

CHAPTER 9: MCKENZIE WATERSHED COUNCIL

McKenzie River Watershed, Oregon

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This case exemplifies the challenges and opportunities experienced by a group with substantial government participation. The council has been successful as a coordinating, information-sharing body that creates macro-policy recommendations for watershed management.

Interviews:

John Allen, Forest Supervisor, Willamette National Forest, USDA Forest Service (4/12/99)

Dorothy Anderson, Board member, Eugene Water and Electric Board, (4/1/99)

Barb Blackmore, Planning Forester, Weyerhaeuser Corp. Willamette Region, (3/24/99)

Tony Cheng, Ph.D. student, Oregon State University School of Forestry, (3/30/99)

Tim Fox, Wildlife biologist / volunteer member, Oregon Trout, (3/28/99)

George Grier, former member, original co-chair, represented Rural Resources Development Commission, landowner, (4/6/99)

Doug Heiken, Western OR Field Representative, OR Natural Resource Council, (4/9/99)

Emily Rice, McKenzie Area Manager, Bureau of Land Management, (4/16/99)

John Runyon, McKenzie Watershed Council co-coordinator, (3/16/99)

Louise Solliday, original co-chair, represented Pacific Rivers Council. Currently the Governor's Watershed Advisor, (4/1/99)

Pat Thompson, President, Mohawk Community Council, resident, (3/23/99)

PART I: BACKGROUND

Origins and Issues¹

The McKenzie River, a tributary of the Willamette River in west central Oregon, flows out of three wilderness areas on the western slope of the Cascade Mountains. The 1300 square mile watershed includes part of the Willamette National Forest, Bureau of Land Management lands, industrial forestlands, and small private farms and ranches. The confluence of the McKenzie and the Willamette rivers is near the Eugene-Springfield urban center in Lane County, which depends on the McKenzie watershed as both an industrial and residential water source. The McKenzie provides high quality drinking water to over 200,000 people. Outside the metropolitan area, residents value the "rural character" of the watershed with its open spaces, recreational opportunities, and high water quality.

¹ Compiled from interviews and the McKenzie Watershed Council web site (www.pondnet.org/~mwc)

Boasting some of the highest water quality in Oregon, as well as the last sustainable population of native bull trout and the last sustainable run of native Chinook salmon, the McKenzie River watershed is a pristine resource. It is a “hot spot for biodiversity” with habitat not only for endangered fish species, but also terrestrial species like the spotted owl and pond turtles (Runyon). People travel from all over the country to fish and raft the McKenzie and to enjoy its scenic beauty. However, this same beauty has attracted substantial development interest. In the words of Council coordinator, John Runyon, “It’s a beautiful area and people want to live there”.

Pressures on the resource are diverse. In the upper watershed, six dams provide hydroelectric power and flood control and provoke concern over high water temperatures adversely affecting the bull trout, a cold water species. Both Weyerhaeuser and Willamette Industries, along with other small industrial timber companies, own substantial portions of the upper watershed. Most timber extraction in the McKenzie basin occurs on private lands, with only minimal extraction from federal lands. Although timber extraction concerns many residents, the more substantial pressure actually comes from population growth and ensuing development, especially in the lower river valley along the main stem of the McKenzie. It was conflict over land use planning issues and the concern about the impact of development on water quality that spurred the creation of the watershed council.

Runyon describes the concerns of local residents, “Folks were seeing trophy homes being built right next to the river. They were upset about that, they were upset about trees being cut next to the river. There was a lot of concern about water quality being degraded over time, although it wasn’t really based on any data, just anecdotal thinking that forestry for example was contributing a lot of sediment to the streams.” Throughout Oregon, the population was beginning to expand and in the McKenzie valley, “we were seeing a slow death by a thousand cuts . . . each house that was built, another riparian area ripped out so that people could have their view and get down to the river” (Solliday).

Early Stages

In 1991, Pacific Rivers Council (PRC), a local environmental organization, headed up a ballot initiative that would have provided for riparian area protection by adding more restrictions to the county’s comprehensive land use plan. The initiative was very controversial, and while it eventually failed, it brought issues of concern into the public eye and prodded the county to reexamine its resource management strategies. At the same time, the state legislature was considering a bill that would create watershed councils throughout the state. According to George Grier, then chair of the water resources committee of the Rural Resources Development Commission (RRDC), these councils would have been top-down management entities staffed from the state capital. Both PRC and RRDC proposed the idea of forming a watershed council to the Lane County Commissioners. Charter member, Dorothy Anderson, member of the Eugene Water and Electric Board (EWEB) remembers that, “everything was coming together at the same time” within the regional context of the Northwest Forest Plan and endangered species listings. Many people felt “pressure and fear that we were going to lose this very nice resource” (Solliday). Local resident Pat Thompson adds, “You had the economic aspect and the physical and biologic aspects of watershed health at loggerheads, not exactly at loggerheads, but stumped as to where do we go from

here. And so this gave them both an avenue to sit down together and do what everyone knew was really right for the resource.”

In 1991, the Lane County and Eugene Water and Electric Board (EWEB) commissioners, frustrated with the current piecemeal approach to managing the resources of the McKenzie River watershed, initiated the steps that would lead to a more integrated approach. Joint funding enabled the Lane Council of Governments (LCOG) to conduct an initial scoping study to identify the issues, concerns, resources, and needs of a wide range of interests in the watershed. The study proposed a tentative organizational structure for a watershed program and the formation of a policy committee.

