

Federally Protected Rivers

The Need for Effective Local Involvement

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The designation of such protected areas as Wild and Scenic Rivers near human settlements has created the potential for significant conflict between resource management agencies and local residents. This article, based on three case studies of protected river areas, suggests that the particular reaction of local residents to management agency presence is the result of a process by which locals attach meaning to such presence. Such meanings evolve over time through the interaction of locals and agency representatives and can lead to conflict. Transactive planning offers strategies to avoid such conflicts. These strategies incorporate local values and interests into planning and management, create successful relationships with local residents, and make way for agreement about acceptable levels of and arrangements for resource protection.

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Planning for the use and protection of rivers and their surrounding environments is becoming one of the most controversial and difficult tasks for natural resource policymakers and planners in the U.S. As many of the debates over designation of wilderness areas are resolved, increased national attention and activity has been focused on river protection and its attendant dilemmas and difficulties. The passage of the omnibus Oregon Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1988 is but one example of the increased prominence of river protection on public policy agendas.

As river protection has gained momentum in recent years, planners have discovered that the problems they face are different from those encountered in wilderness and traditional park protection. These differences primarily stem from the presence of local communities and autonomous governments within river areas slated for protection. In many instances, river protection programs have required the acquisition or regulation of privately owned land, which is rarely the case in traditional wilderness protection. Local people (including locally based planners) often see river protection and its consequences very differently than urban interest groups or land and resource managers and planners employed by federal or state agencies. River protection measures often result in changes in the way local people have traditionally used resources and in the actual loss of ownership or control of property. Consequently, river planning efforts have provoked bitter and protracted locally based conflict (Eugster 1983). In view of these circumstances, this paper discusses three studies, each in a different region of the country, in terms of the planning implications of the interactions between local communities and federal agencies in the process of establishing river protection areas (Carroll 1989).

Study Objectives and Methodology

The three studies seek to discover the meanings local people attached to agency presence in each river area and to examine the linkage of those emergent meanings to the interactions with the river management agencies. The studies focus on the communities adjacent to the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River in New York and Pennsylvania, the New River Gorge National River in southern West Virginia, and the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River in west Texas.

The studies employ, as the mode of inquiry, the interpretive paradigm of sociology (Burrell and Morgan 1985; Borman, Compte, and Goetz 1986; Faulk and Piney 1978; Murphy and Pilotta 1984). In contrast to more objectivist approaches, which emphasize quantification and measurement of social phenomena and the statistical manipulation of the derived data, interpretive sociology attempts to gain an understanding of the worldview of subjects and to describe the meanings of actions from the perspective of the subjects. This is achieved through semistructured interviews and first-hand observation of behavior and interactions.

This study is based on the preliminary assumption that as local residents develop shared meanings concerning the federal presence in their area, there emerges a collective response (or nonresponse) to such presence. This assumption follows Murphy and Pilotta's (1984) contention that it is not useful to view communities as "universal audiences," all conforming to a given set of norms. These authors state that, although communities may share certain demographic characteristics, such structural attributes should not be considered important data in themselves. Rather, they contend that it is the worldviews of community members that give such characteristics meaning. Thus, they argue against the sole use of standardized methodologies for investigating communities in favor of approaches that tap meanings held by members and the linkage of such meanings to social action.

In line with this conceptual approach, this study employs an inductive methodology known as grounded theory, which uses chain-referral or snowball sampling' and semistructured interviews (Glaser and Strauss 1980; Biernacki and Waldorf 1981). In the Upper Delaware, researchers conducted eighty-six in-depth interviews with residents of the fifteen towns and townships in the Valley and with other affected parties for two years and observed 150 hours of meetings and other public gatherings. In the New River Gorge, researchers conducted 242 interviews and observed fifteen hours of meetings. Time and funding limitations in the Rio Grande restricted the study there to fifty-eight interviews over two months and no observations of public meetings. These interviews, however, included more than 90 percent of the potentially affected landowners along the American side of the designated stretch of river.

All three studies included considerable background research into published histories, agency documents, and other sources to piece together the chronology of events leading up to and following federal designation of each river. The semistructured interviews allowed subjects the freedom to communicate their point of view concerning the effects of the federal presence on the local way of life.²

Outcomes of Planning Efforts in the Three Areas

The Upper Delaware

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968 listed the Upper Delaware River as a "study river" for possible inclusion in the Wild and Scenic River System. In 1969 an interagency task force headed by the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Outdoor Recreation (BOR), began a study of the river. The task force's recommendations, presented in a public meeting in the Valley in 1973, called for significant land acquisition by the federal government. The communities immediately formed river associations to undertake negotiations for more locally favored arrangements.

