Three Quarter Circle Ranch CRM functions very informally. It is a consensus based volunteer run organization with no paid employees. Administration consists of a single chairperson who serves as "quasi-facilitator" organizing meetings and ensuring all concerns at the table are heard. Chairmanship rotates between members depending on the group's current focus, interests, and need of expertise on a particular issue.²

The CRM initially focused its first years on improving efficiency and profitability given the grazing focus of the ranch. However, primary concerns have broadened along with recognition of the multiple factors that affect rangeland management and its interconnection to environmental health. Other CRM concerns include:

- Water quality;
- Bio-diversity;
- Education;
- Wildlife management; and
- Riparian protection.

Accordingly, the group's **mission** is to:

Promote wise use of the natural resources through application of sound ecological, managerial, and financial principles; improve knowledge of present natural resources; promote positive aspects of CRM; and establish a partnership to accomplish multiple use objectives through combined management objectives.

The CRM has nineteen **goals** which together aim to economically harvest renewable natural resources and other assets by:

- Establishing a stocking rate and grazing system compatible with multiple use of range resources -- including recreation, timber, minerals, watershed, wildlife, natural, scenic, scientific, and historical values;
- Developing spring pasture or purchase winter pasture that can be integrated into overall ranch operation;
- Improving efficiency of irrigation;
- Developing opportunities for range recreation;
- Improving hunting opportunities;
- Improving animal breeding and nutrition;
- Maintaining and improving riparian communities and upland range conditions;
- Improving livestock distribution;
- Designing and implementing intensive grazing management in respect to special resource concerns;
- Maintaining and improving wildlife habitat;
- Using economically efficient conservation and range improvement practices;

² Rancher owner Tony Malmberg has never served as chair in order to avoid influencing group decisions.

- Coordinating adequate hunter access to achieve harvest levels for wildlife objectives;
- Consulting and coordinating with all affected parties in implementation of CRM plan;
- Maintaining a beaver management program to raise water table and enhance riparian zones;
- Documenting and inventorying all ranch resources; and
- Monitoring all resource base changes.

Meetings

Meetings are typically held at an agency office (Bureau of Land Management or Wyoming Game and Fish) or on the ranch itself because of Lander's small size and the fact that the CRM members live in the general vicinity.³ Group meetings occurred once a month during the first two years of the process in order to determine goals that stakeholders could agree on. Initial discussions were heated as the group tried to agree on priorities. The meetings have since tapered to 2-3 times a year for a few hours in order to set priorities and review yearly strategies. The busy nature of ranching life does not lend itself to more frequent meetings.

Funding

The CRM taps state and federal grants to fund its innovative management. Resources come from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service for reparation and protection of riparian zones, the Environmental Protection Agency for water quality issue. The Natural Resource Conservation Service also provides finances via its Great Plains program for herd management. In all, over \$200,000 has been used toward CRM management projects since 1989. As Tony Malmberg notes, "There are no administrative costs except the box of donuts the chairperson pays for out of their own pocket each meeting."

Outcomes

Three-Quarter Circle Ranch CRM's collaborative approach has resulted in innovative range management approaches. As Tony remarks, "I no longer no see the ranch as growing cattle, but rather an ecological grass growing business. Good beef is a natural result." Indeed, improved information sharing with agencies and resource experts, effective experimentation, and enhanced care of the land's resources have resulted in remarkable economic and ecological benefits:

Outstanding economic outcomes are:

- 95% increase in beef production; and
- Lowered production costs from \$60,000 per year in 1989 to \$40,000 in 1998

Equally impressive ecological gains are:

- Increased bio-diversity with more varieties of native grasses and enriched habitat

³The town of Lander is roughly 8,000 people and is only 30 miles northwest of the ranch.

- Natural increases in protein, phosphorus, and other trace mineral levels on grazing land;
- Riparian habitat protection; and
- Improved water quality and reduced water use.