Once the initial scoping study was completed the Lane County and EWEB boards proposed an alternative framework including a watershed council, a project manager from LCOG, technical advisors and staff from government agencies. With the support of local governments and the boards, LCOG obtained \$600,000 in EPA start-up funds to support the watershed council. Dorothy Anderson of EWEB remembers that with that initial partnership and substantial funding, “We had the clout, the interest and enough money to get going.”

Organization and Process

The guiding document of the McKenzie Watershed Council is its charter, approved in October 1994. The charter outlines goals and objectives, council participation, structure, process and ground rules. The charter states that the purpose of the McKenzie Watershed Council is “to help address watershed management issues in the McKenzie River watershed and provide a framework for coordination and cooperation among key interests in the development and implementation of a watershed action program.”

The specific mission of the McKenzie Watershed Council is:

*“To foster better stewardship of the McKenzie River watershed resources,
deal with issues in advance of resource degradation,
and ensure sustainable watershed health, functions and uses”*

The MWC focuses equally on program (substantive issues) and process (improved coordination and education) objectives. In the spring of 1994 the council identified and prioritized a list of issues. The top four issues are incorporated into the overall watershed program objective “to maintain and enhance the quality of the McKenzie watershed for *water quality, recreation, fish and wildlife habitat and human habitat.*” All work program objectives must address one of the top four issues. In 1996, the council completed Action Plans for water quality and fish and wildlife habitat and recreation and human habitat outlining specific objectives for the main issues affecting the watershed.

In its role as an advisory body to “established decision-making bodies and communities of interest,” the MWC makes recommendations concerning the management of the watershed. None of the council partners are obligated to abide by the recommendations of the council, but are expected to consider them. The McKenzie Watershed Council has a fairly formal

organizational structure with very specific roles for different entities. Those entities include the Council itself, Coordination Team, Project Team, Subcommittees, and Task Forces.

Participants

The Council is made up of twenty partners, who are formal representatives of an organization, interest group or other constituency. The council charter specifies the exact balance of interests to be represented, including a majority of local citizens (15) representing private and public interests and five federal and state agency representatives. Represented interests must include local government, water utility, McKenzie Valley residents, resource users (agriculture / private timber) industrial forestland manager, major water consumers, environmental, state and federal governments. In a charter amendment approved in 1993, MWC outlined specific criteria and steps to use when responding to requests for new partnerships. Since its inception, several new partners have been ratified. Other individuals and organizations may participate as members of task groups or as technical advisors, or in other capacities. Partners are expected to keep their constituencies informed of council activities and decisions, and to represent those constituencies' viewpoints in council meetings. Partners may designate alternate representatives in case they cannot attend a meeting.

Partners currently represent the following organizations and interests:

LOCAL CITIZENS:

Private Interests:

Agripac Cooperative
McKenzie Fisheries Restoration Project
McKenzie Residents Association (2 partners)
Mohawk Community Council
Oregon Trout
Rural Resources Development Committee?
Weyerhaeuser Company

Elected Officials

City of Eugene
City of Springfield
East Lane Soil and Water Conservation District
Eugene Water and Electric Board
Willanalane Park and Recreation District

AGENCY REPRESENTATIVES

Federal (3)

Army Corps of Engineers
Bureau of Land Management, Eugene District
USDA-FS Willamette National Forest

State (2)

Division of State Lands

Water Resources Department

Organizational Structure

The Lane Council of Governments was the original MWC Project Manager, responsible for administrative tasks, project coordination, communications, and budget management. The Coordination Team was an interagency team that acted as staff to the council for the first four years. Members of the team participated on subcommittees and task forces, and the team as a whole implemented council projects and recommendations. Since MWC hired John Runyon as council coordinator in 1997, he and co-coordinator Renee Davis-Born have taken over the administrative tasks previously carried out by LCOG and the coordination team, which no longer meets.

Task-based subcommittees made up of council partners form and meet as needed. Subcommittees have so far focused on process, citizen involvement, program resources, and other ad hoc tasks. Task groups are ad hoc technical advisory groups that provide data and expertise for specific projects. The MWC appoints both public and private sector technical advisors to each task group. For example, the council convened technical task groups to prepare Action Plans for each of the council's focus issues.

Process

The MWC meets monthly in the evening, usually at the EWEB offices in Eugene. Occasionally, the council holds meetings further up river, when an issue directly concerns rural residents. Meeting agendas are formal. Although every meeting reserves ten minutes for public comment following provisions of the Open Meetings Law, council agendas are set by the coordinator beforehand. Anyone can request to add an issue to the agenda, but must usually do so three weeks before the next meeting. The MWC has drafted specific guidelines regarding the appropriate "level of involvement" for issues brought to the council, with consensus decision issues requiring the most time and effort and information issues the least. An average council meeting lasts two to three hours.

MWC uses a consensus decision-making process. The council recognizes five levels of consensus from "wholeheartedly agree" to "serious concerns, but can live with the decision." Consensus is reached when each member can live with the decision. Before the council adopts a consensus decision, absent members have the opportunity to discuss the decision at the following meeting. Since some partners have legal responsibility regarding an issue on the table, those partners may abstain from formally giving a position. For example, the USDA Forest Service representative, although present, may choose not to participate in a consensus decision affecting national forest management. In some cases, the council may decide to move forward on an issue despite the opposition of a few members. This occurs only when a strong majority of the council is supportive and opposing members agree not to block the decision as long as their concerns are recorded.

