

A PRIVATE LANDS PERSPECTIVE ON COLLABORATION¹

by Shorna R. Broussard & Kenli A. Schaaf

Abstract

While conflict surrounding public land management is commonly a precursor to many collaborative resource management efforts in the United States, the potential for this concept to cohere in fragmented landscapes dominated by private ownership is emerging as a reality. Private lands house the majority of U.S. timberland (59%) and more threatened and endangered species occur on private lands than any other ownership category. In many ways the fate of public lands is tied to the fate of the surrounding lands in private ownership. Thus, it is imperative that effective resource conservation strategies engage those individuals and families that own America's private non-industrial forestlands. In this article, we consider the case of collaborative resource management in a private lands context and illustrate a process model for investigating such arrangements.

Collaboration and Private Lands

Over half of the forestland in the United States is privately held (Birch, 1996), making private forests an essential component of landscape-level, sustainable natural resource management. While the amount of private forestland has increased slightly over the past several decades, the number of private owners has increased drastically, from 7.7 million in 1978 to 9.9 million in 1994 (Birch, 1996). This engenders an environment where increased numbers of landowners are managing smaller parcels of forestland, resulting in increased fragmentation of the landscape. This problem is exacerbated when one considers that less than 5% of private forest owners have forest management plans (Birch, 1996). Increasing pressures of parcelization, development, and harvesting are posing a threat to the sustainability of private forestlands. Non-industrial private forests provide countless ecological, economic, and social benefits both to owners and the public at large, including carbon sequestration, wildlife habitat, biodiversity, improved water quality, forest products, and recreation opportunities, yet private forests do not always receive the same attention as public forests. Some have even referred to private lands as "the neglected geography" (Knight, 1999, p. 223). Both private and public forest management are critical components of ecosystem management, and we must find ways to reach private forest owners. Collaborative natural

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resource management across multiple private ownerships may be an effective means to deal with these threats and to work toward landscape level sustainability.

Collaborative efforts in the natural resources field have gained recent attention as a means to move beyond the typically contentious and often litigious aspects characterizing public land management (Kagan, 1997; Snow, 2001) and resource management issues. In many of these efforts, public land management, water-quality, watershed issues, ecosystem management or some combination thereof were the stimuli for the collaborative group's formation. Among these groups, there exists a tremendous diversity as to their focuses, scopes, participation levels, and outcomes—for example, Coughlin et al. constructed a database of over 450 “collaborative partnerships” (Coughlin et al., 1999, p. 2-4); and Kenney et al. identified over 300 watershed focused groups in the West (Kenney et al., 2000). Accordingly, many different names have evolved to describe and designate these groups, including watershed partnerships (Leach and Pelkey, 2001), collaborative conservation (Snow et al., 2001), and community-based collaboratives (Moote et al., 2000). In many of the collaborative groups that have been studied from a research standpoint, the group occurred in a landscape with a mosaic of both public and private ownerships, frequently the impetus for collaboration being public land/resource issues. Many have involved significant portions of land owned by the US Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management (Kenney et al., 2000). Some of these collaborative partnerships do incorporate private lands, yet few occur explicitly on privately owned forests or lands. For example, the Ponderosa Pine Partnership, a group that addresses natural resources issues in southwestern Colorado, has set up some research and demonstration pilot projects on private forests, yet the majority of their work centers on issues surrounding the San Juan National Forest (Preston & Garrison, n.d.). What if we consider the feasibility and fruitfulness of pursuing similar concepts of collaboration in landscapes dominated by private ownership, and especially, private forests?

The most organized form of cooperative and coordinated behavior among private forest owners is seen in the case of forest cooperatives. Forest cooperatives may represent examples of collaborative natural resource management on private forests, especially when their goals extend beyond the business and financial commitments typically associated with cooperatives. There are approximately 25 forest landowner cooperatives or similar type groups in existence in the United States; some are business co-ops, such as the Sustainable Woods Cooperative in southern Wisconsin; others are nonprofit associations, such as the Vermont Family Forests (Foster, 2002). Many of these forestry cooperatives and associations are in

