Moving Public Participation beyond Compliance: Uncommon Approaches to Finding Common Ground

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This article explores how assumptions behind process design can facilitate or hinder success of public participation. In particular, we explore strategies that can open up new avenues to move public participation beyond required compliance to become an opportunity to improve natural resource management. Federal land managers have regularly included public input in decision-making for decades, with varying results. Legal mandates require certain procedures for including public input, yet a variety of processes can be designed to fulfill these requirements. While public hearings once were used to comply with these requirements, new paradigms for public participation are emerging, and managers are gaining experience with innovative approaches to better understand stakeholders and implement more durable decisions.

Federal natural resource management agencies are responsible for managing resources on public lands as public trust resources, to be protected and preserved in trust by the government for the benefit of current and future generations (Baer 1988). In the course of fulfilling this responsibility, natural resource managers regularly address problems that are highly complex, ambiguous, and steeped in uncertainty about the response of the ecosystem to interventions. While each agency has a specific mission that defines its purpose with respect to resource management, segments of the public (for whom the agencies manage) may have interest in the resources based on different sets of values than managers and often different from each other. In such situations, it is not surprising that management responses to complex natural resource issues often evolve into public issues when stakeholders believe they may be impacted[1] by either the resource itself (e.g., wildlife such as predators or ungulates, insect or fungal disease outbreaks, fire, rangeland condition) or the means for managing the resource (e.g., allowing or restricting certain forms of recreation, eradicating exotic wildlife, distribution of grazing allocations, access to public lands). Federal land managers working in this context constantly find themselves making decisions that involve negotiating between fulfilling their conservation mandates and satisfying the myriad publics, both local and national, to whom they are responsible.

In previous eras, federal agency actions were less likely to be challenged by the public; but today citizens expect opportunity for involvement in natural resource management decision-making (Decker, Brown, and Siemer 2001). Partially fueled by the environmental movement of the 1960s and '70s, a public that increasingly values wilderness and non-consumptive recreation, heightened distrust of government, and democratization of information (mak-

ing technical information more available to a more knowledgeable public), managers are experiencing increased pressure to adopt a collaborative strategy of decision-making (Wondolleck and Yaffee 2000). The federal government is responding by placing greater emphasis on stakeholder involvement in recent law and policy, such as the Negotiated Rulemaking Act of 1996 (5 USC § 561 *et seq.*), the Executive Order "Facilitation of Cooperative Conservation" (E.O. no. 13352, 69 *Federal Register* 52989, August 26, 2004), and the National Park Service (NPS) Director's Order no. 75A, *Civic Engagement and Public Involvement* (2007).

Approaches to public participation have been described in terms of a continuum that reflects the degree of citizen engagement and power in the decision-making process, ranging from token or non-participation, where the decision is made by the vested powers alone, to co-management, where citizens are embraced as partners in the final decision and management implementation (Arnstein 1969; Decker and Chase 1997; Smutko and Garber 2001; Chase, Siemer, and Decker 2002; Leong et al. 2009). Leong et al. (2009) identified three underlying paradigms along this continuum, reflecting shifts from top-down governance (no public involvement), to a governance model that includes public input, to one that emphasizes public engagement. Public input approaches comply with legal mandates to include the desires of diverse stakeholders, often with an underlying assumption that the optimal resource decision will require trade-offs that balance competing interests. Public engagement approaches utilize dialogue-based processes that emphasize mutual learning and treat participation as an opportunity for cooperation between stakeholders who may "create value" by identifying areas where they share common interests.

Some critics worry that a cooperative approach to resource management encourages agencies to relinquish too much power to local publics, rather than enforce agency conservation mandates (Heilprin 2004), while others believe that cooperation between agencies and the public will lead to more sustainable resource management practices (Wondolleck and Yaffee 2000). These diverse interpretations reflect a dilemma of collective decision-making. In any collective management decision, participants negotiate between three interrelated areas, each of which influences the outcome: the substance of what is being allocated or managed, the procedures or processes through which those participants interact, and the relationships between the participants in the decision. But what happens when one or more of these interests is privileged over others? Parties who pay attention only to substance risk damaging relationships (and may not necessarily do well on substance); parties who only pay attention to process risk "going through the motions," sacrificing both substantive outcomes and stronger relationships; and parties who only pay attention to relationships might risk adopting a process that teaches them nothing and ignores substantive losses. To learn how some managers are successfully balancing substance, process, and relationships in natural resource decision-making, we interviewed natural resource managers, planners, and practitioners who had experience with both competitive and cooperative participatory processes.