Funding

MWC is fairly unusual in that the council was started with substantial funding. The 1992 \$600,000 line item in EPA's budget was earmarked for the Integrated McKenzie Watershed Program and approved as a grant to LCOG for the purpose of supporting the MWC and developing a basin-wide Geographic Information System and action plan. In 1994 and 1995, Congress again supported the watershed program by appropriating \$250,000 each year to the Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) to support the McKenzie program. With this money, SWCD funded on the ground projects recommended by MWC.

Currently, the Bonneville Power Authority (BPA) is the primary funding source for the Council, providing \$105,000 out of the \$160,000 annual budget. EWEB also provides \$25,000 to support administrative and project costs. MWC also receives direct funding for various aspects of its work from partner organizations and small grants. In-kind contributions include the provision of staff and technical advisors as well as time volunteered by other partners.

Outcomes

Most members of the council describe both process and substantive outcomes that have resulted from the MWC's formation. One of the MWC's most significant tangible outcomes is the development of a coordinated water quality monitoring network. Several members and outside observers emphasized that the council's primary achievement is providing a forum for information exchange and collaborative problem solving. Former member George Grier states, "What the MWC did that is really important is that it designed a master plan and it pinpointed critical needs and it got everyone to agree on things that needed to happen." As McKenzie District Ranger John Allen points out, "[The watershed council] allows you to talk a little more holistically about how to manage a watershed instead of managing little components, everybody's little pieces. It really changed the nature and context of the discussion."

Some of the outcomes of the council are:

- Creation of a forum for information sharing
- Framework for coordination and cooperation among stakeholders
- Lane County involving citizens in drafting of new land use regulations
- Education and outreach (Speaker's Network, Open Houses, Newspaper insert, Information booth at Lane County Fair, Newsletter and mailing list, streamside planting demonstration projects)
- Evaluation of fish and wildlife habitat data
- Compilation of a GIS Database
- Development of program benchmarks and recommendations
- Development of a water quality monitoring network in the valley

- Advisory decisions (e.g. urging agency restoration projects, recommending specific testimony and comments for draft EISs, etc.)
- Securing funding to install temperature control towers on dams

PART II: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Why Collaboration?

When asked to describe why they chose a collaborative approach to address their concerns, council members emphasized two main themes: a concern that current management strategies weren't sufficient to protect the McKenzie River's pristine conditions, and a conviction that only by bringing former adversaries together could the issues be addressed.

The 1991 ballot initiative on riparian area protection created factionalization and conflict between environmentalists, developers and private landowners. People were frustrated with the county land use planning process, which pitted conservative county commissioners against Eugene's liberal residents. According to Louise Solliday, then of Pacific Rivers Council, there was very little enforcement of the comprehensive plan's "very mushy language on riparian areas." As development pressure increased along the McKenzie's main stem, "every weekend the chainsaws would go" (Solliday).

PRC had also been involved in lobbying for the 1988 Wild and Scenic Rivers bill, which added 40 river segments to the federal program. Despite this protection "We continued to see resources decline... we got all these miles of river protected and yet we're still losing resources left and right." Throughout Oregon, "There was a 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" (Solliday).

Local resident Pat Thompson echoed this concern for the resource as well as a desire to resolve the conflicts in the watershed. "I saw a lot of things happening to the environment. I also come from a strong timber background, so I understand both sides of the situation and I felt that there was a lot missing in between. I wanted to find the balance and common ground solutions to problems that will make things work. The best way to do that is to get all sides sitting down together at the table."

John Allen, USDA Forest Service district ranger, described a history of developing collaborative relationships within the watershed that made participation on the council a natural extension of those relationships. As founding member Dorothy Anderson of EWEB relates, "Eugene is different. There's a long history of citizen participation. The community has recognized that working together is the way things are done in Eugene." As the agency

responsible for providing drinking water to Eugene and surrounding areas, EWEB was concerned with protecting water quality and wanted to take a proactive stance².

Weyerhaeuser's Barb Blackmore's observation reflects this incentive to collaborative. "I think for a long time we've felt as a company that we need the public's 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 legislating. Even though sometimes it would be nice to just go about your business and leave the political side alone, I don't think as a big company you can do it."

George Grier, then serving as president of the water resources committee on the Rural Resources Development Commission, was involved in assessing water resource management in the Basin. Grier felt that the top-down watershed council approach proposed by the 1991 legislation would only add to the problem of complex water regulations. "We suggested the creation of watershed councils that were a bottom up approach, where you had people involved on the ground...benefiting by the shared knowledge of everyone's experience" (Grier). Pat Thompson adds that, "Watershed councils, at least in the state of Oregon are the best way to get a very large diverse group of people to sit down together and talk turkey" (Thompson).

Alternatives

Interviewees imagined a variety of scenarios could have happened if the MWC had not formed. Besides a status quo of lawsuits and finger pointing, participants cited detrimental effects of development, lack of coordination among the responsible agencies, and a lost opportunity to involve interested stakeholders in the decision-making process.

Commenting on Weyerhaeuser Corporation's alternatives to collaboration, representative Barb Blackmore states, "You can always opt to not join the process, and do the law and keep your head down and follow the forest practices act and hope people leave you alone."

In contrast, some stakeholders have not chosen to participate, in part because they prefer alternative paths to reach their objectives. The Oregon Natural Resources Council (ONRC) and other environmental organizations prefer advocacy strategies like litigation to collaboration. ONRC's Western Oregon field representative Doug Heiken explains that, among other reasons, "We're going to stay out of it so we can have our full arsenal of tools available."

