

CHAPTER 12: OWL MOUNTAIN PARTNERSHIP

Jackson County, Colorado
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Owl Mountain Partnership (OMP) exemplifies a collaborative resource partnership that labels itself as an ecosystem management group. Triggered by a state-established program, OMP developed during its first five years from an emphasis on data gathering to an emphasis on planning, implementing projects, monitoring, analysis, and education. During these five years the partnership struggled to define its role in promoting a holistic approach to natural resource management. OMP provides a prime example of a partnership that has struggled to attain representation from environmental organizations. In addition, there has been a great deal of local fear toward the concept of ecosystem management and the federal agencies that are advocating it.

Interviews:

Cary Lewis, Co-Chairman, Rancher Lewis Ranch, (3/17/99)
Jerry Jack, Project Manager, Bureau of Land Management, (3/9/99)
Stephen H. Porter, Steering Committee member, Wildlife Biologist, Colorado Division of Wildlife, (2/9/99 and 3/15/99)
Verl Brown, Steering Committee member, Rancher, (3/10/99)
Greg Sherman, Steering Committee member, Western Envir. and Ecology, (3/9/99)
Jack Haworth, Steering Committee member, Rancher, (3/12/99)

PART I: BACKGROUND¹

Origin and Issues

In north central Colorado just south of the Wyoming border along the Continental Divide lies the North Park region. The region is bound by high mountain ridges and is characterized by coniferous forests, rolling sagebrush uplands, and extensive pasture lands and hay fields. Agriculture (primarily livestock grazing), recreation and logging provide the main economic foundation for this rural and least populated area of Colorado. There are twenty-five major ranching operations in the area as well as over three hundred small ranches. Local economic depression due to the closure of the local coal mines and lumber mill, loss of the railroad, perceived threats from the influx of "new" people, *Rangeland Reform*, increasing environmental regulations and a proposed ski area have created a fragmented community.

¹ The information for the background has been compiled from several sources; *The Owl Mountain Partnership, A Prototype for Ecosystem Management, Five Year Assessment Wildlife Perspective* by Stephen H. Porter and Dr. Roy Roath, December 1998, *Showcasing Sharing Common Ground on Western Rangeland: The Owl Mountain Partnership* by Stephen H. Porter, *Colorado Owl Mountain Partnership, Partnership for Total Ecosystem Management*, Seeking Common Ground, April 1994, *Ecosystem Management in the United States: An Assessment of Current Experience*, by Steven L. Yaffee et. al. 1996, Owl Mountain Partnership web site, <http://www.yampa.com/northpark/owlmnt/>, and the interviews listed above.

The Town of Walden, located within North Park, has been fragmented to such a degree that it was listed as one of ten endangered communities according to the National Association of Counties. The major ecosystem stresses in the region include: past logging and grazing practices, loss of forage resulting in a decline in sage grouse and deer populations, as well as an increase in wildlife, particularly elk, retreating to private lands at lower elevations.

Early stages

The Colorado Division of Wildlife's (CDOW) Habitat Partnership Program (HPP), a statewide effort to induce collaborative processes that resolve conflicts between livestock and big game animals throughout Colorado, was established in 1991 within North Park.² The HPP program resolves these conflicts by developing partnerships between land managers, landowners, sportsmen, the public and CDOW. The North Park HPP composed of interested stakeholders began by first writing a five-year plan to address the livestock/big game conflicts. While writing a grant proposal requesting funds from a group known as Seeking Common Ground³ in 1993, the North Park HPP realized that the locally contentious issue of the livestock/wildlife conflicts could not be resolved focusing on one or two isolated issues. They began to realize that many of the livestock/big game conflicts within the North Park involved larger issues such as other herbivores, vegetation and soil.

After receiving the initial grant from Seeking Common Ground, the North Park HPP was approached by the sponsors of Seeking Common Ground. They inquired whether or not the group wanted to begin an ecosystem-based management effort as part of a nationwide effort to develop new and more effective ways to manage natural resources. For nearly six months the North Park HPP analyzed background information pertaining to ecosystem management and determined what it would mean to begin such a process. In the summer of 1993, the North Park HPP created a separate OMP Steering Committee (herein after Steering Committee) with the objective of total resource management for the southern quarter of Jackson County. OMP gets its name from Owl Mountain, a key landmark just southeast of Walden.

The initial Steering Committee for OMP composed of local agency personnel, landowners, and business people (several of whom were also members of the North Park HPP), agreed from the beginning that since there were no set guidelines for ecosystem management they would have to spend the first five years developing a process that would begin to define it. Stephen Porter, a wildlife biologist with CDOW and member of the OMP Steering Committee, noted, "we decided to take the big bite...total resource management instead of singular elk-livestock conflicts and no one really knew exactly what they were getting into."

Evolving from CDOW's HPP, OMP developed a collaborative approach among diverse stakeholders to manage a broader array of issues surrounding the landscape. From issues

² Information about the Habitat Partnership Program in Colorado can be found on the web at <http://www.dnr.state.co.us/wildlife/HPP/HPPsec6.htm>.

³ Seeking Common Ground is an ad hoc coalition of organizations and agencies including the U.S. Forest Service, BLM, National Cattlemen's Association, Public Lands Council, American Farm Bureau, and others. It was set up after a 1991 meeting in Nevada to "improve and manage rangeland resources to enhance the long term benefits for livestock, big game, and other multiple uses and to effectively communicate success."

surrounding the livestock/big game conflicts, the partnership expanded its focus on an extensive set of issues involving water quality, soils and using vegetation as a baseline for land health.

When asked how visible natural resource conflicts were prior to the formation of OMP, Stephen Porter said, "extremely." The OMP presented a new way for members of the community, governmental agencies, and businesses to deal with often-contentious natural resource conflicts in North Park. Something the Steering Committee learned early on was that controversy was going to be a constant factor they would have to face. Greg Sherman, environmental representative on the Steering Committee said, "On a scale of one to ten, ten being the worst, we were close to a nine or ten when we first got started as far as local involvement and local trust. There were great many misconceptions, fears and political factors surrounding the concept of ecosystem management." Stephen Porter stated "Politics go with the baggage that the word ecosystem management carries. The fact is that people cue into one word, ecosystem and not the management side of it. Local politics of people not liking government is also a tremendous hurdle."