New business and education concepts have also resulted from the collaborative effort. Two concepts include a ranch recreation program that brings 'city folk' to the property to ride the range and live the ways of West use of the ranch by a grade school science class as case laboratory for environmental experiments. In sum, Tony remarks, "We've tried to align our management efforts with the forces of nature, and we reach out to our community to help us achieve those objectives. We also believe the best way we can be a good neighbor and practice sound environmental management is to maintain a profitable business." For his efforts, Tony and the CRM have won multiple awards including:

- 1989 - Outstanding Area Supervisor, Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts
- 1995 - National Stewardship Award, Bureau of Land Management
- 1998 - National Environmental Stewardship Award, National Cattlemen's Beef Association.
- 1999 - Environmental Protection Agency Region VIII - Outstanding Environmental Achievement.

PART II: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Why Collaboration?

Participants expressed three themes in describing their decision to collaborate:

- Belief that financial benefit could result from working closely with agencies;
- The idea that more information about the land and management strategies could improve ranching viability; and
- Frustration with the 'old way' of doing business.

For ranch owners, the choice to pursue collaboration was primarily driven by financial crisis, not environmental concerns. Ranch owner Tony Malmberg explained, "I was going broke and that was the wake up call that I wasn't managing the land correctly and something else was needed." Partner Steve Wiles recalls being motivated by the economic and regulatory opportunities the CRM process might offer through working directly with agencies; "We saw opportunity for land improvement projects and government concessions coming out of the CRM process --- basically any way to get this operation above water."

Though Malmberg specifically asked others to participate when forming the CRM, they had their own reasons for choosing to collaborate. Agency representatives generally feel involvement was part of their public land management duties. Moreover, there was recognition of the need to "try something new" given historically bad communication with landowners (Lanka). As BLM range conservationist Troy Packer explains, "agency

folks out here [in Wyoming] are often regarded with a bit of suspicion and are generally distrusted because regulation and rules are seen a threat to business. Getting involved with the community at an eye to eye level helps to build those relationships." Likewise, Fremont County Extension Agent Ron Cunningham adds that it is his "responsibility" to deal with land management issues: "I think we are also interested in preventing duplication of efforts when multiple agencies are working with the same piece of land."

Other participants feel the CRM provides a chance to affect land management on a broader scale. Outfitter Jim Allen notes he was concerned primarily about wildlife management for his hunting operation on the ranch. He thought, "getting involved might provide a chance to influence policy and management trends on public lands." Comparatively, Marty Higgenbothan, a schoolteacher who recently moved to Lander from California, saw the CRM approach as an opportunity "to get to know the community better" through the CRM. "Tony invited me on as an environmental representative since I had been involved with Sierra Club previously. I also saw the possibility of eventually using the ranch as a science education tool for my classes."

Alternatives

According to Malmberg, there were no obvious alternatives to the pursuit of collaboration. In his words: "I don't know that I was even aware of options... it was rather a natural progression of my personality. I had worked with many of the people before and asking them onto the CRM was kind of like formalizing a brain trust for management of the ranch. If I hadn't done this I would surely be working in Wyoming's oil fields like I did back in the early 80s when I was heading into bankruptcy."

As for others, like BLM representative Troy Packer, there was no doubt that things would have continued "the way they had always been done" if not for the CRM. "Out here, change comes slowly in the ranching community---there's lots of tradition to deal with and people more often do things the way their fathers and grandfathers showed them. CRM has been growing in popularity, but Tony has taken it further with his creativity and perseverance."

Advice

Participants offered the following advice and reflections when deciding whether to enter a CRM process:

- Steve Wiles emphasizes the need to set goals for the operation. "You need to be able to see where you and your partners want to go. You've also got to determine their willingness and flexibility as well before entering in this process."
- Bob Lanka advised participants to "understand beforehand that the CRM process can be very time intensive. You just don't think about the CRM once a month for 10 minutes and you're done. It takes quite a bit of effort and thought. If people are not willing to do that, they don't work."