Almost all 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. "Without a doubt, encroachment of development on the watershed would have had a detrimental effect. I don't think that water quality would have been maintained" (Thompson). Several participants recounted a specific issue that occurred in 1997 when Lane County, along with other

² The board is also anticipating meeting the re-licensing standards of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission for several hydroelectric dams on the McKenzie. Some observers believe that part of EWEB's support for a watershed council stemmed from a desire to diffuse opposition and avoid becoming a target for future conflict.

counties in Oregon, had the chance to develop new criteria for use of forestlands. All other counties in the state, under pressure from timber companies, developed criteria that would loosen the restrictions on forestlands, allowing for development. MWC provided a forum for discussion of the issue, and former member George Grier states, "I am pretty certain that without the thoughtfulness that was injected in the process by the watershed council, that this thing would have gone through quickly enough that the dialogue would not have been there to actually examine the impact, and we would have done what all the other counties did."

When asked why the agencies and organizations responsible for the resource weren't effective, George Grier responded, "They weren't talking to each other!" Several council members mentioned the incoherent water quality monitoring that existed before the formation of the watershed council. Grier expands, "The State of Oregon had been maintaining water quality data for almost 100 years, but it was in 16 different formats, no one could access it and no one knew what was going on. (Data) was all scattered around, there was absolutely zero communication and it was ludicrous. There was data that someone was spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to collect and it was just sitting gathering dust someplace. 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."

Above all, members felt that the watershed council offered a unique forum that would not have existed otherwise. "The context of agreed upon interests," says Allen, "creates working relationships that cross agency and private boundaries, where you really focus on the important issues; you don't get lost in the tangential issues." New environmental representative Tim Fox believes that without the watershed council "An avenue of getting information out to people with an interest would be 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." Founding member Thompson also reflects that without the council to bring them together, "There would have been a lot of people like myself thinking about [these issues] individually or in small groups without being able to actually have a large impact on how things are done."

Advice

Members of the MWC were adamant about the council's role as an advisory body only. The recommendations, action plans and agreements that result from a council consensus decision have no authority over participating agencies or organizations. For the most part the MWC functions as a coordinating framework and forum for discussion. Since agencies and other decision-makers do have seats on the council, unlike many other watershed councils in Oregon, interesting questions can be raised about the appropriate role for collaborative groups in the resource management process. Participants offered the following reflections and advice about the role of the council and its relationship to the actual decision-making bodies.

- "Natural resource management is a very complicated issue and there's lots of components to it and those components are going to continue to stay there. and unless they all get together and integrate their approach or at least stop tripping over each other things are

going to be much more complicated than they need to be...that's a really important function to serve" (Grier).

- "The discussions and the decisions that the council makes have a lot of influence on the agencies. They're not there just to listen and then go away and do something different. I think they're there to bring ideas, to get feedback and to try and implement things in a way that are going to work within the larger context of the watershed plan" (Solliday).
- "If you don't want to have agencies at the table then you damn well ought to include them somehow in the whole process because they have a stake in what's going on...If you exclude them then you set up a boundary between your organization and theirs that's going to be really hard to pierce, and its going to set up an adversarial relationship" (Grier).
- "Agencies have figured out that the work that councils are doing can actually reduce workloads for agency folks. They're able to leverage dollars to stretch dollars further to get things done" (Solliday).
- "Councils look to agencies for technical objective experts. You don't have to get too deeply involved in the political aspects of it" (Allen).

Ensuring Sufficient Representation

When Lane County and EWEB began the dialogue that led to the creation of the MWC, they agreed that all stakeholders must be represented on the council for it to work. First key stakeholders were identified, then "we did a careful review of who could participate in the collaborative process" (Grier). "There was a real effort to find individuals who were respected in their broader stakeholder arena who could carry and represent a broader community than just their own individual organization" (Solliday). The MWC chose a formal representation strategy, with each member representing a larger constituency, because, "there was a recognition that the table can't be so big that you can't get anything done" (Solliday).

Several participants commented that the process of identifying stakeholders and ensuring representation must evolve with the process and maturation of the group. In the words of John Allen, "Over time there's been continual concern over [having] the right people at the table. I think it's an evolutionary thing...over time as issues mature and issues change you realize that somebody should be there that's not. Some partners have dropped out completely because they realized their stakes weren't that large. It's an expected and dynamic process that representation will change over time." Barb Blackmore agrees, "We've evolved who's there consciously. When first setting up...they put more of the focus on high level people who could direct resources ... Once the work plan's in place, the shift has been more to the partners being technically knowledgeable."

Challenges

MWC's representational strategy is reminiscent of that of a formal advisory council. Each member represents a larger interest group and is responsible for communicating the concerns of that group to the council and keeping constituents informed of council business. Coordinator John Runyon remarks, "While it sounds good in theory it doesn't always work in practice. We're walking a fine edge between having a sort of representation stakeholder involvement process and try to open it up to a broader range of folks and bring them in." This strategy, while it has kept the process manageable, has been a challenge for the council.

Tony Cheng, a doctoral student studying the McKenzie, notes the challenges involved in defining categories of stakeholders or interests. "Having a group that represents interests of that watershed as if it were divisible maintains a status quo that they wanted to get away from...It eats up so much of people's energy to discuss who you represent, what hat you wear, what you are and are not allowed to say and do, as if your interests are divisible" (Cheng). In fact, several participants mentioned "wearing more than one hat," with both organizational and personal interests that are fundamentally intertwined.