Methods

Natural resource managers in the Northeast and National Capital regions of the National

Park Service, social scientists, and planners were asked to identify practitioners or other managers who had experience designing and facilitating both competitive and cooperative approaches to public participation in natural resource management decisions for federal public lands. Twenty-two practitioners and agency managers or planners identified in this way were invited to participate in semi-structured informal interviews. Interviews of approximately one hour's duration were conducted either face-to-face or by telephone, during normal business hours from January 24, 2005 to October 28, 2005. Interviewees were asked to describe their experiences with (1) civic engagement and public participation efforts of federal land management agencies and (2) designing and implementing participatory processes. Questions followed an interview guide, with follow-ups and probes added as necessary for clarification. Confidentiality was assured.

Interviewees described experiences as employees of or contractors for the following organizations: National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Department of Agriculture–Forest Service, US Geological Survey, US Department of Energy, and US Department of Defense. Respondents were not asked to provide official agency position statements, thus responses were considered to reflect only opinions of the individual responding. We did not audio record interviews; quotations in the text are an attempt to reproduce their words as faithfully as possible from handwritten notes taken during the interviews that were written up in detail immediately following the interviews and validated by interviewees in reviews of manuscript drafts. This research was approved by Cornell University's University Committee on Human Subjects (Protocol ID no. 04-04-043).

Findings

Interviewees' experiences with public participation were examined with respect to the tension between public input and public engagement approaches to participation and implications for substantive outcomes, processes used to make collective decisions, and relationships between parties. In addition, challenges to adopting more cooperative approaches to public participation were identified.

Substantive outcomes Interviewees indicated a number of conditions that resulted in competition over substantive outcomes of federal natural resource management decisions. Many interviewees mentioned the preoccupation of federal agencies with the potential for every decision to be adjudicated in court, a common concern of NPS natural resource managers (Leong and Decker 2005). Judicial processes are explicitly adversarial. Parties are cast as opponents who need to make the strongest case for their own interests in a context where only one will win; it is in no one's interest to think of outcomes that split the difference or produce creative, win–win decisions (Wondolleck and Yaffee 2000). If parties think they can do better in court than through a cooperative negotiation, they may choose to sue. Because of the diversity of values extant in the American public, interviewees recognized that it is practically impossible to reach an agreement that pleases everyone. This causes many managers to approach public participation cautiously, in terms of defending agency actions to the public, in preparation for what is perceived as inevitable adversarial conflict. Interviewees believed that a public input approach to public participation (sometimes termed "compli-

ance") reinforced the adversarial, competitive understanding of participation. As one planner described, "A public hearing in general has an outcome, you can grant or deny. It has winners and losers." An agency scientist referred to this approach as "invite–inform–ignore," while a third interviewee used the more familiar phrase, "decide–announce–defend."

In contrast, one manager described a planning process that focused considerable effort on discovering the interests of potentially affected communities by engaging in informal communication networks. In this approach, park staff met with stakeholders "on their turf, at their convenience," in informal gathering places such as churches and coffee shops to discover the topics of concern that were being discussed every day, as well as ways that park management might affect those concerns. These dialogues helped identify the people who were influential in the community (not necessarily as elected officials of a known organization, but those who the rest of the community listened to) and who would be necessary to include in more formal scoping processes, but who might not ordinarily come. This manager acknowledges that this approach does not necessarily lead to agreement on all facets of issues. Nevertheless, by using this approach in a recent general management plan, he sees that the park is now better able to articulate why they're doing what they're doing with confidence, and that the deeply emotional issues associated with their management appear to be less contentious and controversial than they had feared initially. Another manager described how this process helped identify changing local demographics that affected resource use. Using a process (provided by a consulting firm) to learn about communities via informal networks, the managers identified needs which may have been completely missed otherwise, an oversight that likely would have necessitated a formal amendment of the management plan in the future, costing additional staff time and resources.