- Finally, Jim Allen voiced concern about agency involvement in collaborative processes: "I guess I would encourage everyone to start these things with a good faith effort. Unfortunately I feel that, regardless of what's said, I've come up against the attitude of entrenched agencies that I wish were more flexible and creative in there work with collaborative processes."

Ensuring Representation

CRM participants did not consider ensuring sufficient representation a major issue, although they did voice concern about the effect if community resources, strength of representation for particular groups, and the existence of a local / national tension.

Challenges

Community Resources

A primary challenge to ensuring sufficient representation was the small community setting of Lander. As Tony Malmberg notes, "when you live in a town of less than 8,000, you tend to know who's in the community and how they can help you. I've worked with most of [the CRM members] before and that really helps to get the right people on board." By the same token, Bob Lanka considers Wyoming's isolation to be limiting. "With so many CRM processes occurring out here, and fewer agency resources year to year, sometimes you just can't get enough the people to be on these things. I think finding the time to sit on these Boards is the biggest challenge."

Strength of Representation

There was also general concern that environmental interests are not well represented in the CRM group. Tony has made multiple efforts to attract environmental non-profit organizations to the table such as The Nature Conservancy, Trout Unlimited and the Audubon Society but they have all refused. As Tony says, "They just say no thanks, pat me on the back and tell me I'm doing a great job. They say they don't have time for non-crisis issues." CRM member Marty Higgenbothan added " an independent environmental voice could bring a unique voice to issues on the ranch that would be free of the constituent based opinion of agency representatives."

Other participants felt state and federal agencies had too big a voice on the CRM. Ranch partner Jim Wiles noted that "agency interests are not as diverse as we would like. They have different methods but they tend to dovetail in their goals." Jim Allen pointed out that agencies like Wyoming Game and Fish Department are difficult to work with on issues like managing the deer population: "You see, government and independent expertise have entirely different constituencies and [hunting] business owners like me often get the short end of the deal. In these CRM meetings I look around the room and all I see are paychecks. And when it comes to the rest of us there are none. The only way we pay our bills is through our risk taking, creativity, and imagination. These guys just don't have the same stakes involved as the rest of us and I think it limits them in what they are willing to experiment with."

Local / National Tension

Existence of local / national tension was also recognized as a challenge. Dick Loper, a local critic of CRMs notes that most Wyoming residents fear national interests will override local control of resources: "Regulations coming from Washington scare the hell out of us. We see road closures and wilderness designations as a restriction of freedom." Hunting outfitter Jim Allen agrees. "If anything, it's the reverse of most people's concern over local control. To me it seems federal agencies are getting the better end of the deal. With so many of them involved in management out here, I feel like we've lost a great deal of control over how we can make a living in our own community. I see the Feds as kind of like a 900 pound gorilla that doesn't fit in its cage back in Washington D.C."

In contrast, environmentalist Marty Higgenbothan voices an opposing view: "I personally don't approve of public land grazing, yet I don't have a problem with it when its done right, like on Tony's ranch. Nevertheless, there is something troubling when a rancher can take a huge chunk of BLM land for bottom of the barrel rates and use it for their personal business.⁴ With the predator control that the government throws in, the economic benefit really swings in their favor. I often asked myself who promised that profession success?"

Strategies

Invitations

Malmberg's face to face strategy of inviting missing stakeholders into the CRM has been key to addressing some of these challenges. In his words: "It's like what I did this morning when I spoke to a Game and Fish representative about a ranching concern I had. He gave me a recommendation for someone to talk to and I sought them out. In other words, I determine the need for knowledge and then go and find someone who can address it."

