Comment on "Winners and Losers: Emerging Ecological Policy"

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What E.O. Wilson recently (**1993**) stated about forest ecosystems is as true of the sociocultural systems with which they are inextricably bound the structure and dynamics of these systems are as yet poorly understood, and therefore policy and management decisions based on the current knowledge are necessarily limited and bounded. Institutions must be flexible and adaptable; there can be no single solution applicable across different landscape scales and time horizons. From their various disciplinary perspectives and languages, all five panelists in this colloquium converged on this now almost axiomatic principle of ecosystem management.

But how can institutions—research institutes, the court system, the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, colleges and universities, corporations, non-governmental organizations—he transformed away from hierarchy (which so often results in the whole notion of "winners" and "losers") and toward flexibility and responsiveness? All five speakers converged to some extent on the idea of local stewardship councils as one key way to begin to open up dialogue among stakeholders and close the feedback loops at levels where the environmental and social effects of decisions can be sensed by participants. In my view this was the most exciting idea brought out and developed during this colloquium.

As the supposed free marketeer on the panel, Karl Hess came to the somewhat surprising conclusion of the need for locally elected, self-governing stewardship councils as one of three approaches for public lands to break through the logjams of both distant, bureaucratized state institutions and increasingly global market systems which cannot easily incorporate noneconomic values. Along with local, self-governing commons, he proposed establishing marketable rights to foster accountability and responsibility, and substituting outcome-based management for the traditional prescriptive management by government agencies to monitor compliance with locally appropriate, yet democratically set standards.

Robert Keiter outlined the legal basis for ecosystem management already firmly in place. Local councils might not be as vulnerable to single stakeholder domination as many fear, and the County rights movement is in a legally weak position. Courts can play only a limited role in evolving ecological policy, either to accelerate (e.g., endangered species protection) or brake (e.g., takings) emerging issues. Courts do provide an arena to which losers feel they can turn, and the threat of judicial action can promote local stewardship.

Carolyn Merchant's concern with ethical bases **for** human action hit squarely on the cultural foundation underlying all ecosystem management. Focussing on salmon in the Pacific Northwest, she outlined historical stages of ecosystem policy and the ethical orientations and intellectual traditions of each: from egocentric through homocentric to the emerging ecocentric ethic. This stage-like evolutionary sequence was projected forward to a proposed partnership ethic between people and nature. However, in outlining the model, Merchant offered little sense of how, or even *why*, this new ethic might come about. Nevertheless, local stewardship councils would offer an arena where stakeholders' (including fish stocks') values and beliefs could be threshed out and consensus established.

Robert Lee argued that we are now nearing the end of the Enlightenment, in which a paramount focus on individual's rights against an oppressive collectivity (the state) has resulted in a view of individuals disembedded from society and nature. Because people are more likely to commit to the known and familiar, not the abstract and distant, all large-scale institutions face chronic problems of legitimacy. He suggested that commitments to others and ecological processes in a place of residence represents a promising alternative, for "institutions found in places offer opportunities to stimulate the development of familial attachments to both nature and unknown others who benefit from nature's ecological services, now and in the future.'' (In the printed paper) he offered the colloquium's **only** fleshed-out specific example of a local stewardship council effort—the Wallowa County-Nez Perce Tribe Salmon Recovery Plan in Oregon.

Though Alan Randall's presentation, late in the afternoon, was rather disjointed and too abstract to be of much use to the colloquium, be too argued that to deal with the high degree of fragmentation and mobility in late-twentieth century North America (the "isolation paradox"), the whole notion of community must be reinvented. Solutions cannot be top-down, he argued; we need a mix of both communitarian consensus and enlightened individuals to make bottom-up, local solutions work.

Reference

Wilson, E.O. **1993.** Forest Ecosystems: **More** Complex Than We Know. In *Defining Sustainable Forestry,* ed. Aplet, G.H., et al., xi-xiii. Washington, D.C.: Island Press.