In order for the process to work, Steering Committee members knew they would have to get the support of all stakeholders. But, many stakeholders were doubtful including ranchers who were skeptical when hearing government resource managers talk about "ecosystem management" as a new way to resolve resource conflicts on public and private lands. Support from the livestock producers was achieved through a meeting in which ranchers were asked if they felt they both could solve the livestock/big game conflicts alone. When ranchers unanimously agreed they could not resolve the conflict without a broader perspective and were assured a major emphasis of the group would be to determine the capacity of the land to support grazing, several ranchers saw the partnership as a means to address their concerns.

Agency support already existed since several agencies previously helped to develop the model and saw this partnership as a new way to gain credibility within the community. Stephen Porter mentioned the main reason he personally wanted to take part was to ensure government credibility: "[Agencies] have to change the way we do business with the people." The Steering Committee sponsored public meetings, newspaper articles, one-on-one discussions and other similar events to gain public support and begin to develop an ecosystem-based management partnership.

Organization and Process

Organizational Structure

Mission Statement and Goals

As the Steering Committee began developing goals to guide their planning process they struggled to find common ground on the definition of ecosystem management. During this time they adopted the following mission statement:

To serve the economic, cultural and social needs of the community while developing adaptive long-term landscape management programs, policies and practices that ensure ecosystem sustainability.

From this mission statement the Steering Committee was able to unanimously agree to five fundamentals of ecosystem management:

- 1) Increased trust must be developed between local stakeholders and all levels of government.
- 2) Ecosystems allow harvest of appropriate natural resources on a sustainable basis.
- 3) The local people that will be affected must be involved and empowered to make decisions and implement actions that will contribute to sustaining the social, cultural, economic and ecological systems upon which they depend.
- 4) Environmental education is crucial element of management because it is a process of learning about the interactions and interdependencies of the socio-cultural, economic, and ecological systems that support mankind.
- 5) The issues that drive and ecosystem management efforts must, in large measure, originate from the community's grassroots. It is here where the sense of place and community ties to their natural world are best expressed.

Goals were developed through numerous meetings with agencies, individuals, and community members. Issues were prioritized in terms of what needed immediate action. From there, a five-year set of goals was established. The goals listed below are periodically reviewed and reprioritized:

- 1) To create partnerships that build trust and teamwork to achieve ecosystem health and resolve resource conflicts which will serve the economic, cultural, and social needs of the community;
- 2) To develop and implement an adaptive ecosystem management plan across political, administrative, and ownership boundaries based on identified issue needs;
- 3) To document the implementation process of ecosystem management and communicate knowledge gained from the project to partners and public.

Originally OMP focused on an area of more than four-tenths of a million acres (67% public, 33% private), but in 1997 the partnership decided to expand its boundaries to include all of Jackson County (more than one million acres with similar percentage public/private land). Public lands are administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), United States Forest Service (USFS), United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), National Park Service (NPS), State Land Board, CDOW, Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS) and the Colorado Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation.

OMP Steering Committee is composed of a diverse array of members, representing varying values and motives. Representatives include ranchers, timber industry, outdoor recreation, Colorado State University, federal and state agencies (USFS, BLM, USFWS, NPS, and Natural Resource Conservation Service, CDOW and CSFS) as well as an environmental representative. At times county and local government representatives have been involved.

To become a member an individual must submit a written application that must be approved by the Steering Committee. However, Verl Brown, a Steering Committee member and Rancher noted that, the key to becoming a member of the Steering Committee is to show commitment: "All you have to show is an interest and you have to be alive. Although we do discourage more than one representative from any one agency." Brown continued, "According to OMP by-laws there must be a minimum, four landowners from within the project area." Membership has fluctuated during OMP's first five years depending upon the issue being discussed, although most members spoke of a core group of fifteen to twenty that attend most meetings. According to Stephen Porter, the strength of OMP lies with the people who portray the very essence of Western culture such as independence, common sense, and realism and who actively want to be involved.

The common ground that unites the diverse membership of OMP is sustainable land health. The Steering Committee has strong representation from landowners and agency personnel who live and work in the community and provide administrative, financial and technical support. The committee also seeks support from all other stakeholders and community members. Some members mentioned that if they know an issue coming up is of interest to a particular group or person, they make an effort into getting that interest to the meeting.

The Steering Committee serves as the governing body to define, approve and establish goals and objectives as well as handle budgetary matters. The Steering Committee is also where all formal recommendations and actions originate. While the Steering Committee forms the foundation for the process, other stakeholders are always welcome. According to Jerry Jack, OMP Project Manager from the BLM, "The public is involved anytime they want to be. We advertise all meetings in the newspaper and also send out about 400 mailers from our mailing list." During the first four years the CDOW and BLM provided full time positions for a project manager and an assistant. Currently, the BLM has the only full time project member (Jerry Jack) with the staff assistant position vacant. "The assistant is something we need and we were hoping would be back filled by one of the agencies, but it has not." The USFS is currently providing office space for the group.

After five years the OMP is still developing and has not yet begun to address the "big picture items" of ecosystem management. "We are still working towards ecosystem management," notes Stephen Porter, "It is very difficult to move to basin wide approach...there are many dangling issues." A five-year planning process was developed at the outset of the OMP process, with emphasis on: database/inventory, planning, projects, monitoring, analysis, and education. With the five-year process completed, OMP is in the midst of redefining its role. With regards to redefining the OMP role, Porter stated, "We are feeling a lot of pressure to expand. That is scary for a lot of us. All four components will remain. What we emphasize in the next five years, I don't think we have determined that." "We are moving from project oriented to issues we can deal with," said Verl Brown, "I don't know how that is going to go."

