

ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT: SOCIAL ORIGINS AND SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES

Matthew S. Carroll

INTRODUCTION

The whole question of ecosystem management and the associated changes currently facing public land management in the Inland West are, I would argue, most productively viewed in a broader social context. Many at this symposium have talked about changes we are witnessing which are internal to the world of land management. I wish to take a different approach and, first, to focus on those changes ongoing in *society* that are influencing land management to move in the directions we are hearing so much about today. Secondly, I would like to address, from a social perspective, the challenges of implementing these changes in land management. Specifically, I would posit a relationship between the social consequences of many of these changes, the manner in which such consequences are addressed, and the likelihood of successful implementation. Let me present these subjects in the order in which I have introduced them.

SOCIETAL CHANGE

Clearly there are a myriad of changes going on in our society that can be seen to have some influence on land management. If this entire 3-day event was totally devoted to social issues we would clearly not exhaust the list of relevant topics. Let me suggest, however, four types of changes that are of particular relevance to land management in our region. These are as follows:

1. demographic changes in the region and nation;
2. changes in the world economy that are having a direct effect on the region;
3. changes in national politics; and
4. changes in the nature, focus, and use of forest and natural resource science.

The kinds of demographic changes to which I am referring include an increase in cultural and social diversity of our population. If we look at recent census data, for example, we see very significant increases virtually throughout the West in the population of Hispanics and other non-white racial and cultural groups, due mostly to patterns of migration. Another important demographic pattern is the urbanization and suburbanization of the West. A greater and greater proportion of us live in metropolitan areas, or in the suburban areas surrounding metropolitan areas, and fewer and fewer of us live in truly rural settings. This latter pattern has some interesting implications which time does not permit me to fully develop, but clearly fewer of us are directly linked, either economically or in terms of life experiences, to resource extraction activities.

Turning now to economics, one term being used in the literature to describe economic change is "uncoupling". "Uncoupling" in this context refers to the fact that some of the relationships taken for granted in the economy in the past are no longer found or at least, are no longer as strong and predictable as they once were. For example, the relationship between primary production and industrial production has changed. It used to be that if you had a newspaper in your hand, or a 2 x 4 in your wall, you knew pretty much where it came from, where and how it was produced, and who the actors were in the chain of events from harvest to final delivery of the finished product. Further, you knew that the cost of the raw material and its initial production were major components of the economic value of the finished product. Those relationships have become more complex today than they were in the past. Today it is much more difficult to know where that 2 x 4 came from, where it was produced, and who derived economic benefit from its production. Further, it may well be that the cost of the computer chips controlling mill production, and the software used to make transportation decisions, are more significant factors in the value of the end-product than the cost of initial production.

Another related economic change is the uncoupling of industrial production from employment. Thirty or forty years ago we knew if we carried out a certain activity on the land, such as a timber harvest, we could fairly readily predict the employment effects throughout the chain of events leading up to final delivery. Today this is much more difficult to do in light of such economic events as the "jobless recovery". This is not, of course, to suggest that primary production does not create employment, however, the linkage is weaker and more difficult to reliably predict.

Turning to the role of political changes in the larger society and their impact on land management, I would briefly draw attention to two phenomena experienced by most of the people in this room on a day-to-day basis in their jobs. One is the reduced trust by the general public of large institutions over the last two to three decades. By large institutions I refer not only to public and private agencies and corporations, but also to such entities as the resource professions themselves. The fact that a resource professional (or for that matter the majority of members of a professional society) favors a particular management action no longer guarantees public acceptance of that action. It would be a grievous oversimplification to attribute all land management conflicts to this wide spread social phenomenon, but our recent experiences in land management in this regard are part of a larger societal pattern.

The second political change is one that I need not belabor with this audience. This is the rise of environmentalism in western society. It is perhaps useful to remind ourselves, however, that environmental *philosophy* has been with us for generations in our writings and in the minds of a lot of people, but in recent decades environmentalism has become a far more potent *political* force in the world. Recent sociological analysis suggests that the political ascendancy of mainstream environmentalism is a far more complicated matter than simply the shift in public values that some writers have suggested. For those interested in this topic I would refer you to the work of Fred Buttel (particularly Buttel 1992).