In addition to the ever-present threat of lawsuits, interviewees noted that agency assumptions about the authority of certain kinds of knowledge encourage a tendency to utilize participatory processes that emphasize substantive outcomes. One agency scientist believed this mind-set was perpetuated through agency emphasis on "decisions based on sound science." He indicated that "a myth has grown up that sound science alone will solve the problem. It relieves us of the need for the hard work of deliberation. It has decreased the focus on relationships. Information doesn't make decisions, people make decisions." Susskind and Field (1996) note that most people operate from a belief that we are able to interpret reality objectively, and that our social attitudes, beliefs, preferences, and priorities are rational, unemotional, and unbiased. As a result, we assume that anyone with an opposing viewpoint has limited information or is biased or irrational. These assumptions can lead to negotiations that attempt to convince or persuade other parties, using participation as a means to garner support from the public rather than listen to public concerns.

Alternatively, as one manager noted, "there may be twelve people with the same issue, but twelve different reasons for having that issue." He believed that rather than focus on the substance of the issues themselves, managers should first try to understand the reasons behind the issues. Key to this observation is that the same information may be interpreted differently by different people based on their underlying beliefs or on the social context, such as the historical relationship between the community and the agency, assumptions about

what the other group is saying, and level of knowledge about the topic (Ziman 1991; Weeks and Packard 1997; Weber and Word 2001). One agency scientist emphasized that

> Information must be three things: credible and accurate, salient to the issue at hand, and legitimate in the eyes of the public. To accomplish that, you need relationships that are transparent, open and accessible to everyone. All forms of knowledge have to be respectfully questioned and examined, both traditional and expert. This builds the legitimacy of expert knowledge. Otherwise, people will take the attitude, 'If you dismiss my local knowledge, I will dismiss your expert knowledge.'

From this perspective, relationships and processes that build relationships help participants discover each other's (perhaps diverse) understanding of the substantive issue. Interviewees described public engagement processes resulting in this type of comprehension as "amazing, it's phenomenal" and "transformative, it's amazing to watch"—observations similar to what is described in the literature as "light bulbs going off" (Forester 1994) and transformations of awareness resulting in personal growth (Lowry, Adler, and Milner 1997). Through such transformative processes, parties realize the need to learn about each other as well as the issues at hand, helping them overcome presumptions that might restrict their ability to think creatively about options (Forester 1999). Until this understanding is reached, "issues look different to opposing partisans, who think their own perceptions—and emotional reactions—are the only 'natural' ones" (Susskind and Field 1996).

One interviewee observed that most public participation efforts are focused on agency concerns, whereas learning about the public's concerns may help agencies discover more sustainable management alternatives. He explained:

> Rather than asking people always to come to our meetings, we need to go out to find out what are their issues, how to align with their goals, instead of asking them always to align with our goals. We need to be there to listen rather than inform and tell, we need to be more participants.

Another practitioner believed that understanding community issues, irrespective of the specific project, can help frame the project in terms of solutions that help both the community and the agency meet their respective goals. As an example, he described an agency project to restore habitat for an endangered species. By using a public engagement approach to learn about community issues, they discovered that community residents did not care about the endangered species, but were concerned about the general issue of youth leaving the area and the more specific need for more camping sites. By learning about these community priorities, a plan was developed that created opportunities to address community concerns via habitat restoration.

Although "sound scientific information that is credible, accurate, salient to the issue at hand, and legitimate in the eyes of the public is crucial in natural resource decision-making," it also is important to understand how each party interprets and understands that informa-

tion. Such dialogue based on "good information" requires that each party has a good understanding of each other's interests and concerns. As one interviewee observed:

> Managers carry myths around that 'people don't want X.' There is a need for mutual education—for the agency to learn about the community on its own terms, not what the communities can do for them, and the community learning about the agency and its mission.

This sentiment was reiterated by another manager: "There is a need for education, both of those outside and inside the park service. [Public participation] should be an opportunity to make you a better manager." Another interviewee explained, "Even if you don't agree, listen. Tell them why you don't agree, have a conversation. They may convince you."

Process As with substance, focusing solely on the procedural components in a negotiation also can lead to poor outcomes. A procedural orientation focuses on process criteria, such as how many people participated, how many spoke at a meeting, how well meetings were publicized, whether dialogue occurred, etc. Alternatively, success can be gauged in terms of process-related outcomes (i.e., outcome criteria), such as whether participants' comments were useful, whether participants' comments influenced decisions, whether participants were satisfied with the process, and whether relationships between the agencies and participants improved (Chess and Purcell 1999; McComas 2001).