The decisions of the partnership are advisory. They provide recommendations to the agency or landowner who manages the resource who can then either act on or ignore OMP suggestions. According to Jerry Jack: "I do not like to use the term advisory because of

FACA (Federal Advisory Committee Act)...I think that a group of individuals with expertise can look at an issue and give solid recommendations and maybe two or three alternatives, but that is as far as I would go." Greg Sherman noted that he feels, "An important thing that any group should have is by-laws or other legal papers...Since BLM representatives on the group are bound by FACA they can only represent themselves as individuals and that has to be documented in the by-laws." According to Stephen Porter the goal of the partnership is to build enough credibility over time where those who manage the resources can trust decisions made by the partnership. This credibility could ensure that partnership actions and decisions would have a better chance of being implemented.

OMP combined revenue from January 1993 through December 1998 totaled just over \$1.11 million with the bulk coming from BLM (\$422,966), EPA Clean Water Act Section 319 money (\$219,950), USFS (\$102,084), with state and federal agencies as well as private sources making up the remainder of financial donations or assistance. Expenditures during the same time period totaled over \$1.12 million including \$539,574 for projects, \$226,630 for administrative, \$153,513 for planning, \$117,393 for vegetation inventory, with the remainder going toward education, travel and publicity in that order.

Process

Verl Brown spoke about the evolution of meeting schedules: "When we first started we just decided to call a meeting whenever we needed one. That did not work, so when I became chair, I changed it to once a month. Although we usually don't meet in August as ranchers are busy and government folks are on vacation." Most meetings are held in the town of Walden, but occasionally they are held elsewhere or in the field. Brown also described meetings: "We run fairly loose meetings. We have an agenda and we try to keep meetings as organized as possible." Cary Lewis described the typical process: "Ideas are brought to the Steering Committee. Whoever brings the idea, presents it and gives the pros and cons, usually mostly pros. We then try to tie it back to our objectives. We look for data and input and then decide whether or not to go further."

As issues and conflicts are identified, OMP often attempts to first review a considerable amount of background information and often appoints subcommittees to do in-depth work. Examples include budget, economic, education and project committees. "We have five or six standing committees currently that evolve as we go along," said Jerry Jack. The decisions and recommendations from the subcommittees are taken to the full Steering Committee for further study and approval. Both subcommittees and the Steering Committee use consensus decision-making requiring full agreement from each group member.

Stephen Porter noted that the group has often been criticized for using consensus because decisions often take longer. Stephen Porter said, "If we can't reach consensus we will table it and come back or stay with it until we resolve it, we work through it." At the same time, Porter was quick to point out the strength of decisions once consensus is reached: "If everyone is doing their job they have to pay attention and communicate back and the issue is covered so that each person gets a good understanding of the issue and then we can make the best decision. That is why we have stayed with consensus."

The Steering Committee elects the Chairman and Co-Chairman yearly at the December meeting. Chairman and Co-Chairman assist the process and move the meetings along. The Chairman is also responsible for determining that the activities of the committee are directed toward achieving project and community needs. OMP has used facilitators in the past. "Yes, on controversial issues we certainly do [use a facilitator]," said Jerry Jack, "We only bring one in when we have a real head knocking session and we know some of the more reticent members may get stomped over by more vocal members." Stephen Porter noted that, "Over time we have gotten better and do not use facilitators as much as we used to." Currently, OMP is using a facilitator from the BLM who is working with the group on its vision for the future.

Steering Committee members vary greatly in the amount of time they spend on OMP issues. Jerry Jack, as the Project Manager and BLM representative, works full time on OMP issues. Others range from several hours a month to twenty percent of their time.

Outcomes

As OMP struggled to define its role as an ecosystem management partnership they decided to focus efforts on database and inventory projects. Having evolved from livestock/big game conflicts, OMP decided to use soils and vegetation as indicators for land health. For the first three years OMP focused on gathering data, including vegetation sampling, soils studies, and Neotropical bird surveys. A majority of the time, effort and money was spent on an extensive range site inventory. Using vegetation as an indicator of rangeland health was and still is a major focus of the group.

Verl Brown noted that the partnership heavily focuses on on-the-ground project implementation: "Right now we are talking about moving away from the projects that we have been so heavily involved with. When we first started five years ago, there were people wanting to put money into stuff like this cause there weren't many. Now there are getting to be quite a few of them so we really can't depend upon quite as much money. Moving from projects-oriented to issues we can do with less money, but it is a question of whether it will work or not." Greg Sherman noted, "Early on we were trying to get everyone to love us...we were throwing a lot of dollars to highly visible projects because of that. I think we did some early projects that weren't tremendously important to land health but they were high profile. Some of the early ranchers were able to see some projects on their property that aided them right away."

OMP projects address problems such as: elk populations and distributions compared to livestock numbers, competition between big game animals for existing forage, damage to private hay stockpiles, decline in sage grouse numbers, noxious weeds, transportation, and water quality monitoring. The types of projects undertaken with help from OMP include: high tensile hay stacks, realigning fences, irrigation projects, soil studies, various bird inventories, reseeding projects, and sagebrush treatments. One particular project was a baseline vegetative inventory for the project area to determine the carrying capacity of the

range resource. Another outcome is their newsletter *Mountain Ecos* which is sent to all "interested individuals" and highlights recent accomplishments.

Group members frequently mentioned the Hebron Slough Management Plan. Hebron Slough Management Plan was developed by OMP for BLM land leased by current Steering Committee Jack Haworth. The plan allowed for Haworth to keep his permit and graze on the land with a provision that called for rotating the cattle and installing a fence system that would allow the area to be developed as duck habitat. Several members referred to this project as a win-win situation. Haworth was allowed to keep his permit, improved areas of his grazing lands, and ducks currently have begun to nest in the slough.