Limiting Participation

Limiting participation to those interested in the CRM's goals has also been a key strategy to ensuring that the right people are at the table. Some participants voiced concern that a larger group might mean even broader representation, but at the expense of the functionality of the ranch. Bob Lanka notes, "the process can become just too cumbersome when a group is allowed to grow without restriction." He adds, that while CRM certainly is a "useful approach" to cooperative management of natural resources, "in the setting of ranch life there has to be some careful calculation between how you idealize the process while still making it work for the landowner."

Advice

CRM members had a wide range of advice on how to ensure representation:

- Ron Cunningham speaks to the unique nature of representation: "Remember that dealing with representation is different in every situation. There is no cookbook for

⁴ Federal grazing allotments are granted at \$1.84 an acre in Wyoming.

it. There are no two ranches alike, no two families alike, and no two communities alike. You kind of have to feel your way as you go. Start with the values of the people in the community and hopefully you can recognize and include others with time."

- Jim Allen adds: "I think representation could benefit from having more self-employed people whose lives are impacted by our decisions instead of mostly insulated bureaucrats."
- Tony Malmberg advocates the inclusion of all stakeholders: "If you can include as many interests at the front end then you can take care of hidden problems more easily as they surface. It's just human nature that things start blowing up if folks are excluded. But if you keep everyone on the inside of the process you can take care of those problems when they are still small."
- On other hand, Bob Lanka encourages small groups: "Smaller groups are better. If you can get a set core of people dedicated to do something in common, then these processes work better. I've been on large CRMs that try to be all encompassing, which is tough."
- Though Jim Allen agrees, he also feels group size must be handled delicately: "Sometimes I think limiting participation could benefit the CRM process. But I can also see how some group or individual would easily feel left out. It's a fine line. But if you get every single stakeholder involved it can be nearly impossible to accomplish much."
- Finally, Steve Wiles ends on this note: "Start with the goals of the ranch and stay within those parameters. That gives you a tool to handle representation issues. Otherwise, you're going to end up all over the show."

Accommodating Diverse Interests

Participants highlighted a number of benefits as well as challenges to accommodating diverse perspectives. Salient themes included:

- Difficulty of matching traditional ways of rancher business with cooperative approaches to management; and
- The challenge of participating in an innovative process with agencies.

Challenges and Opportunities

Balancing Benefits or Costs

Participants felt challenged by the difficulty of separating the benefits and costs when accommodating diverse interests. As Jim Wiles notes "looking at a common goal through different interests has given us the added knowledge we've needed to become profitable. At the same time, diversity can diminish decisions because you don't always

get what you want." Similarly, Ron Cunningham considers the positives and negatives of diverse perspectives "like two sides of the same coin...diverse interests have a positive impact because there are more strategies on the table to address the issues, but the negative side is the time and energy required to address those ideas."

Cultural Limitations

Another concern was the difficulty of managing diverse interests within the independent culture of the West. According to one CRM observer "Ranchers are for the most part solitary in their operations and don't possess the skills to interact and make decisions with others. Hell, they have enough challenge working with their bankers or lawyers, much less a consensus group!" (Loper) Jim Allen iterated similar cultural limitations for agencies: "I think for the most part [agencies] are outside of the comfort zone of their rules and regulations when dealing with collaborative processes. I know we need them when dealing with public lands, but they have a tendency to fall back on their bullshit rules when the situation demands that they try something new."

Group Size

Finally, participants raised the challenge of group size and its role in managing diverse groups. Bob Lanka elaborates: "I've got experience on four of these groups and you learn quickly that when they get too big it's nearly impossible to make decisions. I think Tony's group is a good right size for now, but it's not typical of a lot of other large CRMs I've been involved in."

Strategies

Holistic approach

Tony's holistic approach to the CRM and ranch management is the driving force behind the incorporation of innovative ideas in the CRM. As Jim Allen describes "Tony is bold enough to put his whole ranch into this CRM thing. A lot of folks are afraid to do that because you really have to open up your dirty laundry for everyone to look at. It's a bit like inviting the public to watch you raise your family. Imagine them saying 'well those parts look kind of good and this other part needs some work!'" Others agree. "Tony is not your typical rancher by any means," says Ron Cunningham. "He's broken the mold out here by inviting us all into his operation. Frankly, some ranchers are even offended by it because they see him moving away from tradition."