Laws such as the Administrative Procedures Act of 1946 (5 USC § 551 *et seq.*) and the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA; 42 USC § 4321 *et seq.*) require federal agencies to provide for public involvement in federal decision-making. One manager pointed out that agencies typically use public input approaches to participation that focus entirely on NEPA's Section 102, the action-forcing portion of the law, which lead them to forget about Section 101, the portion of NEPA that emphasizes productive harmony and working with communities. Section 101 declares it to be a policy of the federal government "to create and maintain conditions under which man and nature can exist in productive harmony, and fulfill the social, economic, and other requirements of present and future generations of Americans" (42 USC § 4331). This manager believed that the focus on Section 102 has not been productive, and has resulted in "making the system more complex. We're making assumptions about what we know. When we find out we don't know, we get sued." The emphasis on Section 102 stems from legal rulings that have upheld NEPA as imposing only procedural requirements, preventing uninformed, rather than unwise, agency action (*Robertson v. Methow Valley Citizens Council,* 1989, 490 US 332). Yet, as previously described, public input processes that meet only procedural requirements run the risk of being framed as adversarial and historically have resulted in many court challenges. Lawsuits may force agencies to start over, reassessing both the nature of the problem and appropriate solutions, as in the case of deer management at Cuyahoga Valley National Park (National Park Service 2003). Another manager provided an example of what happens at a typical public meeting designed to comply with procedural public input requirements:

> At a typical public forum there are about 30 people, and maybe 3 or 4 who will speak out. Most are sitting silently, thinking. They are there because they feel something about the place,

> but the majority are not comfortable speaking in a public forum. By the end of the meeting they feel forced to choose one of the articulated positions. It may not be quite right, but they feel they have to choose. This leads to the creation of factions. People start discussing 'I agree with what John said' while someone else says 'well, I liked what Sally said more' and then they get entrenched.

This manager believed that more informal processes could better engage the public and encourage effective dialogue, providing those less comfortable speaking in a public setting an opportunity to explain how they feel, rather than siding with someone else's articulated position. Another manager described the typical lose–lose outcome stemming from public input processes that simply meet legal requirements: "If both sides are equally mad at us, we're successful." Everyone leaves the process feeling as though they have done poorly, yet they do not see how any alternative is possible. This manager believed that agencies resigning themselves to this mind-set have allowed fringe organizations to "isolate agencies in the middle," an often described sentiment when public input approaches to participation are adopted.

One interviewee described an example of a more productive approach that followed the cooperative philosophy outlined in NEPA's Section 101. Six years of traditional public input processes had been unable to yield agreement in a dispute over a proposed resource management plan that would have a lifespan of approximately 20 years. Recognizing that continuing down this path was likely to end in court, the agency adopted a new public engagement format to discover each group's issues, facilitated workshops around those issues, and held many field trips on weekends, including meals together. They developed relationships and informal communication networks that helped identify interested parties, complementing formal announcements in newspapers and other media. Collectively, they recognized early on that they would not have enough information to make definitive decisions that would endure for the 20-year span of the plan, so rather than fight "tooth and nail" over substantive details, they chose an adaptive management approach. The focus on their common interest in a healthy ecosystem led to a solution where an influential landowner with a large landholding voluntarily changed its management practices, and an environmental group accepted responsibility for monitoring ecosystem condition. Both parties meet regularly with the agency, examining data and making decisions from year to year. After about three years, they were able to implement a plan, whereas previously there had been six years of negotiation with no agreements. By changing their approach to participation, they were able to reach a productive outcome in half as much time.

Interviewees also indicated the importance of utilizing less formal processes to improve understanding of local community dynamics. One manager described a situation where an approach to participation based on informal networks revealed that the local community leaders were not likely to attend public meetings. This manager believed that reaching out to these individuals via community networks rather than formalized processes was necessary to ensure that the agency did not "get caught blindsided" within the 20-year planning cycle. Another interviewee described how informal networks could be used to improve the turnout at public meetings:

> At a public meeting where normally you would get ten people if you advertised in the newspaper, you get 200 [if you go through informal networks]. If you call five people, they call others; they post flyers in the community where you wouldn't think to post. And the 200, they'll be interested to hear what you have to say, vs. the ten who only want you to hear what they have to say.