Lack of representation

Two main stakeholder groups, environmentalists and residents, feel their interests are not being represented, despite the presence of one "environmental" and two "resident" council members. Commenting on the diverse interests within each of those "stakeholder categories," Grier says, "It's hard to find someone who has enough support from all the local organizations who have different missions." With over 100 residents associations and many "factional interests," it has been impossible for the council to provide council seats for all of them.

Environmentalist Doug Heiken, ONRC field representative, who has attended council meetings as a visitor says, "I pooh pooh the idea that I'm being represented by somebody else. Nobody's representing ONRC on that council." Heiken criticizes the council as being "very self-selecting," excluding stronger environmental advocates for meeker, less informed representatives. George Grier mentioned the difficulty the council has had in finding "someone who's militant enough to not take any guff but still centered enough to keep their cool and establish a trusting relationship with the farmers and the people who see your organization as trying to undermine six generations of work."

Although the Pacific Rivers Council, represented by Louise Solliday, was one of the principle founders and supporters of the MWC, internal changes in the organization's leadership and strategies caused it to sever its ties with the council. Since Solliday left both PRC and the MWC to serve as the governor's watershed advisor, the council has had trouble maintaining consistent representation of the environmental community. Both ONRC and PRC declined participation as environmental representatives. ONRC has a policy of not participating in collaborative processes. "There is this perception, right or wrong, that if you're an environmental organization, collaboration is a dirty word and you need to be out there being more of an activist and taking no prisoners" (Grier).

Pat Thompson counters those concerns with the observation, “A lot of people wear more than one hat. There’s a very good balance of environmental interests but from a practical sense,” Of the council’s 20 members, he perceives 2-4 to represent strong environmental interests.

Involving citizens

Another challenge the MWC has encountered is in balancing government officials with private citizens. Grier states, “If the mix is deficient in any way, it's deficient by not having enough private landowners or folks who aren't agency rep or elected officials.” Dorothy Anderson of EWEB adds, “We have been criticized because we don't involve more of the grassroots people. We're a Eugene group (EWEB) coming up there (up river) to dominate their lives.”

Strategies

Participants reflected on some of the strategies that the MWC has used to ensure diverse representation within a manageable process:

- “One technique we've used is a round robin. When an issue gets too difficult we'll go right around the table to make sure everybody had a chance to say what they wanted to say” (Anderson).
- “You have to get a number of people involved in the chair position (by rotating chairs). It got everybody really involved in the process, in the inner workings of the council. Everybody gained a better knowledge of what it took to make this work; what the mechanics were behind the machine itself” (Thompson).
- “We wanted as many people as possible at the council level. The way we deal with the specifics or logistics of getting work done is to break up in working groups. To some degree the watershed council becomes a policy setting or a policy direction kind of entity that approves working groups to go on to logistical things” (Allen).

Advice

Council participants advocated the importance of diverse representation. Those interviewed also had the following advice to offer:

- “It's tough to have faith that by opening the doors up everyone is going to benefit but I think you need to concentrate on making sure folks are at the table that deserve to be there...otherwise there's the risk someone's going to file a lawsuit against you or denigrate what you've done and spent 3 years on” (Grier).
- “Do your homework up front, identify key players and bring them in early on so they have a chance to help frame the process and the issues” (Runyon).
- “Figure out who the key stakeholders are instead of focusing on individual organizations” (Solliday).

- “You’re forming a new social contract of how people relate to each other with respect to the watershed and if you treat it as something that is separable and has discrete attributes, then your social organism will reflect that” (Cheng).
- “Players are important, not only who they represent but their personalities. When you're putting together a group you should stress that you want people who are willing to work towards solutions. Obviously you want people with opinions, strong opinions, but you want people who are willing to listen and be flexible” (Blackmore).
- “There needs to be a workshop training process that forces people to step back and take off all of their hats and speak forthrightly about why they are there and what they expect to achieve” (Cheng).
- Speaking on the role of environmental advocacy groups, Dorothy Anderson suggests, “They're going to be pushing the box outside what the watershed council does and I hope they do ... You have to have that environmental interest pushing outside, but you also want to hear their voice inside the council so that they can help maintain some balance.”

Accommodating Diverse Interests

Coordinator Runyon summed up the challenges and opportunities faced by the MWC’s attempt to accommodate diverse interests through a consensus process, stating, “There is usually some level of compromise in all of our decisions. Because though we do arrive at our decisions based on consensus, when we do come to a decision it’s much more powerful. In some cases you can’t always tell when you start the process what the end result will be, there’s often sort of a synergy that develops out of this consensus process. So it’s not always strictly compromise middleground. Sometimes you do come out of it with some surprising results. But there are other times when it does come down to the lowest common denominator.”

Challenges

A main challenge the council faces with regards to diverse representation is difficulty in dealing with controversial issues. Several interviewees remarked that the McKenzie does not usually take on issues on which they feel it would be impossible to reach consensus. This has limited the activities of the council to macro policy recommendations rather than addressing micro land use issues. Researcher Tony Cheng notes, “Time and again with controversial issues, they failed to get to a point where they took any action.” In the words of Dorothy Anderson, “Consensus does constrain how far you can go and how proactive you can be when you have such a wide variety of interests.” Not only do diverse interests constrain the types of issues addressed or the potency of the outcomes, but also social relationships sometimes take precedence over voicing a concern. Cheng describes that dynamic, “There’s seems to be desire not to hurt peoples’ feeling, too much emphasis on relationships. Someone (like xx) might not step up to the plate if she’s going to piss off some of the people she really gets along with.”