Standing invitation

The CRM group also maintains an open invitation for all to visit the ranch and to see its successes as well as trouble spots. As Malmberg illustrates, "bringing people face to face with what the CRM is doing out here allows me to establish a connection. It's like when I invited Marty Higgenbotham and his wife to tour the ranch and check their doubts about the sustainability of ranching for themselves. I showed them both the bad and the good. I could just have as easily said 'to hell with you goddamn vegetarians' and never made an effort to understand them. Instead, I recognized who and what they were as legitimate and did not judge them as right or wrong. In turn, that enables them to do the same with me."

Advice

Participants offered a range of advice on how to maximize the benefits of diverse stakeholders while minimizing the shortcomings:

- Joe Nimick iterates the importance of involving everyone: "It's true that many CRMs are livestock oriented, but to be effective you've got to include a variety of interests and all aspects of a healthy range. That's part and parcel of the growing stakes in western public lands."
- Ron Cunningham places importance on regularly "checking back in" with the CRM goals to focus the group and connect concerns at the table to direction of the partnership. "Re-plowing that ground is often necessary, particularly for new members coming on board who don't understand as clearly where the group has been and where it's headed. If you don't do that, you don't have a group marriage. You may even up with a group divorce on your hands."
- Marty Higgenbotham emphasized the need to "remain flexible" since you "just can't always get your way... remember that you're at least doing something by being involved in these things instead of watching the land go to heck."
- Bob Lanka highlights the need for flexibility: " I think you need groups, agencies and landowners that are willing to leave their dogma at the door. If they are not open to new approaches, then forget it. People that have strict ideas about making a buck with this process won't help. "
- Jim Allen comments on the importance of getting to know people across the table: "Coming back to the personality thing, once you get to know these people and their families it's a little easier to try and understand their point of view. When you can look someone right in the face and hear why they want to try a certain strategy, or make a change, instead of reading it in an EIS statement, then it's easier to find an agreement. It's a lot better than the cold and faceless and impersonal type of situation we used to have with agencies."
- Finally, Jeri Trebelcock encourages CRM leaders to accommodate diverse interests by example. "Like Tony says, you need to reach out the community to bring people into the process who you might not otherwise talk to."

Dealing with Scientific Issues

Managing scientific concerns was not considered a major difficulty for the group though a number of challenges were posed to improving science including:

- Access to information
- Cultural barriers

- Managing new issues

Challenges

Access to Information

Lack of information and the scientific uncertainty inherent to range land management strategy are considered obstacles to managing science in the CRM. As Bob Trebelcock of Fish and Game elaborates, "what we are doing is not an exact science by any stretch of the imagination." Tony Malmberg adds that although substantial local knowledge exists on land management, the best science "comes from far away countries like Australia and Africa where they've been dealing with desert-like grazing much longer."

Cultural Barriers

As Bob Lanka notes, the independent decision making style of ranchers, time requirements, and unequal scientific understanding among CRM members combine to make the pursuit of hard science a "troublesome task." Jim Allen explains that "the need to make quick decision on the ranch for economic reasons does not lend itself to going through long deliberate debate over appropriate scientific steps." Though Malmberg regularly seeks outside knowledge---such as when he asked The Nature Conservancy to evaluate the ranch's bio-diversity---operating the ranch leaves little time to pursue formalized scientific decision making. Moreover, Lander's small size and isolation also makes accessing scientific information difficult.