Not all federal actions require extended negotiation with the public. For example, many standard operating activities are considered "categorical exclusions" under NEPA, meaning that they have no potential to impact the human environment and are not likely to be controversial (National Park Service 2001). Other situations are not always clear-cut, and it may be up to a manager to determine the level of participation they choose to pursue. Two interviewees described cases where simply educating the public on the NEPA process resulted in community-developed alternatives that were adopted as the preferred alternative by the agency. In both cases, the community alternatives included a co-managerial aspect that would have been outside the jurisdiction of the agency; i.e., the agency could not have developed that alternative on its own. In one instance the agency was planning a visitor facility and had identified a number of potential sites, all on agency property. A neighboring municipality that had been looking to revitalize the area was interested in the economic benefits this facility could bring. They identified two sites that were on land owned by the municipality, but adjacent to agency land, and submitted these sites as alternatives during the NEPA public comment phase. The agency included their sites in the final analysis and ended up choosing one as the preferred alternative. With this alternative, the agency does not need to use any of its own land to develop the facility, and the facility is in a more prominent location to attract visitors, benefiting both the agency and the local community.

In the second case, the agency was developing a recreation management plan. Seventeen local area recreation groups with different foci (e.g., shooting, off-road vehicle recreation) organized into an outdoor recreation association and developed an alternative that not only met agency objectives but also would help the community prevent future sprawl, a common interest that united the recreation groups. Agency managers realized that if they could work with the communities to implement this alternative, they might be able to preserve those lands forever; if not, they would be fighting with them to make it something else (that the communities might not necessarily want). Managers also recognized that if they chose the community-developed alternative, they would already have an allied group of 17 organizations who would help with implementation. This manager acknowledged that "all [the communities] needed was a better idea of how we do it with NEPA with respect to alternatives. They were able to take what they wanted to do and fit it within the NEPA process, it wasn't hard for them to do." Another manager remarked,

> There is a need to discover. Are there other possible solutions that have been overlooked? Maybe we saw them but overlooked them because they're outside our realm of control. Bringing partners and citizens in opens up solutions that you may have dismissed because you were not able to control.

Relationships Interviewees indicated that relationships affect federal resource management in two ways. First is a competitive situation where parties utilize relationships and political power to influence decisions (e.g., lobbying Congress rather than engaging in participatory processes). Interviewees gave examples of cooperative approaches to participation that helped reduce the use of this strategy. One planner described a stakeholder who changed his behavior when a public engagement process was adopted by the agency. After attending some of these meetings, a stakeholder who previously would stand in front of the agency and picket now engages in reasonable discussions with the planner. Another manager described a situation in which cooperative approaches produced a solution that was agreeable to all local parties, and local environmental groups were successful in requesting that the parent national environmental groups (who typically have more lobbying and political power) not get involved. Although one national environmental group appealed the decision, voicing concerns that differed from the local chapter, they did not file a lawsuit.

Alternatively, a focus on building relationships taken to the extreme runs the risk of ceding decision-making power to the public, which some fear could result in substantive losses in terms of protection of the resource (Heilprin 2004). This approach typically is not included in the continuum of public participation because it results in the agency forfeiting its responsibility to manage in the public trust, which is illegal (*Illinois Central Railroad Co. v. State of Illinois,* 1892, 146 US 387). Interviewees recognized that "the buck stops with the agency. Legally the agency has the ability to make the decision," but that "the decision is likely to be a better one and more durable if you listen to the public." One interviewee described an approach to building relationships that avoids forfeiting agency management mandates:

> The Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement was started by the agency around 1995. It is a diverse coalition of environmental, outdoor recreation, and scientific organizations, about 20 different groups including: The Wilderness Society, Safari Club, National Rifle Association, Wildlife Federation, Sierra Club. All they agreed on was that the refuge system is important and should be funded. They developed a written agreement, a chartered agreement that says they all agree the refuge system is important, but they don't have to agree on specific activities. They can't agree on activities because of the different purposes for groups, they recognize that. The Fish and Wildlife Service set up the group for its centennial anniversary, they decided to see if the groups would all want to work for a common goal. Since then, the funding for the refuge system has increased significantly. Now the members of [the alliance] are listening to each other better, the level of acrimony has decreased. They don't deal with things they won't agree on, they work on things they can.