In 1978 President Carter signed the National Parks and Recreation Act into law, which included the desig-

nation of the Upper Delaware as part of the Wild and Scenic River System, with the National Park Service (NPS) as the responsible federal agency. The legislation included provisions that reflected the results of negotiations among local groups in the Valley, the BOR, the NPS, and the local congressional delegation. These provisions specified that a minimal amount of private land would be acquired by the federal government provided that local communities met certain conditions. The most important of these conditions was that local towns and townships would pass zoning ordinances in conformance with land use guidelines to be promulgated by the whole mix of entities responsible for the planning process. The act also called for the appointment of a Citizens Advisory Council (CAC) to ensure "maximum public participation" in the Upper Delaware planning effort. The NPS established its operational presence in the Valley in 1979 and planning efforts led by the agency's Denver Service Center began in 1980.

The initial planning process led to a political uprising in the Valley, complete with tumultuous public meetings, the involvement of an external opposition organization, and the creation of two very vocal locally based opposition organizations. At one point a local newspaper carried an editorial headlined "There is Fear in the Valley!!" The NPS regional director ultimately decided to scrap the initial plan and begin anew with a fresh cast of planners operating through a new local organization, the Council of Upper Delaware Townships (COUP), consisting of locally elected (not appointed) officials. This group hired consultants to carry out the technical aspects of plan development. The second planning process provoked a costly and extended political battle in the Valley, which pitted local opposition groups (now well organized) against advocates for the COUP planning effort. Eventually the second process led to the adoption of a plan featuring the creation of a permanent local body, the Upper Delaware Council (UDC), to function as an intermediary between the federal and local governments. The battle leading up to the adoption of the second plan, however, which included the emergence of yet a third local opposition organization, created in the Valley deep political divisions and hard feelings and tore at the fabric of local relationships. The aftereffects of the struggle may require a generation or more to heal.

New River Gorge

The provisions in the National Parks and Recreation Act designating the New River Gorge in West Virginia as a national river parallel those for the Upper Delaware in the sense that they are the product of years of negotiations between the federal government and local interests and they seek to protect the viability of communities within the designated area. The approach taken to protect communities in the New River Gorge, however, was quite different than that for the Upper Delaware. In the case of New River, the designation provisions specifically limited the secretary of the interior's powers of eminent domain over residential, business, and agricultural prop

erty (Simpson and McAvoy 1978). The New River plan involved far more extensive federal land acquisition than the Upper Delaware plan, but most of the land was largely undeveloped and in the hands of large corporate landowners, including mining companies and private utilities.

When the superintendent and two staff members first arrived at New River, they decided to postpone operational activities, such as river patrols and law enforcement, and to focus on planning efforts and community relations. During the early years, the superintendent and chief ranger traveled throughout the area, making personal contact with hundreds of local residents. In this process, they discovered local social networks and central information points within the region. Using this information, they designed a public involvement strategy tailored to the area and its culture. They began by contacting store keepers, other business owners, and postmasters in the local communities. They followed up by carefully explaining to individual residents the purpose of the river's designation and by listening to their concerns. The agency representatives also held more formal public involvement meetings and workshops on specific planning tasks. Consequently, local residents were receptive to the planning efforts. The agency had a solid base of local and regional support when land acquisition and the operational presence began.

The Rio Grande

As with the Upper Delaware, the original Wild and Scenic Rivers Act listed a section of the Rio Grande River for study for possible inclusion in the system. Like both previous cases, the specified segment of the Rio Grande later became part of the Wild and Scenic River System with the National Park Service as the responsible management agency. The designated river section was a 191-mile stretch located directly downstream from the Big Bend National Park. In 1979 a project manager (a position roughly equivalent to a park superintendent) and two support staff members assumed initial planning duties. The project manager set up an office, and with support from the Denver Service Center, began planning and public involvement efforts. The public involvement included open houses, news releases, and individual meetings with potentially affected landowners. In January 1981, the NPS released a draft Environmental Assessment and draft Land Acquisition Plan, calling for a combination of federal land acquisitions and the purchase of scenic easements. The agency scheduled a series of six meetings for public comment, which developed into debates between NPS personnel and a group of citizens led by a local ranch landowner who objected to the "dictatorial tone" of the land acquisition plan. The citizens group proposed an alternative quite different from the "preferred alternative" in the Environmental Assessment. This so-called "Alternative 111" stipulated no federal land acquisition of scenic easements and did not allow visitor contact facilities. In addition, "Alternative III" called for the continuation of "historical" usage on the entire designated stretch of river.