Wisconsin, Minnesota, and the northeastern states of Massachusetts, Vermont, and New York (Nadeau et al., 2002). The focus of many of these cooperatives typically revolves around sustainable harvesting, which is indicative of the capacity and willingness of forest owners to work collaboratively on natural resource issues. Recent studies of non-industrial private forest owners have found that landowners would be willing to undertake cooperative or collaborative natural resource management projects for other purposes, especially if the projects relate to wildlife habitat or other amenity type values (Jacobson et al., 2000; Stevens et al., 1999). Many researchers have found that forest owners often have many objectives for their land, of which timber harvesting is not necessarily of utmost importance (Best and Wayburn, 2001; Birch, 1996; Jones et al., 1995). Objectives such as management for wildlife, recreation, hunting, water quality, and others may potentially serve as the catalysts to convene collaborative resource management endeavors among private forest owners. Pursuing these important values and objectives may be an appropriate and effective way to increase the receptiveness of forest owners to the concept and practice of collaboration across their private ownerships.

Given the success of many collaborative efforts on public land issues, such a concept applied across private ownerships may be of utmost utility in a state such as Indiana, where the landscape is peppered by many small fragmented forests in a matrix of agricultural land. We therefore present the following research agenda to begin to understand the role that collaboration could play in natural resource management on private lands. Based on existing research on collaboration centered on public land issues, we believe that the following framework and methodologies could serve as a platform for research on collaboration focused on private land issues. We propose the following framework for research on private lands focused collaborative processes.

New Directions for Research on Collaboratives

Building upon research on mixed ownership collaborative efforts, we propose the following model (Figure 1) as a means to determine whether proactive, local, community-driven approaches can be an effective means of engaging private landowners and stakeholders in conservation practices, and ultimately result in collaborative resource management across a landscape of fragmented private forests. We advance the investigation of collaboration as a process, in which the goal is to document, analyze, and evaluate collaborative efforts on private lands.

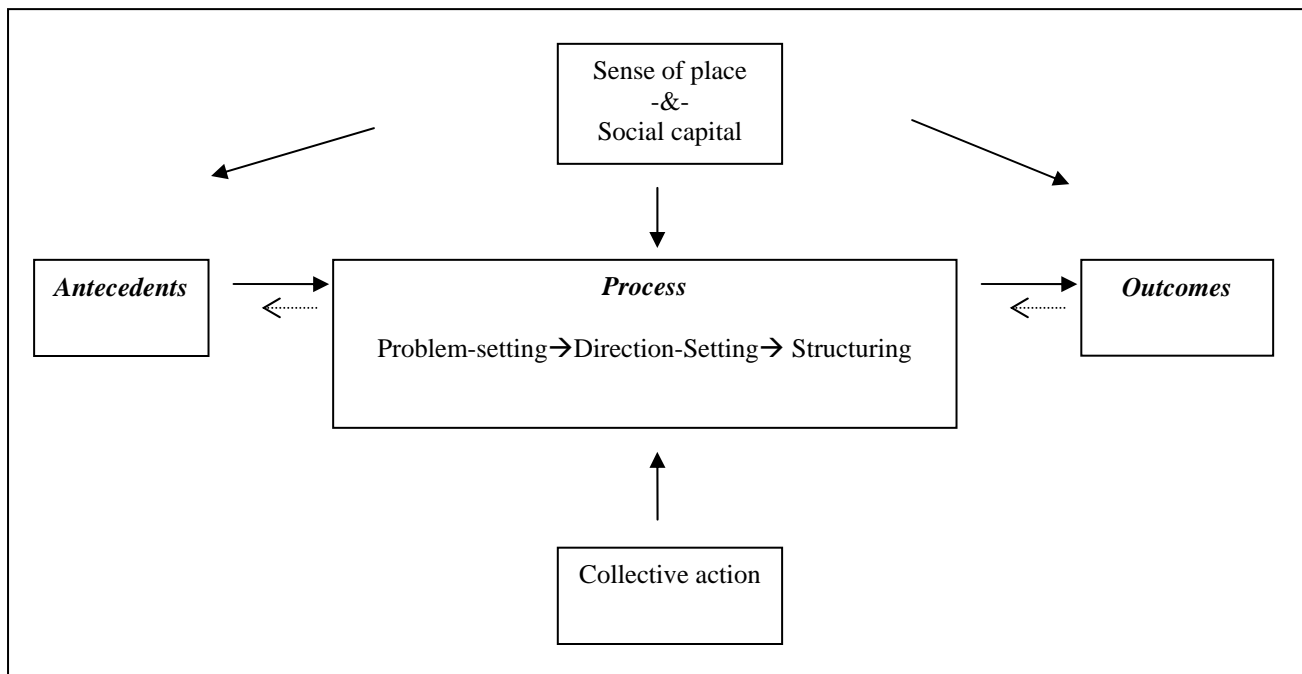
Selin and Chavez (1995) developed a 5-step model of collaboration and identified antecedents, or precursors, as the beginning point of collaboration. The presence or absence of varying antecedents, such as a common vision or a crisis, is related to the process and outcomes of the collaborative process (Selin & Chavez, 1995; Waddock, 1989). We suggest researching these various components of collaboration by conducting multiple-methodology qualitative case studies. For example, researchers would use in-depth, one-on-one interviews with landowners and stakeholders to assess antecedents, participant observation and focus groups to assess the collaborative process, and document analysis to assess some of the outcomes. Evaluation of the process and outcomes should be based on previously determined measures of success. In addition to examining the concept of collaboration, it is necessary to examine some of the social and environmental forces, such as social capital, sense of place, and collective action, that influence a collaborative endeavor.