Dependency on Agencies

According to Jeri Trebelcock, reliance on agencies like the Fish and Game Department and BLM for scientific expertise also has its problems. CRM member Jim Allen comments that this dependency carries a sour taste because of his bad experiences with agency information that too often has a constituent slant. He states, "With more and more interests agencies need to respond to, it's hard to know where they are getting their numbers. With deer population management, for example, surveys just don't match up with what I see as a hunter. God knows what they're doing in that main office in Cheyenne. I basically don't trust what they hand on down from up high."

Managing New Issues

Though not directly a challenge to sound scientific decision making, the presence of new wildlife management concerns could exacerbate existing problems. Bob Trebelcock offers an example, "The reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone a few years could pose a new management concern as recent sitings have been confirmed near the ranch."

Strategies

Experimentation and Monitoring

Given the above limitations, experimentation and monitoring are the best approaches the CRM has found to deal with scientific issues. Indeed, in some cases the CRM has benefited scientifically from a lack of regimen. As Malmberg remarks, "Even though we don't have a methodical plan, I actually believe we are out ahead of science as the agencies know it." By using an approach to land stewardship known as Holistic

Resource Management that focuses on the health of the grasslands to improve grazing, Malmberg draws on many sources of knowledge. He states: "Between the on-the-ground experience we have within group and our ability to monitor and adapt to new discoveries, we can move faster than if it was just the agencies making decisions on their own."

Outsourcing

Openness on the part of the group to outsourcing for the scientific knowledge for the CRM needs has also been key. Malmberg recounts asking The Nature Conservancy to evaluate bio-diversity and identify endangered plants on the ranch. In his words "It was one of the best moves I made to understand the land better... my theory is you can't manage something if you don't know what or where it is. I want a track record that shows that I monitored our activities out here so if somewhere down the line someone wants to take us court we can show we did the best we could with our resources."

Advice

Having the benefit of hindsight, participants offered a host of advice for improving scientific decision making:

- Outfitter Jim Allen encourage better use of agency resources: "I think a greater effort needs to be made to share information between agencies and look outside them for help with science. I'd also caution that it can be hard to find the time to do this in the ranching business when decisions have to be made quickly and there's little time to mull over the scientific implications."
- Marty Higgenbothan agrees: "We have got to look for more outside expertise. There's no excuse for not having it because of our prominent need. This is becoming more important with the deer population decline we are facing. Bringing someone in who specializes in this would be incredibly helpful."
- Ron Cunningham suggests diversifying expertise in the CRM: "There are too many rangeland specialists focusing the scientific approach to the ranch. We need to diversify our expertise by bringing on a botany or wildlife specialist for example."
- Finally, Bob Trebelcock suggests the inclusion of as many voices as possible: "Sometimes you're just going to have to make do...there's a lot of uncertainty in our scientific approach, but what are our options? The most we can do is bring in as many voices to the issue as possible and trust the agencies to work with the best information we can find."

Accommodating Diverse Capabilities

Members of the Three-Quarter Circle Ranch CRM possess a range of capabilities and power. Mixture of public and private land management, combined with the landowner initiation of the process, pose particular challenges to working together effectively.

Challenges

Landowner Control

Because CRM processes are landowner initiated, participants recognize an inherent bias in decision-making. As Malmberg describes it, "we operate on a consensus basis but with a quasi-veto power for landowners. In other words, if I don't like the decisions that will affect my lands, I am not going to do what the group wants." Partner Steve Wiles voice similar reservations: "Yeah, veto power is a security blanket that keeps me from being defensive or threatened by the collaborative process. I know it sounds hypocritical, but if I had to give that up I would have to rethink the whole process."

Other participants agree. "To say [the existence of diverse capabilities] doesn't affect the process," remarked Marty Higgenbothan, "is being too idealist. No matter what situation or wherever you are, there is always going to be a power inequity based on who holds the cards. So far, it hasn't been a self-destructing problem [in our group] because of agreement on our goals."