The project became increasingly controversial, even among local groups generally supportive of Big Bend National Park. Most of the affected landowners, the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board, the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association, the Terrell County Commissioners, and the Big Bend Law Enforcement Association actively opposed the plans.

The agency planners then modified their original proposals to rule out fee simple land acquisition and to include the development of agreements with local landowners to preserve the natural and cultural values of the river. By that time, however, the controversy had inflicted significant political damage. The NPS transferred its scenic river staff elsewhere and placed the project on de facto hold by curtailing operational funding. The implementation of the Wild and Scenic program, as it had been envisioned in the legislation, remains largely uncompleted.

An Assessment of the Outcomes

Why did successful federal/local relationships develop in one case and not in the others? It would be unfair to characterize the initial planning process in the Upper Delaware and Rio Grande situations as complete failures. Much was learned from both efforts. In both instances, however, many of the managers and planners will testify that they did not build successful relationships- with all the local and regional groups who saw themselves as stakeholders in the outcome of the planning processes.

An understanding of the outcomes of the three planning processes requires a conceptual framework for viewing the interactions between local community groups and natural resource management bureaucracies. Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality* provides a framework for viewing such relationships. The authors state: "Everyday life presents itself as a reality interpreted by people and subjectively meaningful to them as a coherent world. As sociologists we take this reality as the object of our analyses" (1967, 19).

This perspective shows that the evolution of positive locally perceived meanings of federal agency presence in the areas surrounding the protected rivers is critical to successful federal/local interaction. While the physical presence of a federal agency is verifiable as objective reality (offices are established, federal vehicles drive on the roads, uniforms are worn), the meaning that local people attribute to this presence and for their way of life has important subjective dimensions, which are socially constructed. Evidence gathered in the three cases suggests that these subjective understandings of the meaning of the federal presence had a strong influence on the individual and collective reactions of local community actors to the planning effort. The appearance or prospect of a federal agency's presence or, as in the case of the Rio Grande, the expansion of that presence into new areas, presents local people with a problem: "How do I define this unfamiliar entity and understand its consequences for my everyday life?"

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The evidence suggests that arriving at a commonly shared view of a federal presence and the subsequent evolution of a response, is a complex social process, which involves interactions between local and agency people and communication among locals. In the case of the Upper Delaware, such dynamics resulted in conflicts among local groups whose members saw the federal *presence differently*.

The three case studies suggest that early interactions between local residents and agency personnel have a strong bearing on future relationships. It is in the early stages of planning that local residents search for clues concerning how to define the federal presence and how, if at all, to respond. If local residents define such presence as nonsalient to their daily lives, they will likely ignore it. If they define the presence as generally positive, support will begin to build. Early unsettling clues, however, may sow the seeds of future conflict and mobilization for political opposition.

Some natural social boundaries exist between local rural people and employees of federal resource agencies (Colfer and Colfer 1978). In addition to economic and educational differences, federal agency personnel, and particularly professional employees, tend to move frequently in their career progression. Agency employees are socialized to and rewarded for being loyal to the central mandate and established procedures of their agency and respective professions. Local people, on the other hand, tend to eschew such loyalties. Residents are typically more oriented to the local surroundings and the here and now realities of extracting a living directly or indirectly from the land. The result, according to Colfer and Colfer, is typically very different life styles and orientations for the two groups.

If the clues concerning the federal presence are unsettling and lead to mistrust, such social boundaries can become more salient and further solidify, thus heightening the possibility of social conflict. If this incremental building of mistrust occurs, one or more specific events may then trigger more generalized conflict between local groups and the responsible agency and the emergence of conflict leaders. The evidence clearly indicates that this scenario was played out in the Upper Delaware and Rio Grande cases as local groups became fearful that the NPS was unjustly and dishonestly threatening their freedom and property rights.

In the Upper Delaware Valley, local residents were unsettled by the fact that an NPS unit, established downstream in the 1960s, had dismantled communities and provoked bitter court fights over eminent domain proceedings. This, coupled with early public statements by BOR planners concerning possible land acquisition and what was perceived locally as a heavy handed operational and law enforcement presence by the NPS after the 1978 authorization, all contributed to an uneasiness that the federal presence was, in the long run, likely to destroy the local way of life. Events during the initial planning process further exacerbated these negative perceptions.

In the Rio Grande instance, potentially affected landowners perceived a discrepancy between what NPS personnel told them in private meetings concerning land acquisition and other related issues and what the NPS really intended to do. For example, NPS had reportedly told a well-known ranch owner that his property was not under consideration for acquisition. Widely distributed preliminary maps, however, showed an NPS visitor facility on a corner of his land. The landowner immediately began organizing very effective "behind the scenes" opposition to the Wild and Scenic River planning effort.