Commenting on the human relationship challenges, John Allen says, “Sometimes you just don’t understand each other. We all speak English...but we’re all so different, certain words or phrases mean different things to us and the context of how we’ve been involved in resource issues over the last 2-3 decades means different things to us.”

Opportunities

Despite the limitations of trying to meet the needs of diverse interests, the process has also provided unprecedented opportunities, including increased coordination, pooled resources, improved understanding of the issues, and more creative solutions.

Comparing the watershed council’s decision-making process to traditional top-down resource management, Barb Blackmore reflects, “I’ve seen so many agencies reach decisions that are either politically motivated or they only address one issue while making others worse.” In contrast the watershed council offers the opportunity to take advantage of “a real breadth of resource” (Blackmore) that provide “huge efficiencies ...as you begin to coordinate the activities at the watershed scale” (Solliday). Solliday expands, “All of a sudden we have a huge area of commonality that we can spend years doing project work in any watershed and still not have done enough.”

District Ranger John Allen remarks, “When you have a good relationship with people of diverse interests, they’ll pose ideas to you that will put you outside of your own box and get you thinking about ideas that you hadn’t thought of or hadn’t been exposed to before. When you have a good relationship with that person you’re more willing to accept ideas outside of box. I think we’ve come up with ideas and solutions and strategies that are much better because we have a diverse group of people represented.”

Strategies

The main strategy the council has used to avoid watered down agreements, and to maintain group integrity is the avoidance of really controversial issues like specific national forest harvest plans, or individual land use decisions. As John Runyon explains, “There are times when we can’t tackle a really controversial issue and in fact we table them, because we know we can’t deal with it in a consensus format, and we say, well, we’re gonna wait until the time is ripe or the organization is ready to deal with that issue.”

Advice

Louise Solliday felt it was important when thinking about the effects a process involving diverse stakeholders might have on resource management to “keep in mind that watershed councils don’t have any authority, so they’re not making any decisions, they’re making recommendations that may or may not be followed.” She also emphasized the existence of other options to ensure any stronger voices are heard. Solliday noted that the watershed council has an advisory role, one that feeds in to other federal decision processes that provide

for further review and comment by any interested individual. “Where there are federal lands there are always processes that are open to all comers. Those processes don’t go away when there’s a watershed council created”(Solliday).

With regards to accommodating diverse interests, those interviewed had the following advice to offer.

- “You really need to go slow in the beginning...take time to develop relationships, develop an understanding of shared interests and shared expectations. If you’re not able to do that, you’re not going to be able to productively take on the issues you might have conflict on” (Allen).
- “If you don’t have trust and understanding and communication then the more diversity you have the quicker things are going to fall apart”(Grier).
- If you start off a watershed council in the context of learning, we’re really all here to help each learn...start off with those kinds of discussions when you start a watershed council (Allen).
- “Not taking up the most controversial issue at the first meeting, they need time to go through the forming, storming, norming stages and until you get to the norming stage, taking up the first crisis is not going to work. You need time to mature the group, understand and respect each other’s perspective” (Solliday).
- “Consensus training is imperative. Base the whole collaborative process on the premise that everyone who’s there is entitled to be there and they have a part of the answer and if you all just listen carefully enough, you come up with a solution you never would have before” (Grier).
- “New folks need to understand norms are always evolving. They’re not stepping into something set in stone. New people are afraid to change those norms. It’s like marrying into new family or moving into a new town; you don’t want to be the one that disrupts norms that could be really deep seated” (Cheng).
- ONRC’s Doug Heiken believes, “You need somebody to ask the hard questions” (Heiken).
- Solliday counters, “Having extremists at the table will cause the process to not move at all, that’s not in anybody’s interest and it’s certainly not in the interest of the resource.”

Accommodating Diverse Capabilities

Challenges

The presence of many technically knowledgeable members, and upper level managers creates opportunities as well as challenges for the McKenzie Watershed Council. On the one hand an “elitist” (Anderson, Rice, Heiken) group can leverage resources and influence, but on the other it can create “an intimidating forum for residents to come into” (Runyon). The imbalance of knowledge, resources, power or skills sometimes suppresses dialogue and incurs strong peer pressure.

Outside observers Cheng and Heiken both noted a tendency in council meetings towards “Dialogue where some people have more knowledge than others make categorical comments and everybody takes them as truth” (Cheng). Heiken, who has attended five or six meetings, explains that “It’s hard to stand up and disagree with your peers when you don’t have totally solid information. Representatives of city council know more about budgets and police than natural resources. They get buffaloed into going along. The environmental representatives they choose are usually the meeker type who aren’t going to raise a stink.” Discussing a Forest Service’s timber harvest plan presentation to the watershed council, Heiken says, “they [the Forest Service] give a 5-minute presentation and nobody asks any questions and they put the absolute smiliest spin on it and then it’s over.”

However, resident Pat Thompson disagrees with that perspective. In his opinion, “We’re fortunate to have a group of people who know when to call bologna. There’s not a single person in this group who’s going to be bullied...we’ve had some very very strong personalities who try to guide the process. (After) two or three meetings, they realize if there’s ever going to be a decision made I’m going to have to give as well. And there’s not a person on this group who isn’t willing to pull that individual aside and talk turkey with them and say look, you’re not getting anywhere with this.”

Anderson recognizes that the social relationships built on the council do influence members’ decisions: “There’s peer pressure. You don’t want to be the one who always blocks things.”