Another manager explained how initiatives to build relationships, learn about community issues, and empower citizens to influence decisions transformed his experiences at public meetings. Prior to relationship-building, he described public meetings where stakeholders would challenge government officials, saying "I think the government is full of BS," and noted that as a manager, "you expect this, expect to get beat up." After switching to a more cooperative approach, he described another meeting. A member of the public stood up and

began almost personal attacks against him. Someone else in the audience then stood up and said, "Shut up. We want to hear what he has to say." Others in the audience agreed, and it became self-policing. Rather than being "beat up," this manager felt that he was being protected by citizens. This manager notes that to adopt this approach, "you have to be committed to the possibility that your whole relationship with people will change."

Building relationships outside formal participatory processes also can lead to gains in unexpected areas. One manager gave an example of relationship-building at all levels of the agency. A maintenance person was sent to a farm to work on a restoration project. While he was working, a neighboring farmer came over and asked what he was doing. He could have ignored the farmer; instead, he stopped the machine and took the time to explain the project. The farmer thought the restoration work was "cool," said that he had land in similar condition, and asked if he could do the same thing. The refuge supervisor saw the value of this interaction and allowed the maintenance person to go out to the second farm. The maintenance person was sent to do one farm; he came back after doing 20 different restoration projects.

The Department of the Interior (DOI) emphasizes that good public participation involves lasting engagements with people, not just episodes (DOI 2005). As one manager explained:

> You make a deal differently with someone you know you'll never see again vs. someone you have to see every day. The longer you live, the more you realize you can't assume you will never see them again.

Another summarized:

> To be honest, working with the public is all about developing relationships. You always have a relationship with the public. People come to meetings with preconceived ideas, they come with a relationship. We also . . . have a predetermined perception of what their comments will be . . . we think we know what they will say. If we do business that way, we'll never get to issues, we'll only see positions.

Additional challenges

The examples presented above illustrate the pitfalls of public input processes that become competitions over substance, process, or relationships, as well as benefits of integrative public engagement approaches that can create value in all three areas. Interviewees acknowledged that application of public engagement has been uneven across the agency, and that factors such as history, timing, and personalities of stakeholders and agency staff can affect the success of these types of approaches. They also identified a number of institutional challenges to adopting more cooperative approaches to participation. These include the need for agency-wide commitment to public participation, clear communication of agency intent for outcomes of participatory processes, and lack of resources to conduct participatory processes.

A number of interviewees identified a need for broader-based commitment to cooperative public participation throughout the various agencies. They emphasized a need for sincerity from *all* agency staff involved in public processes, noting that if some agency representatives are not genuinely interested in learning from the public or show biased points of view, they can undermine any progress others have made towards cooperation. One scientist observed that often field managers recognize they need to engage the public, but they will not be effective unless those with the authority to make decisions (who are typically at higher levels within the agency) are involved in the process. Interviewees acknowledged that using cooperative processes to uncover public interests and values can be "very scary for a person in government, [to go] into things with no preconceived perception of what the outcome will be." This perception of risk can prevent individuals from adopting new approaches to participation. As one manager described:

> It can be foggy how you get from one step to the next. It was like that for me, like I was in a fog, I couldn't see the end. You had to have faith it's getting you forward. . . . [I managed to stick with it] because I have always believed . . . that the public should be empowered in decision-making and implementing. Early on in the process, I recognized this was a method that could allow this to happen. By aligning our management and issues to community issues, we would empower stewardship, empower citizens to implement actions. I was willing to take that risk because it was something I believe in deeply.

Another interviewee noted that publicly acknowledging different viewpoints is a skill that can be uncomfortable to develop. She explained:

> It is obvious to invite those who support you [to provide input]. It may be uncomfortable to invite those who are influential but don't necessarily support you. What I have learned is that if you don't invite other views early, there will be detractors later in process. There's a need for, and I'm still developing this, skills in working with people so that this approach is comfortable and successful. It can be a challenge when you're up in front of a group and people say negative things about [your agency], but by including them, the other people who are there see that you are inclusive. There is a big payoff in credibility by a lot of other people watching.