Local residents interviewed in both the Upper Delaware and Rio Grande locations stated that when uneasiness and mistrust were building, NPS officials did not go out into the communities sufficiently to build informal trust relationships. Rather, except in the case of formal public involvement meetings, NPS Wild and Scenic River planners and managers appeared, in the view of many local people, to expect residents to approach them with issues and concerns. As we have seen, this was a very different impression from that created by the NPS at New River.

A key public event in the Upper Delaware Valley that triggered the ensuing conflict was the showing by local activists of a film narrated by the late television journalist Jessica Savitch, highly critical of National Park Service land acquisition practices in Ohio's Cuyahoga Valley. The film depicted local farmers as having been victimized by the NPS. Another triggering event was the release of the initial draft plan, which proposed design control restrictions and other regulations, including a reference to "appropriate house color," which frightened and angered local residents. In the Rio Grande area a key event was the release of the initial drafts of the Land Acquisition Plan and the Environmental Assessment, the tone and wording of which galvanized already growing landowner opposition. The conflict was played out in the six public meetings, letters to newspaper editors, and behind the scenes political maneuvering. In the Upper Delaware, the conflict took place over several years in dozens of public and private meetings, public gatherings, letters to newspaper editors, public demonstrations, vandalism, and other events.

In contrast, a public event in the New River area threatened to pit the perceived interests of most local residents against NPS policies, but did not lead to conflict. The event was the refusal of the NPS to allow the West Virginia State Department of Natural Resources to spray a commonly used control agent to reduce black flies. The flies, which swarm in the gorge in spring and summer, can be a major annoyance to locals and tourists. Despite generally strong public sentiment in favor of spraying, and the perceived deleterious effect on the area's summer tourist business of the decision not to spray, no widespread conflict occurred as a result of the decision. The interviews indicate that the lack of conflict can be largely attributed to the interpersonal credibility the NPS manager had established in the area over the years.

Implications for River Planning

Although the managers and planners in the New River Gorge were likely unfamiliar with the terminology, their approach to establishing the national river is an example of what Friedmann terms the "transactive style of planning." Friedmann describes transactive planning as follows:

Transactive planning changes knowledge into action through an unbroken sequence of interpersonal relations Transactive planning is a response to the widening gulf in communication between technical planners and their clients Institutions do not relate to each other as wholes, but through a complex series of exchanges among individuals. Although these individuals behave primarily according to their formal role prescriptions, each role masks a singular personality. Roles are defined by a set of abstract behavior patterns but the person assuming a particular role may be straightforward or devious, disposed to be tranquil or angry, approachable or remote, eager for power or reluctant to assume responsibility. The planner steeped in the practice of the transactive style will try to reach the person who stands behind the formal role (1973, 171-2).

Although Friedmann's discussion concerns relationships between planners and clients, it is also relevant to relationships between river planners and local residents. The latter, in some cases, come to see themselves as the unwilling recipients of planning expertise. In his discussion of the planner-client relationship, Friedmann could well be describing the differences between natural resource managers/ planners and rural residents:

Each has a different method of knowing: the planner works chiefly with processed knowledge abstracted from the world and manipulated according to certain postulates of theory and scientific methods; the client works primarily from the personal knowledge drawn directly from experiencing The difficulties of relating these two methods of knowing to each other reside not only in their foci of attention and degrees of practical relevance . . . but also in language. The planner's language is conceptual and mathematical, consciously drained of the lifeblood of human intercourse in its striving for scientific objectivity . . . the language of clients lacks the formal restriction that hedge in planning documents. It, too, implies a jargon to speed communications, but the jargon will be experience- rather than concept-related (1973, 73).

Friedmann suggests that the solution to the problem of client/planner relationships lies in direct conversations in which processed information can be combined with personal knowledge and translated into action. He de-

scribes this process as one of "mutual learning," wherein planners learn about the values and language of clients and clients learn from planners. Berger and Luckmann call this the "construction of a joint reality." More recently, Shannon (1987) has described a similar approach to planning for national forests in her article, "Forest Planning: Learning with People." Hester (1985) describes in detail a process by which a town planner worked carefully over an extended period of time with residents of a small community to construct its future, while preserving what locals felt was valuable from its past. All three authors state or imply that it is incumbent upon the planner, as a change agent, to take the lead in this translation and mutual learning process. In addition, planners through their education and training should be much better equipped than locals to undertake such a translation process.