Participants view the BLM with similar influence because they are the largest landowner in the CRM. Dick Loper comments that "[the process] can sometimes feel like a status quo mechanism because of the grazing focus of agencies." Ron Cunningham agrees: "It's not a perfect democracy but it seems to be improving. Control of the landowner is still somewhat of a quagmire and if we are in the same place next year I'll be disappointed. "Over time I think we better see the improvements in the balance of players at the table, otherwise the pluses we've achieved will become negatives."

Peer Pressure

Peer pressure poses another challenge to bringing fair and equitable attention to the issues. According to Steve Wiles, "typical decisions are not unanimous consent and, at times, people get left out." Roy Packer further describes the social dynamic group as "at best, general agreement among peers." Jim Allen adds explanation: "One of the real tensions of these groups is that even when you disagree with something strongly, you have to temper that with the fact that, even after the disagreement is worked out, you still have to live with these people day to day in the community." Bob Lanka concurs. "It's not always comfortable disagreeing when you know you have to work with the person the next day."

Managing Strong Personalities

Managing strong personalities at the table is also a challenge. Though the group generally gets along, the strong voice and presence of some members, like BLM representative Roy Packer for instance, has been irksome for some. Jim Allen describes him as "one of those guys that will break into your sentence mid-stride and will continue for 5 minutes without thinking about it twice."

Dick Loper, interprets this as "an exploitation of a custom and culture" because "ranchers in the West don't have the professional skills and negotiation training you find among professionals." Indeed, outfitter Jim Allen recalls being outgunned on another CRM

when a Forest Service employee shouted him down for suggesting a vote on an issue: "This guy just jumped down my throat screaming that I was breaking his rules. 'Well stick your rules up your ass,' I said. I'm not a little kid and I'm not in school so don't hard-line me. I came home from that at 10 p.m. more stressed out than I had ever been and could not get to sleep until 1 a.m. It was painful as all hell."

Strategies

The group has no specific strategies for accommodating diverse capabilities. However, they offered following approaches to the dilemma:

Reliance on the chair to incorporate group ideas

Most participants felt that, because the CRM has no formal facilitator, the chair is responsible for bringing out and defining the interests of group members. Jim Allen remarked that being the chairperson is "the death sentence of the year" because "doing it well is damn difficult."

Focusing on CRM goals

Focusing on the goals of the CRM was also deemed critical. As partner Steve Wiles states, "If the groups keeps its eyes on the original goals, interests can be narrowed to a manageable scope."

Outlasting Controversy

Tony Malmberg notes that sitting at the table longer than the other guy is often your only option to dealing with power issues: "There are people that operate so close to their professional traditions or even their personal agenda that it can make them impossible to deal with. That reminds me why Copernicus, Plato and Columbus didn't have to go out and prove to those who thought the world was flat that it was actually round. All of them just eventually died! There's a similar reality in resource management when an agency representative comes into the process that you can't work with. Sometimes the only way to survive is to sit at the table longer than the other guy."

Openness to Diverse Interests

Finally, many CRM members see increased diversity at the table as a means of keeping a particular person or interest from dominating the CRM. Malmberg again elaborates: "I guess I see diversity at the table as an insulator against being controlled by one group or interest. Newton comes to mind when he said that a body in motion tends to stay in motion at the same rate and direction until acted on by an outside force. So if you're a lone rancher sitting out there and you get some agency jerk transferred to your region, there's a possibility they could throw you for a loop. But if you are part of a diverse CRM, you are part and parcel of a much larger force and he will have a lot harder time knocking you off track."

Advice

Participants had broad advice on how to manage diverse capabilities and power when making collaborative decisions.