OMP members had various answers when asked what they believed was their greatest outcome:

- Greg Sherman mentioned the coordination that has occurred: "Not any of the projects. It is that all the members of the group can talk amongst one another quite openly. BLM can talk to USFS which is almost never heard of. Ranchers can talk to their BLM representative or water quality people. It is trust."
- Stephen Porter mentioned, "The biggest achievement is the process and showing how it can be done. We have done more projects in that community in the five years of the partnership than in all the twenty years I was there combined. Those are the products but we need to look at the potential and what we now can do. [OMP] has shown it is possible for a community to accept the responsibility of resource management as it relates to meeting the needs of local citizens and interests of outside communities and stakeholders within the boundaries of land health sustainability."
- Jack Haworth felt OMP's projects have, "proved to [environmentalists] that we can have cattle and wildlife and still improve the land."
- Verl Brown felt the educational aspect was the greatest outcome: "The main value to me which did not cost anything at all was the education on grazing practices. I have changed my grazing practices of the last five years and it has worked so well. I have more grass for my cattle, more grass for elk. That has been the biggest asset for me. The education."
- Jerry Jack said, without this effort we would not have a five year track record of success." He also mentioned the many "spin off groups that have seen what we are doing."

PART II: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Why Collaboration?

OMP members chose to participate for various reasons. The common thread appears to be that each member thought that this process had the potential to be effective and they were all looking for something different from the "top down" approach.

Stephen Porter emphasizes the distrust of government, particularly within the North Park region of Colorado. In his words: "Government is not well liked in rural communities. We need to change the way we do business. The goal over time is to build government credibility. From a wildlife perspective we need to also deal with the people component if we are going to be successful and sustainable." OMP provides an opportunity for the agencies to build credibility within an often-hostile environment, in which they work and often live.

One of the driving reasons for many members to participate in OMP is the promise of the process. As Greg Sherman highlighted, the old ways of resource management such as public hearings did not work effectively and often polarized the community. OMP offers something different that members hope can be the answer to effective resource management from the ecosystem level and that includes their personal human component into the equation.

While Stephen Porter spoke about the difficulty that a new process brings, he also highlighted its potential rewards: "This is extremely hard, it is hard for different reasons. It is extremely hard and it should be. If it was easy we would be doing something very wrong. If sustainability is something we are all after you have got to start looking at the pieces of a huge landscape. We need a new process, and this is on its way."

Several of the landowners and ranchers also have the incentive to participate in OMP because of the possibility of having a project on their lands and learning more effective grazing techniques. Verl Brown spoke about the education aspect that has led him to "change my grazing practices over the last five years" leading to "more grass for my cattle and more grass for the wildlife." Furthermore, Stephen Porter mentioned that the ranchers participating are "ten steps ahead of the other (ranchers) when it comes to range reform. The people who are working to alleviate problems on their land will be the first not to lose their permits." Jack Haworth felt that without OMP, "I would not have my BLM permit in the spring of this year."

Listed below are several members' reflections on their decision to participate:

- Greg Sherman wanted: "To avoid lawsuits and public hearings. What usually happens is that they don't come to a successful fruition, nobody wins a lawsuit except for the attorneys involved. And as far as public hearings with agencies, they have not been very successful because of the polarization that occurs when you get a lot of people talking and discussing, but what you don't get are a lot of constructive ideas."
- Jack Haworth spoke about the Hebron Slough plan as a catalyst for his participation: "Our allotment was one of the first to have a OMP project done on. I've spoken before a lot of groups and if I can help out OMP or anything, I am willing to get up and say what has worked for me and how it helped me. I thought maybe I could help."
- Verl Brown thought, "it just makes sense." Brown then spoke about a current lawsuit in the county where a rancher and the county government is suing the USFS. He noted, "In

the end it is not going to solve anything. I think if the USFS would sit down with a local collaborative group and look at the problem and look at some solutions" that would work.

- Cary Lewis mentioned coordination was a driving force behind his choice to participate: "I could see a big benefit to seeing all the agencies agree and to channel their energies toward one line, one way of doing something, put them all into one and we can get more done more effectively."
- Jerry Jack spoke about the fact that BLM hired him specifically to work with the partnership and how the BLM is the most active agency because, "we are the big gorilla up there."
- Stephen Porter spoke about his belief in the collaborative approach: "We had the experience working with it (collaborative partnerships) through the HPP and ...it worked real well. So we decided to stay with the process and we have learned over the years it is a better process."

Alternatives

According to members of OMP, several important projects, more localized decision-making, a more holistic approach to resource issues, as well as the ability to disseminate funds for resource management, all might have been lost, or never occurred within North Park, without OMP.

When asked what would have occurred without the formation of OMP members mentioned things such as:

- Cary Lewis felt that decisions made would have "been more toward the government side of the idea and the issues might have not been as well known for people to get together and debate on them and decisions would have been less favorable for the landowners."
- Jack Haworth spoke about the fact that he might not have his grazing permit without OMP: "There is a good chance I would not have had the permit at all. The movement for a long time has been to take all livestock off public lands. We (OMP) have proved to them that we can have cattle and wildlife and still improve the land."
- Stephen Porter mentioned holistic thinking: "We would not have had such a large scale look at things. Maybe this is a fad, but this is not the time to back away from this...the future prospects are too great."
- Verl Brown mentioned projects that would not have been done: "We would not have done some good things such as Hebron Sloughs. That was headed to be a disaster."
- Jerry Jack said, "I think it would be a top down push. For example, the BLM throughout the west right now is undergoing the implementation of Standards for

Public Land Health and Guidelines for Livestock Management and because of the collaborative efforts and the BLM being so intensely involved and because of some of the action taken on BLM land in the last five years (with OMP), the majority of the permittees who have been involved with OMP will not have any problems."

- Greg Sherman mentioned several things: "Certainly we would not have fallen apart. There probably would have been a loss of grazing permits to some BLM lease holders. Some innovative methods for grazing would not be as wide spread as they are now." He also mentioned that the Hebron Slough project would have been lost.