Turning to the fourth type of social change on my list, I find that Logan Norris has already touched on the subject of changes in the focus of forest/natural resource science. Logan talked about a paradigm shift in forest science, a characterization with which I am in agreement. I would describe the paradigm shift in forest/natural resource science as having shifted from a production-oriented science to an ecosystem-oriented science. I would argue that those changes in the paradigm of the applied science in our field are not simply a function of what goes on internally in the scientific world, but rather are a function of some of the very changes in society that we have just briefly mentioned. The scientific world is certainly not isolated from the larger society. In fact, it is very much influenced by the values in the larger society. This audience needs no reminding that the impacts of such changes in scientific focus are potentially enormous because they influence the language, and indeed the intellectual framework, that we as professionals and the larger society place around land management questions and debates.

The series of societal changes briefly outlined here could, of course, be analyzed at far greater length in terms of their individual impacts on land management. However, what is important to point out is that it is really the *convergence* and *interactions* of these and other changes that is driving the land management trends that we observe. Thus, I would argue that we need to think *systematically* about the interaction of social and biological factors. I expect that Steve Daniels, in the paper that follows, will pick up on the theme of systemic thinking in these matters, so I will leave that subject for now. However, before leaving the subject of the social origins of land management changes, I wish to comment on one additional issue. This issue is the alleged "inevitability" of any particular change in land management that advocates, on one side or another of resource issues, occasionally posit. While there are clearly very real biological, social, and economic constraints on our future actions, I would contend that it is inaccurate, and perhaps bordering on intellectual dishonesty, to state that any particular alternative future is "inevitable". We clearly have some ideas about what the future may hold, but that future is really ours to shape. We have, in this discussion, identified a handful of societal influences playing on our land management, but yet we have many choices to make about the future. Rhetoric about the inevitability of any future end state can serve only to distract from the important choices yet to be made.

CHALLENGES TO IMPLEMENTATION

Now, I would like to turn our focus to the implementation of the kinds of land management changes that we have been discussing at this conference. A very important point that Logan Norris made earlier can serve as a starting point for this discussion. This is the fact that we really won't know what ecosystem management truly is until "it" is implemented. All the theory in the world is not going to tell us how it is actually going to work on the ground. As the changes are made, mistakes will undoubtedly be made. We are in for a period of tremendous learning.

From a social perspective, though, there are a couple of propositions regarding this implementation that I would suggest we consider. One proposition is that the success of implementation of ecosystem management will depend, in part, on how the social impacts play out. This is terribly important for a number of reasons. First, in our political system it is easier to block a change than it is to create one and make it stick. That is not a cynical statement, but a statement of how the system was designed to work.

The second proposition, very much related to the first, is that successful implementation will also depend on effectively involving stakeholders. Steve Daniels' and Gregg Walker's paper will discuss this in more detail, as well as the relationship between the kinds of decision-making processes and how we can effectively involve people. If one message is remembered from this presentation, I hope that it is about these two propositions.

Why do I posit these propositions? One of the reasons that the first proposition in particular seems plausible is that any change of the magnitude being discussed at this conference is going to redistribute the resources of society. Any shift of this magnitude changes the "rules of the game" for many stakeholders and there will very likely be winners and losers. Further, it is important to understand that the social impacts of this redistribution will occur in many places in the society. For example, consumers will probably pay more for some goods, and certain recreationists will face increased restrictions on their activities on the land.

However, if we are going to be honest with ourselves, many of the most immediate and negative social impacts will be felt in the rural sector. By negative, I mean negative from the standpoint of people who may not be particularly interested in, or perhaps even equipped to readily adapt to them. From some other perspectives these impacts may not be seen as negative, but from the perspective of those rural stakeholders being affected, clearly they are seen as negative. This appears to be true for a number of reasons. The most obvious of these reasons is that rural people tend to be those that are the closest to the land, in both a physical and economic sense.