Interviewees also identified misperceptions among the public about agency intent for public participation as a barrier to more cooperative practices. One consultant thought this was especially true when people felt they hadn't been heard in the past. When this was the case, he believed public meetings often enhanced antagonism, rhetoric, and stereotypes, discouraging managers from further engaging with the public. He emphasized the importance of staff training in transparency: providing good information, being clear about expectations, and building relationships. He summarized: "I think people want honesty. They want to know 'what do you expect of us?' They want a commitment, 'how are you going to use our input?' The parameters need to be articulated or people will be skeptical." Another interviewee emphasized the importance of building relationships and trust for successful cooperative participation:

> What communities are really looking for are relationships. Through relationships they build trust. They all say the only way they can move forward is trust. It can be two years to develop trust. Trust has to be earned—once someone breaks trust, that's it. It always comes back to building long-term relationships and trust.

One interviewee believed that one of the problems facing agencies is that the public often feels that "we know you're in charge, you don't know we're here." In these instances, this manager explains the importance of showing that you've listened, and that if you don't agree with their solutions you can explain why and can explore other options together. Interviewees acknowledge that allaying public doubts about agency intent also is a process:

> Before you ever start formal public participation, you need to interject yourself, or a few people, into the community on their terms. It's personable. You peel layers of the onion away, the public positions, you need to get beneath these. And they do the same with you, they peel away the government façade to get to the reasons you're doing what you do.

Many managers cite lack of funding as an impediment to effective natural resource management planning (Leong and Decker 2005); i.e., they don't have the funding to invest in public participation even if they wanted to. Interviewees had a different perspective: they saw lack of funding as an opportunity to develop partnerships. One manager explained:

> Lack of funding leads to inability of the agency to do things by themselves. It becomes a great inventor, leads to solving problems in innovative ways. If you don't have the funding, you have to partner. You get money from partners, and are able to spend their money on your projects. For one project, I had a budget that was too small, I couldn't do it on my own. After building partnerships, I ended up with a 5 for 1 return on the dollar, of flexible money, not money to pay people's salary. But you need open partnerships so that people are able to influence how their money is spent. They are more willing to spend money if they are able to influence how it is spent. Say you don't have money for a project but you have staff. Spend the time, put 1 staff member forward. If each partner has 1 staff member they can devote, with 10 partners suddenly you have 11 people working on a problem where you started with one.

Other interviewees believed it was important to consider the timing of spending limited resources on public participation, stating:

> It's better to front-end load. There's an example of a park planning effort that didn't do this and is starting over because it was a failed effort. When this happens, it's harder to recover. You have to go back to the same people and do damage control.

One consultant lamented that many agency supervisors do not recognize that "front-end loading" may save the agency money in the long run. Individuals she had worked with saw the value of a more collaborative approach to public participation, but still framed it as something to try if the agency had the money to spend, rather than something that could save

the agency money in the long run. A number of interviewees noted that more dialogue-based, cooperative approaches to public participation were only adopted after issues had become so contentious that agencies and the public were at an impasse or because courts had ordered more public involvement. One interviewee believed that focusing cooperative public participation efforts earlier, on emerging issues, provided more opportunities to create partnerships. He believed that waiting until issues became disruptive was too late in the process.

Benefits and barriers

Negotiating between competitive and cooperative approaches to participation is not an easy task. Interviews with managers and practitioners corroborate findings in the literature that cooperative approaches to public participation can reveal mutual interests between agencies and stakeholders. Such revelation can aid in identifying potential management alternatives that create value by improving the substantive outcome for all parties as well as relationships between them. Interviewees also identified impediments to adopting this approach: an agency preoccupation with adversarial processes; agency emphasis on scientific knowledge over other kinds of knowledge; legal precedents that focus on process criteria of public participation rather than outcome criteria; the ability of stakeholders to utilize political power to make an "end run," rendering ineffective any collaborative efforts; and the fact that the agency has the final say in the management decisions.