Several members also mentioned OMP's ability to gather money and combine agency funds to put towards projects that without the partnership would not have been possible. As Jerry Jack commented: "The money factor. To be able to stay in business, to support a staff and do the projects we have been able to has been a constant scramble." As the group has matured, it is clear that members still fear that resources could run dry. Greg Sherman pointed out: "What we are finding, and this is typical of so many government programs, of course a lot of our money is government money, that these programs (Clean Water Act Section 319 funding) are not long term." Sherman continued to say, "They are seed money to get you started. Well, where do you go after five years?" Furthermore, Verl Brown questioned if the group needs the amount of money it has been so dependent upon now that they are shifting their focus more to be an issue-based group: "Moving from project oriented, to issue we can do with less money, but it is going to be a question of whether it can work."

Ensuring Stakeholder Representation

From reading OMP's by-laws and speaking with members it is clear that membership is open to anyone interested in North Park resource management and is willing to stick with the process. Jerry Jack commented about how members were selected: "We opened it up. We tried to get people to come that should be there. We had no problem with livestock, business (interests) but we sure had one hell of a time getting anyone to step forward from the environmental community." Cary Lewis said OMP selected members, "By volunteer. We had enough interest although we were lacking with some interests." Stephen Porter noted that they selected members, "By people showing up and showing interest to stay with it."

Challenges

What also is evident is that most members feel there are interests not at the table that should be. The first chair was a representative from the county government. Ever since he resigned because of philosophical differences, the relationship between the county and OMP has been limited. Although OMP members do not think their decisions have been diminished by the lack of environmental representatives, they have struggled to get the environmental community involved. Furthermore, several members also mentioned the need to become more citizen-based and include a more diverse array of landowners.

County Government

Stephen Porter spoke in detail about the problem the group has faced trying to get county officials to be more actively with OMP. "Early on they were leading it," he stated. "[County Commissioners] are not pro government for a lot of good reasons. They feel government is there to keep them from managing their county (66 percent of the county is state and federal government land) and they feel that amount of government land is a liability, not an asset. It does not allow them to draw tax revenue and keep things going. Our answer is that it draws a different economy than you are used to and don't like. You like the extractive, agricultural side and this is more recreation. We are trying to profess a government that is there for them to use and they think that government, especially a united government, is just a coalition to take more away from them. I think they are going to be up and down through the [partnership]. If there ever is a place they can use us they will come to the table. We can live with that. We just have to stay focused on that the involved government in the partnership do not walk away because of political pressure because they are getting quite a bit right now." Porter continued that political pressure is coming as county officials pressure the state legislators who appropriate money for the agencies through the state budget: "The way I can see it happen is we are fighting budgets right now, we are downsizing under control of legislature. With county commissioners talking to the legislature it makes it (OMP) any easy place to cut. My job is being part of it for five years is to say wow, let's take a look at this before we make any hasty decisions."

When asked about participation of county officials, Verl Brown said: "Oh yeah, that has been bad." Cary Lewis said: "Local government did not want to be on there. It was their choice. It would have helped but they keep track of us." Greg Sherman noted that: "The way we have tried to handle it is through as much discussion and being as opened as we can with the local entities." Several members thought county officials might be staying away because of a lawsuit pertaining to timber practices in the Platte River watershed filed against the USFS by a group called Coalition for Sustainable Resource. The County Commissioners support the lawsuit, while USFS is represented on the OMP Steering Committee.

Several members also spoke about a proposed ski area development that caused some bad feelings between the county and OMP, and divided the community. The County Commissioners were in favor of the ski area development, while participants stated that OMP took a neutral position. However, it was perceived by many that some OMP members actively opposed the ski area. Furthermore, while OMP took a neutral stand, several of the agencies involved with OMP, CDOW, CSF and USFWS were reportedly against the plan among the high level staff. Several members felt that this situation caused a deterioration in their relationship with the County Commissioners.

Environmental Community

Jerry Jack stated that OMP has struggled to get members from the environmental community involved. He also offered his perspective on the minimal environmental representation: "I don't think the environmental community likes these small local groups because they can't keep track of them and they can't use their lawyers to come in...It is far easier to call up their political leaders. I understand why the environmental community is leery of this but it is the only way to go."

Greg Sherman, considered to be the lone environmental representative on the Steering Committee, is the President of Western Environment and Ecology, an environmental engineering firm. Sherman also owns a ranch in North Park and had this insight into why environmental groups are hesitant to join collaborative efforts: "Recognized environmental groups, I would not say The Nature Conservancy, but certainly Sierra Club and Friends of the Earth, are not interested in [collaborative partnerships]. From my numerous contacts in trying to get them involved [with OMP] they feel it is not the best use of funds and the products produced because they are a compromise do not meet their goals. I think you will find this universally, that recognized environmental groups do not like the collaborative process and don't get involved and don't support it." Sherman also thought environmentalists continually keep their distance from the collaborative process because: "One thing we have found is that compromise does not produce controversy and national environmental groups and funded on controversy. How do you get excited by a compromise? You can get all excited about getting all the cattle off the range, but if we compromise, gee we can't raise ten million bucks doing that." Similar sentiments we expressed by others such as Stephen Porters comment that "Their agenda appears to be litigation and not things that are working."

Although many members recognized the environmental community was missing, most felt it had not diminished OMP decisions. Jerry Jack when asked if he felt the lack of environmental representatives affected group decisions said: "No. I will tell you why. When you have representatives on the Steering Committee who are wildlife biologists for the USFS or landowners who are also active Nature Conservancy members and avid birders, I am not worried about the environmental aspect being lost." Verl Brown stated: "I am a rancher and I consider myself an environmentalist. [The lack of environmental representatives] does not bother me." Stephen Porter believes that environmental organizations are not worried about the OMP efforts: "They don't have a problem with what we are doing."