Sense of place, in its simplest meaning is a feeling of geographical interrelatedness, which can enhance the collaborative process (Gray, 1989; Kemmis, 1990; Yaffee et al., 1997). Among other external factors, the success of collaborative methods is frequently dependent on the social characteristics of the communities within and around the region of interest (Gibson & Koontz, 1998). Sense of place is a complex concept that incorporates additional measures beyond geographical interrelatedness, including "meanings, beliefs, symbols, values and feelings" associated with a location (Williams & Stewart, 1998, p. 19), which have a potentially positive influence on natural resource management (Bradenburg & Carroll, 1995; Williams & Stewart, 1998). One's sense of place influences environmental attitudes and worldviews (Tuan, 1974), all of which may affect one's propensity to collaborate. Yaffee et al. (1997) also discuss the importance of personal relationships, trust, and respect in fostering collaboration. Related to these factors is the interdisciplinary concept of *social capital*, which is often defined as "features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (Putnam, 1995, p. 67), encompassing notions of trust, reciprocity, norms, and networks. In addition to the roles of place and social capital in the process, the principles of *collective action* influence individuals' abilities to participate in cooperative settings (Ostrom, 1990; Ostrom, 2000; Steins & Edwards, 1999), and have been examined in the literature in common-pool resource settings, such as in India, Nepal, Ecuador, and Uganda (for examples, see Gibson et al., 2000). However, this theory holds utility in the examination of behavior in non-common-pool resource management settings as well. Collective action, which occurs when individuals choose to cooperate in "social dilemma" (Ostrom, 1998) situations, rather than to just free-ride or defect, would be a component of private landowner collaboration. Hence,

by examining the existing principles of collective action, one can compare and contrast how they differ in private property and common-pool ownership regimes.

Sense of place, social capital, and collective action are inextricably linked, and have been found to play important roles in collaborative natural resource management efforts. For example, sense of place and social capital may in part bring individuals to the table to collaborate; social capital and collective action may facilitate the collaborative process; an individual with increased social capital may play a significant role in the progression of the collective action; and increased or altered sense of place and social capital may result from collaboration. Consideration of these concepts will increase our understanding of the collaborative process and the circumstances that influence its progression and outcomes.

Figure 1. *Framework for research on collaboration (adapted from Selin & Chavez, 1995)*



Conclusion

In non-western areas of the United States, the majority of land is privately held, and thus distinct mechanisms for understanding and addressing the economic, ecological, and social situations that determine the fate of these lands are necessary. Collaborative planning and management is

one innovative policy tool that holds much promise for sustaining valuable environmental resources on private lands. In this paper, we suggest that the concept of collaboration may hold utility in private forest management, thus enabling ecosystem management to achieve landscape level sustainability. We qualify this suggestion by encouraging researchers to further examine situations of collaboration among private forest owners, and therefore offer case studies of how collaboration may, or may not, further stewardship of private lands. A forest landowner recently conveyed to us his thoughts on how best to achieve sustainability of private lands, "I think really collectively would be the right answer if we can make it work." Thus, we propose a framework to guide research in anticipation that subsequent findings will inform the development of policy tools aimed at addressing natural resources issues on private lands and ultimately lead to sustainability of these lands.

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