Strategies

One strategy the council used during its formative years was the use of “primers” on watershed management issues. At every meeting, either an internal or external expert would offer a session explaining an issue pertinent to the McKenzie River Basin. Other strategies include the following:

- “We try to be very very careful to listen to all interests equally. We’re very careful up front in providing very thorough orientation to everybody who comes in on how the council works and let them know that there are resources available if they don’t have them personally” (Runyon).
- “The final sort of equalizer is our consensus process. One individual has the power to block anything moving forward even if that individual doesn’t have big institutions behind him. Everyone around the table is aware of that and that’s a big equalizer” (Runyon).

- “We’re death on using acronyms. We have an acronym police force” (Thompson).

Advice

Those interviewed provided the following advice:

- “Before you even form, before you have the board sitting down together, you need to have a process where you listen to all of the stakeholders in the watershed and actively listen to residents and actively try to pull them into the process. I’ve seen this work on other watershed councils – put on a series of community picnics and barbecues and have an open forum for listening. If people feel they are being listened to they are more likely to want to be involved in the process” (Runyon).
- “You have to get people who are more knowledgeable about certain things to share that knowledge and not browbeat people with it” (Thompson)
- “We all have alternates. You have to be attuned to burn out. Volunteer burnout is a very real thing” (Thompson).

Scientific Soundness and Credibility

The McKenzie Watershed Council deals with several primary scientific issues: water quality monitoring, endangered fish habitat protection, and riparian area restoration. Most of their work is focused on the lower basin, the agricultural, residential and urban sector of the watershed. Rarely does the council deal with terrestrial issues, except those that directly affect water quality or fish habitat.

Challenges

Some of the challenges the MWC has encountered revolve around the uncertainty of both “cutting edge” management methods and of the exact causal relationships between human actions and impact on the resource. With a mix of approximately twelve out of twenty members lacking scientific expertise (Rice), the council has to struggle with keeping everybody up to speed and comfortable with the level of discussion around technical issues.

Both the watershed council and its member organizations have had to deal with a conflict between public perception and scientific data. John Runyon provides an example, “There’s a public perception that most of sedimentation and turbidity in the water comes from forestry operations. We have scientific evidence that shows that it does not, it actually comes from agriculture and growing urban areas.”

When dealing with research or monitoring, large landowners like Weyerhaeuser want to make sure the science is “good science,” stating a fear of “poorly designed, poorly implemented scientific projects”(Blackmore). Several interviewees observed that defining “good science” is also a challenge. Not only can scientists also hold biases, but much of the science of watershed management and habitat restoration is so “new that it’s going to take many many years for us to actually figure out if that approach was the right one or not” (Grier). John Allen adds, “We’re tussling with a barrage of new scientific information and how we deal with it in a social context. I don’t think we understand well some of the social implications of our resource decisions.”

Although the MWC is “almost too top heavy with scientific technical folks” (Cheng), the population of technically literate representatives can cause further challenges. Both Blackmore and Cheng mentioned a paucity of dialogue about the scientific process and the need to deliberately ask, “Why did you measure this in the first place? What was the question you wanted to answer? . . . When it comes to the processing of scientific info it revolves around a small group of folks that know what’s going on” (Cheng). Barb Blackmore explains, “On occasion you get caught up in a question and you grab people and you start down a path without doing as good a plan or asking as good of questions. We’ve all learned from doing. We gather all this stuff up and get people involved and you’re half way through and you say ‘what question were we trying to answer?’”

Strategies

The primary strategy of the council when dealing with scientific issues is to convene technical task forces made up of experts on the issue at hand. Council members brainstorm possible candidates, including agency or industry staff, university faculty or private consultants. Recognizing that even scientists will have different perspectives on the issue, the council tries to balance the task force with a diverse representation of experts. Blackmore says, “[Task force members are] truly scientists, we’re not trying to make sure we got one of every flavor, but we do try to get them into the group, especially if they have land that will be impacted or are decision-makers.” Rice adds that the council never asks only one expert’s opinion. In the early years, most of the council’s meetings revolved around educating its members. Thompson recalls, “We held primers and invited some of the best known professors from Oregon State in fish biology and water quality and wetlands issues.” Even six years later, Emily Rice estimates that half of each council meeting is spent on educational presentations.

To address the problems of public misperceptions, the MWC recently hired an education director who is working with schools and residents. Another strategy that was highly successful was the organization of a water quality forum after severe flooding in 1996 provoked conflict within the community over the impacts of land management practices on water quality. Many outside experts were brought in and over 200 community members attended. The forum offered the opportunity to present scientific data and information in an accessible format to the public.

In an effort to provide credible information, the council has been cautious about drawing conclusions from preliminary water quality monitoring studies. John Allen says, “We made that very clear to the public. Five or six years into data, from a scientific standpoint we have much more confidence in our data and we can speak more clearly about what this data means and about what kinds of questions it raises.”

In order to ensure compliance with federal and state environmental regulations, the council relies on the expertise of agency participants who understand the laws. In the words of Blackmore, “The expertise is there if somebody starts treading on thin ground.”

Advice

Participants had many words of advice for other collaborative resource management initiatives and watershed councils.