Kurt Cunningham, Conservation and Water Quality Chair of the Colorado Sierra Club had two thoughts about why there are no environmental organizations like Sierra Club involved with OMP. Cunningham indicated distance as one reason hindering participation: "It is way the hell out there and we don't have any volunteers in that area." Cunningham also mentioned the amount of time collaborative efforts can take up: "Even [if meetings were closer], you can waste a hell of a lot of time on these collaborative things. We don't have a lot of volunteers." Asked if he was concerned about the lack of representation, Cunningham stated, "In this case, I don't think so...I have never heard anyone say ill of [OMP]"

Citizens and Landowners

Several members also spoke about the lack of small ranching interests and the struggle to get past early problems of certain individuals trying to "wreck the process." Jack Haworth said, "I can understand why certain ranchers are not involved. I have mixed feelings. If you want to get something done there is this process. There is a lot of private land and there is too much government and we just don't want any part of it." Stephen Porter spoke in-depth about the problem OMP encountered when certain individuals "were placed there to wreak havoc. They thought a "no vote" could wreck it because we are consensus, but they could not say no to everything because a lot of it is good stuff. They eventually lost interest in constantly

voting no." Porter also said these events caused OMP to continually revisit whether consensus was the way the group should run.

Stephen Porter felt collaborative partnerships were much more likely to succeed if they are based upon high amounts of citizen involvement. Porter stated: "If the process can start from the local level and not be started by government I think that is by far the best way. At least to have extremely strong support from the local level that is willing to take on responsibility. Government took that responsibility in a region where government is not very popular and that created problems." Porter continued, "The governments job, if we really are redefining government, is to provide background support and the means to make things happen. And if government is truly concerned with land health, working together is the only way to go. Government is good at compartmentalizing and forest people think about the forest that is not sustainable resource management."

Strategies

OMP employs several strategies to ensure stakeholder representation, particularly with county officials, environmental organizations and a more diverse citizen base. Although strategies so far have not resulted in many successes, many members expressed a commitment at constantly reviewing to see who might be missing.

Several members said that OMP members often keep in touch with any stakeholders who might not be participating. For instance Greg Sherman noted that: "Someone unusually attends [a county] meeting once a month to give them an update on what we are doing." Cary Lewis similarly stated, "We keep in touch with those organizations [not at the table] if issues deal with them."

Most members stressed the openness of the OMP process as a strategy to encourage all stakeholders to participate. OMP also sends out a newsletter, has sponsored public events and publicly announces all meetings in the local newspaper.

In order to develop a more detailed relationship with environmental organizations, Greg Sherman invited Kurt Cunningham from Colorado Sierra Club to take a tour of several projects undertaken by OMP. Sherman said, "We were lucky to get Cunningham to go on a tour. That took a couple of years to arrange. We took him on a tour of the wildlife refuge and the grazing patterns we are doing on the refuge and other grazing practice products we are producing...and he thought on the refuge the grazing was well done and improving the habitat so that was a big step." Cunningham said of the trip: "I was not sure how some of it related to Owl Mountain Partnership, but it was interesting...as far as I can tell it looked reasonably successful." Sherman also mentioned how early on he would relay information on to the environmental community and explain what OMP was doing.

Advice

OMP members offered a range of advice about how to ensure stakeholder representation.

- Stephen Porter said, "Never forget it. Constantly address the gap and if someone is not being represented don't just tokenly once a year state that they are not being represented and not try to get them there."
- Jack Haworth had the simple advice of, "Just make sure all interested parties are there."
- Verl Brown noted that there is no one solution fits all: "I don't know. I think each community is going to be different. You are going to have to try to be open and honest and take chances."
- Cary Lewis suggested that, "You come up with conflicts you see you can get more interested people might want to get involved in."
- Jack Haworth mentioned ensuring stakeholder representation might mean, "you have to beat the brush depending upon issue. Depending what the group is focusing on. If you are focusing on education it is helpful to get help from extensions offices we have involved CSU (Colorado State University) and local high schools, student teachers. What we try to do is to figure out what we want to solve and then go seek the expertise if it is not already around the table."
- Greg Sherman offered the following suggestion: "Try to make as many contacts as you can. Be informed with local issues important to the group and if you get a representative from a national environmental group, great, if not well try to represent yourself as best you can."

Local/National Tension

The majority of the land within North Park is publicly managed lands, mainly BLM and USFS. OMP members do not feel national interests are being lost in their local partnership. "No, I don't believe it has been an issue," explained Greg Sherman, "most of the issues we have dealt with are local issues." Cary Lewis commented, "No big conflict there. The agencies had to answer to the big guy in Washington at times but other than that we are pretty well-supported."

Both Stephen Porter and Verl Brown see local/national tension on public lands as an issue, although Porter states: "If the national interests are truly in healthy rangeland, the best way to address that is through a process that government can feed into to allow it to happen from the management side rather than a regulatory side. It is what I see getting done on the ground (here)...the bottom line is what is best for the land and doing it." Finally the words of Verl Brown: "Oh yeah, I see it all the time...people have to realize they can not run this county from Rhode Island. They have no idea. I tend to ignore the problem and tell people to take care of their own backyard."

Advice

Several OMP members gave advice on how to deal with the tension often felt within local collaborative groups dealing with public lands:

- Verl Brown explained, "You have to be confident in what you are doing and you can't always be looking over your shoulder. You have to have confidence in your ability to analyze what is going on and recommend possible changes and admit when you are wrong and to change it as quick as you can."
- Stephen Porter suggested, "By bringing [local/national tensions] up and addressing it. Constantly keep motives in mind. Identify the tension, address it, and talk about it."
- Greg Sherman said, "You have to have thick skin. Do not let early failures detract you. The ultimate goal of collaborative planning is what you need to fix your attention on and not, gee, is the (news)paper happy with us. Have an eye on the prize and not worry what others think."