THE RURAL SOCIAL LANDSCAPE

Here, I would like to digress. This digression is about rural people. I don't want to leave the impression that I am arguing that rural populations are homogeneous, or that all rural groups are going to react in the same way to particular changes in land management. In fact, the complexity of rural populations in the

Inland West is tremendous. For example, we have (1) Native Americans, the longest standing rural inhabitants; (2) "traditional" rurals, people who have made their living from the land typically in some form of primary industrial production; (3) people who moved to rural communities in the 1970s, the so-called back-to-the-landers, who have a different relationship to the landscape than folks who could be called traditional rural; and (4) recent "ex-urbs"—people who have moved to the rural areas, in part, to escape some of the problems in the growing urban areas. These are only four examples of the wide variety of people and groups living in rural areas who will feel the impacts of changes in land management (in many cases differently from each other).

When we think about the changes occurring in land management and the impacts they are having on rural communities, I think it is very important to bear in mind that rural communities are not simply geographic places defined by boundaries on maps. In fact, to many sociologists a community is not just a municipality. I refer to that thinking as "the geographic boundary fallacy". Just as we now recognize that ecosystems are not necessarily bounded by ranger districts or national forest boundaries, neither are human communities necessarily co-terminus with the political boundaries drawn around a particular state, township, or city. While we often speak of the "community impacts" of changes in land management, it is important to keep in mind that there will very likely be people in rural areas who are going to be affected differentially by any such changes. Thus, to talk simply about "the community level", in terms of impacts, may well mask as many impacts as it elucidates.

I prefer to look at rural "communities" (the rural social landscape, as it were) as a mosaic of groups who live together, sometimes peacefully and sometimes not, and who often have different stakes in the way lands are managed around them. In my job as a social analyst, instead of simply talking about "the rural community" or "community impacts", I attempt to sort out this mosaic and understand the relationships between the changes in land management and how its effects are going to play out among various groups.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT

Returning from my digression to the question of social issues and the implications of ecosystem management from a social perspective, it is very important to point out that the social issues related to ecosystem management, and the changes that we are discussing in this conference, are economic, aesthetic, and scientific—but, they are not just any or all of those things. An often overlooked, but important fact is that social issues are also linked to people's identities. For example, there is a man who lives in Lewiston, Idaho who works as an accountant. He could make three-times his current salary if he moved to Portland, Seattle, or perhaps twice the wages if he moved to Spokane. Ask him why he does not move, and he will reply, "because I am a steelhead fisherman." This is simply one example of the sense of identification that so many of us have with the land (including, and most notably, Native American groups).

Nearly any individual or group member that you can imagine, who has a stake in the way we manage public lands, is likely to perceive that stake in terms of his or her sense of identity. We derive a part of who we are as individuals and groups from our relationship to the land. We, in resource management decision-making processes, haven't explicitly recognized these identity issues very clearly, and now they are playing out very dramatically.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATION

Over the last 20 years, something that I refer to as a game of political pinball has taken place with respect to our public lands. Many groups have, at one time or another, had their hands on the flippers—the latest court injunction, the latest administrative decision, the latest appeal. That process is very disheartening for people with a stake in the land and with their identity wrapped up in the land. Whether that identity is that of an environmental activist or of a logger, the political pinball played over the last 20-30 years has been both disheartening and alienating—alienating from the land and from each other. Dan Kemmis (1992), who talks specifically about the Northern Rockies, says the debate over wildlands in the Northern Rockies pits various interests against each other in a struggle which is sapping energy and resources of all concerned. He further states that, while this struggle has gradually undermined nearly all parties' faith in public decision-making, it has also been incapable of identifying or producing the public interest. This is a serious problem to be faced by all interests involved.

One of the results of this problem is the emergence of a political equation, which reads like this: environmental protection is in the national interest, and economic development is in the local interest. My reaction to that political equation is (and I call upon that great social commentator Bart Simpson):

NOT!!

Why do I react that way? If we stop to think about this, it is in the interest of local communities to have a healthy ecosystem and healthy forests around them. It is in the national interest to have healthy rural communities and economies. We need to move beyond this dichotomy. Some of the discussion we have heard at this conference suggests we may now be starting to do it. However, it seems imperative to me that we work as a society to go beyond this dichotomy and move toward some more reasonable decision-making processes. One approach to such decision-making will be taken up by Steve Daniels and Gregg Walker in the next paper, so I will end here.

Author

Matthew S. Carroll
Assistant Professor
Department of Natural Resource Sciences
Washington State University
Pullman, WA 99164-6410