In contrast, the dominant planning approach of the National Park Service, as with most other federal natural resource management agencies, has historically been influenced by the synoptic or, rational comprehensive tradition, described by Hudson as follows: "Synoptic planning typically looks at problems from a systems viewpoint, using conceptual or mathematical models relating ends (objectives) to means (resources and constraints), with heavy reliance on numbers and quantitative analysis" (1979, 389). Hudson notes that the strengths of the synoptic approach lie with its feasibility of implementation while its major weakness is its failure to recognize or deal effectively with the human dimension. It should come as no surprise that a planning process that relies on a rational, comprehensive top-down approach would meet with little success in a setting such as the Upper Delaware or the Rio Grande, where the worldview of the local population bears scant resemblance to that of agency planners.

Shoring up Local Support

Gaining local acceptance of a plan associated with an outside agency requires informal and formal communications and relationships with all groups of relevant local and regional interests early in the process and the maintenance of such relationships as planning and management continue. The importance of developing and nurturing trustful relationships by means of open and honest negotiations with all stakeholder groups seems to be the most critical factor in successful planning. In some cases, this effort may involve alerting a group to the possible consequences of a planning action of which the group might not yet be aware. Although formal public involvement procedures, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act and other laws, are certainly a part of such an effort, they are rarely sufficient in the case of natural resource planning in a local community context. In most situations, some of the local stakeholder groups simply lack the knowledge, experience, or inclination to present their interests in a formal process. These very groups, however, can be highly susceptible to po-

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litical mobilization, or perhaps even later, may lead such actions, if they perceive that the agency is trampling on their rights and liberties. Planners and managers should actively seek out these groups to build relationships and break down communication barriers. Once the agency has achieved good communication and trustful relationships it can develop constructive solutions that take account of local values and views.

Identifying all potential local stakeholder groups and involving them in planning decisions is not a simple task, nor does it lend itself to standardized and formalistic procedures (Murphy and Pilotta 1984). Communities vary and strategies must mesh with the circumstances found in a particular community or set of communities. In planning situations similar to those described here, planners and managers must take time to step beyond formal roles and titles and come to know all groups of local people and to understand their values, language, and worldviews. Also, planners must adopt open, two-way communication with all concerned. If planners can achieve such a dialogue leading to a reasonable degree of responsiveness to local concerns, residents can develop a sense of genuine ownership in the planning process, even though they may not get everything they want.

Some would argue that protected rivers are generally set aside to further national or state interests rather than local ones, and that responsiveness to local values and concerns is inappropriate. Such an argument relies on a false dichotomy between local and national interests. Although Behan perhaps overstates the case when he contends, in the case of national forests, that virtually all national interests are represented locally or regionally (1988), there is often much overlap between national and local interests. For example, it is arguably in nearly everyone's interest to prevent severe resource deterioration, littering on public or private land, and extreme recreational overcrowding on rivers.

The cases here illustrate that conflicts between local people and federal agencies are more about issues of control rather than the substance of proposed actions or regulations. In such instances, negotiations that yield genuine power sharing between federal and local actors can often provide mutually satisfactory outcomes. Unilateral federal actions to solve such problems tend to generate conflict.

On the other hand, some dimensions of federal river protection do present clear conflicts between national and local interests, for example, when the federal agency proposes removing a human settlement to provide a recreation area for the use and enjoyment of others. Such instances, however, are becoming increasingly rare, particularly in the case of protected rivers. The current trend toward protecting rivers and the viability of nearby local communities seems likely to continue.

Resource professionals need to develop and use new approaches to planning and management, which incorporate local values, perspectives, and worldviews more effectively than they have in the past. Such approaches should combine the strengths of transactive planning with

the rational comprehensive tradition and should involve genuine openness and willingness by federal managers and planners to share power and responsibility at every stage of planning and management. Power sharing is not a familiar activity for most federal resource agencies and significant organizational change may well be required if its success is to be achieved. The development and utilization of such approaches would not only reduce the costs and human suffering that often result from extended conflicts, but would likely eliminate a possible political backlash over river protection, as witnessed recently over wilderness designations in Idaho and Utah. The implementation of this approach presents a genuine challenge to natural resource agencies and professionals that should not be avoided if future river protection in populated areas is to be successful.

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NOTES

1. Chain-referral or snowball sampling is a technique by which subjects are identified for interview by other subjects or by knowledgeable individuals on the basis of characteristics or attributes that are relevant to the purpose of the study.
2. For additional explanations concerning the methodology, see Carroll, Twight, and McCabe 1987; Carroll and Twight 1987; Carroll 1988; 1989.

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