Accommodating Diverse Interests

According to Stephen Porter, "Working with diverse people on land and resource issues," was the greatest challenge faced by OMP. Having several ranchers, several agency personnel, an environmental engineer, a recreational outfitter and among others a timber industry representative working collaboratively creates a dynamic that most individuals had never experienced prior to OMP. Members mentioned several particular challenges, as well highlighted some opportunities, that the diverse interest brought to OMP.

Challenges

Trust

The water quality-monitoring program was an issue several members brought up when speaking about a challenge the diverse interests brought to OMP. Early on in the partnership several members wrote a grant seeking Section 319 money from the EPA to design a water quality-monitoring program that could be done by volunteers. Within the grant proposal the members alluded to sedimentation problems possibly caused by off-highway vehicle use, livestock grazing, mining and timber harvesting.

The grant proposal caused two sets of problems both founded upon mistrust. The first according to Stephen Porter was the fact that, "water in [Jackson] county was looked upon by the county and the local water quality district as on their turf and we told them right up front we thought that we were doing something they should be doing." Porter continued, "They said they did not want to do [the water quality monitoring] because it would raise concern in

the environmental sector and water users in the county might lose water rights. We disagreed with that saying if we are doing something now, we are less apt to losing it down the road. They did not buy into that."

According to Greg Sherman, the second problem the 319 grant proposal brought about was "When the ranchers found out that [the inclusion of livestock grazing as a possible cause of sedimentation] was in the grant they went to the county commissioner and tried to get the entire thing killed. We started a war you cannot believe." Sherman continued to state the problem was resolved "By sitting down with the water quality commission and the county commissioners and explaining what we did have and if there was an error it was in the proposal, not the data itself, and they began to see this as well."

Several members have said that building trust within the community has been the most difficult challenge OMP has faced. "People still don't understand what OMP is all about" said Verl Brown; "I had a guy coming around last fall who was running for County Commissioner and so I asked him what he thought of OMP, and he had no clue what it was about. He did not even come close." When asked how to solve the misunderstandings and mistrust, Verl Brown said, "I don't know. We are a small community with many problems that affect the mental attitudes of folks in the community. There are not many open minds. I think you need to just keep plugging away."

Jerry Jack had the feeling that some of the county officials were beginning to come around, "They are starting to come back now. When I took over as project manager I think there was a feeling that BLM is more used to dealing with a variety of resource issues not just wildlife (Stephen Porter of CDOW was the former project manager)." Jack continued, "After five or six years of waiting for us they have found out OMP was not driving people out of business, was not trying to buy up private lands, all those things the fear factor was about. All those changes have lead to a realization that we are not a big threat." Stephen Porter said, "The majority of people are still watching us, we have more active support, than non-support and that is why [county officials] have not stepped on us."

Watered Down Decisions

Verl Brown felt solid decisions have come from OMP: "The Hebron Sloughs was a pretty radical approach and we just jumped in and did it. We have not had to compromise much." Asked if he thought any decisions had been watered down by compromise, Greg Sherman explained, "Being a consensus group we started off not knowing what [consensus] meant. We confronted [the possibility of watered down solutions], and we have defeated it numerous times." Sherman continued by giving the water quality monitoring issue as an example where the group could have just walked away when discussions got "hot." Several other members said similar things when referring to Hebron Sloughs that showed the group could take radical approaches if needed for land health. Stephen Porter noted: "If a group is working like it should, with diverse stakeholders there, [less than optimal solutions] should not happen. If one person is guiding it...it can happen."

Several members mentioned there are times when they would not be willing to compromise in order to avoid what they felt would be a "less than optimal" decision. Greg Sherman

described a situation that has come up where he would not be willing to compromise: "With sage brush control whether we want to go with herbicide treatment, fire or something else. Often times a rancher will go with whatever is easiest which is to apply herbicide and don't worry about it. Time and again my position is we need to re-evaluate on a case-by-case basis whether the site is suitable for herbicide. I will not compromise on that. It has not been difficult due to the trust we have developed. When I say I am concerned with this site because of shallow groundwater and potential fly-by [they understand]."

Time

Two participants mentioned that working with diverse interests took time to get used to. Stephen Porter noted that, "It is a time thing. It just takes time to get the mechanics of the process together." Cary Lewis described the differences among OMP members as "different livelihoods" and said a particular challenge of time is, "trying to get decisions made takes a little while to get the best solutions found and convince people that they can live with it can take even longer."

Opportunities

The diverse interests at the table adds many positive aspects to OMP. Speaking about a positive outcome obtained from the diverse perspectives of OMP members, Jerry Jack said, "I think most ranchers now realize that you need some sort of grazing system, you just don't throw the cattle out on the field and leave them seasonally in riparian zones, you need to move them." Jack continued about the positive aspects of input from diverse representation: "There is a greater recognition of the importance of wildlife. I think some of our group members had not been around ranchers much came with certain opinions have had those changed when they have met people and seen how they do things." Verl Brown said, "You get the resources for different ideas. I think the diversity adds a lot."

Strategies

Building trust for many OMP members was not a great challenge due to the small community feel of North Park. "I did not initially distrust anyone," said Verl Brown. Cary Lewis explained how there was a lot of "new stuff" and that is the reason, "It took me four to five months to build trust." Greg Sherman built his trust "over a year" when he was "thrown in the fire with the water quality monitoring program." Several members also said the main way to build trust was to sit through many meetings and eventually the trust comes.

According to Stephen Porter, constantly addressing differences was a strategy to bring members together. When asked how OMP dealt with the diversity, Porter stated, "Mainly by bringing it up and addressing differences. We constantly need to keep our motives in line."