DOI has identified eight principles of participation (Table 1) and notes that most often when participatory processes break down, it is because these basic principles have not been respected (DOI 2005). Interviewees described many of the DOI principles for public participation as essential for a cooperative approach to participation: transparency, ensuring all voices are heard, focusing on public interests and values, valuing relationships, and basing decisions on good information. They also identified constraints to adopting this approach, which corresponded to other principles: agency-wide commitment to public participation, clear communication of agency intent, and lack of resources. Yet, rather than treat components of successful participatory processes as separate principles, interviewees described an underlying public engagement philosophy that interwove the principles. This philosophy is founded on the assumption that the agency and stakeholders are interdependent and share

Table 1 DOI's eight principles of public participation (2005).

Establish clear commitment to excellent public participation
Base the level of public participation on the agency's intent
Be transparent in all actions
Ensure all voices are heard
Focus the process on public interests and values
Value relationships
Base decision-making on good information
Invest the necessary resources in planning public participation

interests. Interviewees indicated that these shared interests are better identified when the agency is open and transparent, honestly wants to learn from and with the public, and takes a proactive long-term approach to relationship building. Interviewees also recognized that this approach can be uncomfortable for managers who are used to a more episodic public input philosophy that fulfills procedural NEPA requirements. Even though managers do not cede ultimate decision-making power, they may feel like they have less control when they take a more cooperative approach to public participation. As one interviewee described:

> What I've learned is that you have to manage the process but let go of the outcome—you have to trust the process. Unfortunately I've seen in the past that the agency goes through the process just because they have to, or more often because they don't know what else to do or have already made up their mind. That's deadly, that's where you get into gridlock. The important thing is how to get managers to understand that they should not be uncomfortable with the outcome—don't worry about the preferred alternative, focus on the process. It's a leap of faith that the agency doesn't want to control the alternative. What they don't understand is that participation is not decision-making. The agency still has to make the decision. You can't get to compromise unless you understand issues and trust the process. You need to dissect the issues and put them back together again.

This process of "dissecting the issues and putting them back together again" can only take place if both managers and stakeholders approach public participation as an opportunity for mutual learning and transformations in understanding. This can be achieved through some of the alternate techniques described above, as well as by integrating social science associated with natural resources (e.g., the NPS social science program and the NPS Biological Resource Management Division's human dimensions program) and cultural resources (e.g., the NPS ethnography program and oral history program). Federal land management agencies engaging the public have legal responsibilities not only to include the public, but also for making the final decisions. As such, they are in a position of power relative to the public. If the more powerful party can demonstrate in good faith that they will adopt such a cooperative strategy, stakeholders would have more incentive to do likewise.

Experience from the fields of natural resource management, environmental conflict resolution and planning, and first-hand accounts from practitioners indicate that, in the long run, integrative processes that focus on building relationships to discover shared substantive interests are more likely to lead to fair, efficient, wise, and stable decisions (Susskind and Field 1996; Chess and Purcell 1999; Wondolleck and Yaffee 2000; Chase, Siemer, and Decker 2002; Forester 2009). While letting go of pre-conceived outcomes and trusting the process can be challenging for managers, it also can be powerful and transformative, resulting in unexpected outcomes that satisfy multiple interests and may be more sustainable. As summarized by one interviewee:

> The problem is that most people want to make decisions quickly, but sometimes quick decisions take a long time. You will have to keep going back if you don't get it right the first time, but if you get it right the first time, it might last forever.

The federal land managers and practitioners we interviewed recognized the costs of making quick decisions without adequately integrating stakeholder perspectives: the public instead find ways to be heard by blocking implementation. Rather, allocating resources for public participation early on can save time, money, and acrimony later. While it may take longer to reach the final decision, implementation proceeds more quickly. Adoption of this public engagement philosophy by interviewees resulted in the evolution of public involvement from a compliance exercise to lasting decisions and shared stewardship. We hope their experiences will encourage others to explore integrative public involvement processes that can help identify creative management alternatives. As interviewees discussed, this shift in philosophy takes time and commitment, yet the rewards are stewardship solutions that have the potential to last forever.

Endnote

1. "Stakeholders" are individuals who will be affected by, or will affect, wildlife management (Decker et al. 1996; Decker, Brown, and Siemer 2001). "Impacts" are the socially determined important effects (e.g., ecological, economic, psychological, health and safety, etc.) of events or interactions involving natural resources, humans and resources, and resource management interventions (Riley et al. 2002).

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