- “Identify expertise in your watershed. Foster relationships with those experts. Create a list of folks that you can call upon when issues come up” (Runyon).
- “Try to keep everything at like a 6th grade level, so everyone can understand...biology, which is the main science in this is not rocket science and biology is pretty easy to break down into lay terms for people to understand it”(Thompson).
- “Especially in scientific monitoring programs, it’s so critical that you know before you start exactly what question you want to answer, or you may be buried in data and not have a clue what to do with it. So many people think well let's go collect it and something will come to us. That's a major mistake” (Blackmore).
- “You want to be able to tell people why this data is important, what it would possibly mean. Tell them a little bit about experimental design. It’s really boring but really important because it informs how you make inferences from the data (Cheng).
- “A lot of the scientific measurements have to coincide with field tours...Then when you look at the data you have an idea of where it’s coming from and therefore you get a bigger picture of what it means” (Cheng).
- “Start small: Do simple monitoring activities” (Cheng).
- “You still have to reserve judgment and make sure you've explored the whole thing. Because you have someone come in and talk to you, just because they have a Ph.D. after their name doesn't mean it’s the only interpretation” (Blackmore).
- “Some parts of science are just straight math but most of the stuff in the natural resources area can’t be quantified very easily and it’s important to listen to the people who are involved locally because they might have an important role to play either by helping to design the thing properly or in making sure that it’s implemented appropriately” (Grier).

Insights specific to this case

Challenges

The McKenzie Watershed Council is not very representative of other watershed councils across Oregon (Solliday, Rice). The primary difference is that it is not a grassroots citizen based group, but rather a handpicked group of individuals formally representing specific interest groups. Involving citizens and residents has been an additional challenge.

The nature of the group is also different in that the McKenzie formed proactively, instead of reacting to the possibility of salmon listings. Perhaps because of this orientation, the MWC has focused on changing policies rather than individual land-use decisions, a trend that has kept the group intact with a broad base of support, but has limited the council's impacts on the ground.

Citizen involvement

Several council members mentioned a community perception that the watershed council is "just another layer of bureaucracy, because it is dominated by agency heavyweights" (Cheng). Thompson explains, "Even though you don't have any authority, you eventually get to a point where your advisory capacity is very strong and very well thought of, you carry some weight even though you don't have any regulatory authority. You've got to be careful not to throw that weight around or you alienate people (Thompson). Cheng adds, "Because they have that perception of not really being community based and citizen oriented they're going to face some of the same challenges that any government agency in the post Reagan era is going to face: a lot of distrust, a lot of perception that they're just throwing money down the drain" (Cheng).

Although all council meetings are open to the public, and anyone can request an issue be brought before the council, the process' formality can restrain those opportunities for citizen participation. Agenda items must be submitted several weeks before the next council meeting, and opportunity for public comment is formally restricted to the first ten minutes of each meeting, before agenda items have been addressed. Doug Heiken of the ONRC said, while he felt he could have raised questions or commented on issues during the meeting as well, "it's unfortunate that I have to feel like I'm bending the rules to make my point. They should allow public participants who don't interfere with the process to be engaged" (Heiken).

Transition of new members

Although five of the current members have been on the council since its inception, there has been continual turnover. Both Cheng and Thompson point out the problem of volunteer burnout. New people who come in may share the same interests as the parting member, but don't share the history of the group. The transition of new members was described by Cheng as a big "mumble jumble." Since the group is now in its "implementation phase," the emphasis is more on completing work plans than consensus training or continued team building. Although provided with some kind of orientation process, new members often struggle to integrate with the council.

Concrete Outcomes

Other than the water quality monitoring project, the only on the ground projects have been implemented by the Mohawk Sub-basin Group, which has done riparian area re-vegetation. While most members feel that the council fills other essential roles in the community, and may be moving into an implementation phase now, some are frustrated with the lack of on the ground action. George Grier, who left the council to volunteer with a local land trust (the McKenzie River Trust) says, “I felt that they [MWC] were not going to function as an implementing organization, they were going to function as an organization that created meaningful dialogue and unearthed good long term decisions about what type of actions needed to take place.” Critic Heiken comments, “They've identified these things that need to be done but they're not necessarily doing them, they're not following through on the promise.”

Researcher Cheng links both the potential for and lack of action back to the council's composition. “The richness of dialogue is what really transforms the watershed council into something that I think has greater potential for action. The potential for action is there because you have all these federal agencies and they can leverage resources and support, but they're kind of like a gentle giant, this imposing body that really can't do anything because they're afraid to hurt anyone.”

Advice

- “I think the council needs to restructure itself to be more citizen and resident oriented in order to gain some more legitimacy” (Cheng)
- Cheng suggests promoting sub-basin initiatives like the Mohawk Group: “A lot of what will drive these community-based efforts is the perceived threat to their back yard. If you [focus on small-scale community-based projects] on a whole watershed scale you're actually doing something for the resource. If that occurs up and down the watershed then the watershed council can say these are accomplishments that are directly tied to our process” (Cheng).
- “When you get those landowners [involved], you get a good education going, you get people who have a vested interest in the watershed, it's easier to do on the ground projects because they know what's going on on their own land” (Thompson)

Charter member George Grier sums up the ultimate difficulty in assessing the progress of a collaborative process: “You need to have an incredibly long-term view of things if you're going to gauge success by collaborative processes. This is kind of like the analogy of filling the pipe line: You know you don't get anything out the other end until the pipeline's completely full, and in this case filling the pipeline takes a really long time because it's relationship building, and it's building a knowledge base, and it's networking, and there's a lot of complicated stuff that goes on that has to do with human dynamics and has absolutely nothing to do with natural resources. So if you judge how well you're doing by looking at projects completed it's going to be tough to evaluate a collaborative process as being a functional one in a short period of time. The test really will be to see what it looks like in 10

years after the relationships have been maintained. There's a lot of symbiosis that goes on and you got to give that time to get itself established" (Grier).