Advice

Several members provided advice on how to maximize the positive aspects of diverse representation while minimizing any shortcomings:

- Verl Brown simply said, "You have a variety of resources and you have to learn how to tap into them."
- Greg Sherman mentioned the trust element: "Don't have hidden agendas. Get to trust. You don't have to agree with what they are all saying, but get all the cards on the table and know where everyone is coming from."
- Jack Haworth spoke of having an open mind: "Try hard to work together. Be able to look at both sides. You might need to give a little at times."
- Cary Lewis suggested to "Be prepared for the future. Cover all the bases when making decisions and do not leave anyone out. This will allow you to have a much smoother ride in the future, to make a stand."
- Stephen Porter suggested collaborative partnerships should "Pay attention to the people you have at the table. Identify the workload up front. Promote energy needed to get going."
- Jerry Jack felt groups should, "Go out and do it. Don't wait for someone else; if you have an issue go out and do it. I am impatient about that stuff. Nobody ever is going to give you approval; you have to take a risk and do it."

Dealing with Scientific Issues

Some of the scientific issues with which OMP handles revolve around rangeland health, riparian and watershed quality issues, wildlife habitat and health and noxious weeds. Most members feel the group handles the scientific dimensions well and that needed scientific information is most often found within the group. If not, they go outside the group to find "experts" to answer their questions.

Challenges

Cary Lewis stated, "We deal with the science pretty well. We are a bunch of young modern thinking group. We can see the benefit to the technical side of things." Lewis continued, "There usually is enough (scientific information) at the table. The agencies have been gathering data for years. They know a lot." When Stephen Porter was asked how well OMP manages scientific issues, he explained, "Good, not excellent. That is where Greg Sherman comes into play. Government is good at collecting data and filing it and Greg said, no you collect data to use it for management down the road and you constantly go back to the data and re-evaluate...Like our vegetation database that is something we need to use." Porter continued, "We did not have trouble figuring out what we needed and knowing that we did not have all the resources to deal with it."

Asked if he thought OMP members had the needed scientific background, Verl Brown said, "Yeah, I think so. Greg Sherman, in the area of water, I don't think we could find anyone better. We have had some timber experts. BLM and USFS have done a lot of good studies we

have access to. I'd say that goes pretty smoothly." Jerry Jack answered the same question by stating, "Yes, ranchers have experience from thirty years on the land. They may not know the genus or species of all the grasses and plants, but they sure can tell you which ones are important to their land."

Greg Sherman spoke about how many members deal with science differently: "Ranchers usually stand back and listen to the agencies that do have these experts and evaluate the gist of what they are saying. Ranchers seldom come up with scientific bases, but respect the agency people that add that." Sherman continued, "We have a lot of good internal people and haven't used a lot of external people."

Advice

OMP members had several pieces of advice regarding how collaborative groups should deal with the scientific dimension of the issues they are addressing

- Jerry Jack felt common sense should not be underestimated: "Don't get wrapped up in the scientific issues. Don't put all your trust in going out and collecting baseline data. You better use some common sense in what you are doing."
- Stephen Porter said, "First identify what your priorities are and what you want to look at and then start to look at where you can get that science. A lot of rural groups do not like science...you have to have a strong scientific component. That is where you will get eaten alive if your protocols are all wrong, if you did not gather good data, if you did not use data accurately in the best means. That is where the scientific community will come in and chop you to pieces."
- Cary Lewis felt dealing with science is more of an opportunity than a challenge: "Look at it as an opportunity not a challenge. Make us of it."
- Verl Brown said, "Don't be afraid of it. You have to look for the truth and can't be afraid of finding something you don't like."
- Greg Sherman felt groups need to recruit members with scientific backgrounds: "Get as many people with the needed expertise on your committee."

Accommodating Diverse Capabilities

Challenges

Most OMP members did not find the varying levels of knowledge, power, resources and skills OMP members bring to the table to be a challenge. "Maybe we have not had that big of a problem come up, maybe things just move slow enough," said Cary Lewis. When asked if the varying levels of knowledge, power and skills members bring to the table has negatively affected any decisions the group has made, Verl Brown said, "That is a little deep for me. I

like to take what I see is what is there. I don't look for those types of things. I just see us as all equal and if somebody else thinks they are better than I am, well that is their problem."

Greg Sherman thought the varying levels of capabilities as "More of a personality problem. You have some people who are louder, more aggressive than others. It could theoretically control where the group is going. What really happens, though, is it puts a lot of weight on the private landowner's side. They are typically very quiet about it, but when they do say something about it, everyone listens...and the ones that yap most kind of get shut off."

The varying capabilities, especially power, can often lead to politics being brought into the group either by members or from the community. Several members of OMP expressed discomfort with the role politics has played throughout the first five years. Much of this discomfort seems to be rooted in the county government's distrust of the process and agency bureaucracy. "The politics is a real problem," said Verl Brown, "Everyone wants power...the power struggle between people and agencies...that is a real drawback on getting things done. Right now we are talking about getting more into the area of issues rather than projects and it is going to be tough because agencies do not like to give up their authority." Brown said the greatest challenge is "the political realm and the tendency to get drawn into politics." Cary Lewis said, "That some big name power has a trump card to change our whole decision on something always is there as a possibility. On the county level it has been especially rocky."

Strategies

One strategy suggested by several participants to deal with diverse capabilities was to get to know members outside of the formal partnership meetings. Jerry Jack said, "If someone because of their background, education or training doesn't understand, you have to take the time to sit down with them and explain it to them...Go out sit down and drink some coffee with them and explain things. It happens all the time." Stephen Porter mentioned other bonding experiences the group has done such as barbecues and work shops that has helped to build trust among members.

Advice

Greg Sherman and Stephen Porter had advice for other collaborative groups on how they can deal with the inevitable fact that members will bring varying capabilities to the table:

- Greg Sherman mentioned the importance of listening and keeping focused: "You have to keep your eye on why are you doing it and the reason why is collaborative management for land health and regardless of personalities that should be your goal. So listen to everyone on the committee with equal amounts of interest and efforts and not allow personalities to be a part of it even though they will be at times."
- Stephen Porter spoke of the importance of keeping aware of the issues and others at the table: "Listen and communicate back to other members your feelings. Be alert. Know what is going on. If answers are not at the table, find out where they are and make sure they get introduced. If there is a major question not getting answered make sure it does."