- Steve Wiles starts with the following words: "I think we need to face up the fact that these [CRM processes] will never be completely fair and equitable. In the end, you need to figure who holds the sway and work with that."
- Ron Cunningham speaks to the issue of trust: "It boils down to developing a bit of trust in the other guy that he will reason with you fairly. There is definitely a leap of faith involved."
- CRM critic Dick Loper recommends training for ranchers: "It's important that[ranchers] get training in labor negotiations before they even think about coming to the table. Otherwise they just get creamed. More often than not, I get calls from ranchers that say they thought [CRM] was a good idea at first, but now it feels like they are getting run over by a train."
- Jim Allen suggests that the chair of a CRM group has to facilitate discussion and make sure everyone gets their say: The chairpersons need to take it upon themselves to bring out what everyone thinks on the issues. "
- Bob Trebelcock believes that "professional facilitation might be worth a try...of course it's all an experiment. A skilled [facilitator] could bring a person out who was quieter while monitoring more aggressive types. Unfortunately, I think we are often bound by that person's skills. Not everyone has the ability since it's a pretty trick process."
- Roy Packer adds generally that people need to "realize that facilitation doesn't make trust, but it can help produce ideas and create conditions that develop relationships. Don't be surprised if this takes years though."
- Finally, Steve Wiles states the importance on being committed to the process for the long haul: "You've got to have time. It's that simple. Without the relationships between stakeholders that the passage of time allows, you get people holding back what they are willing to do because they fear they'll be giving too much. In our CRM, knowing what process the other guy is going through is also very important because it helps to know where they fit into the issue and where they don't."

Insights Particular to this Case

Three-Quarter Circle Ranch CRM offers a number of insights about collaborative activity:

Financial Incentive

Three-Quarter Circle provides a unique perspective on how collaborative decision-making can function within the for-profit framework of a ranch. The reader should note that the line between a participant's commitment to collaboration and their need to make a living is a complex one. Indeed, one participant describes CRM as "quasi-socialization of grazing that still tries to make a buck." Steve Wiles alludes to the contradiction: "I realize that what I agree to do in the CRM ultimately has to financially reward me, otherwise why the hell am I doing it? In our case, I think it's serendipity in that what's best for the ecology is also good business. Otherwise, we would surely not be operating this way."

Impact of the Landowner

It is also clear that Tony Malmberg's ideology has a great deal to do with the success of the CRM. As Ron Cunningham remarks, "It's people that make these things, not process -- and it's Tony's uniquely broad approach that has made all the difference." Bob Lanka agrees: "I think each CRM is inherently different and that difference depends almost entirely on the ranch owner -- particularly if they have the financial flexibility to experiment with different ranch management strategies. There's a world of difference between working with a motivated landowner who has money and someone who's just barely scratching by."

CRM - An Old Process

Finally, many participants acknowledge that the CRM process is really nothing new. Tony Malmberg explains the point as follows:

"If you know your history, you're aware that Alexander and Jefferson disagreed on most everything with the constitution but they *did agree* on the idea that democracy would flourish and do fine as long as there was a frontier for the losers to escape to. Once that frontier was closed and the country turned back inward on itself, however, they both feared that democracy would implode. That's where we are now. There is nowhere left to go and we are turning back on ourselves having to decide how to manage this country's resources.

In the West, like in Wyoming, it's particularly hard because we are not used to having to confront people's values. Shakespeare's said it best when he said 'nothing is right or wrong, but thinking makes it so.' The point is that we've got to learn to work with people's values instead of fighting them. And until we give others the right to hold their values, you will never be able to talk honestly with others and you're not going to figure things out.

That reminds me of a discussion I had a few years back in a winter book club. The issue was western ranching and I thought someone should go and represent the point of view of a local rancher. I struck up conversation with one of the members and we later exchanged questions on the issue of cattle grazing. After a discussion, she wrote a bunch

of questions on a piece of paper and put it in my mailbox. I would answer the questions and put them back in hers. After 3 books worth, her last question was, 'why should I support ranchers grazing on federal land when they are so traditional?' I answered, 'Have you ever known a school teacher resistant to change?' As soon as she got it she came running right over apologizing."

I really zinged her on that one, but it reminds me that we all need to be open to change out here. Not necessarily to a change in values, but certainly the ability to change our way of doing and perceiving things... including ranching."

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