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Community-Public Lands Partnership: The Montezuma County Federal Lands Program

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**Community-Public Lands Partnership:
The Montezuma County Federal Lands Program**

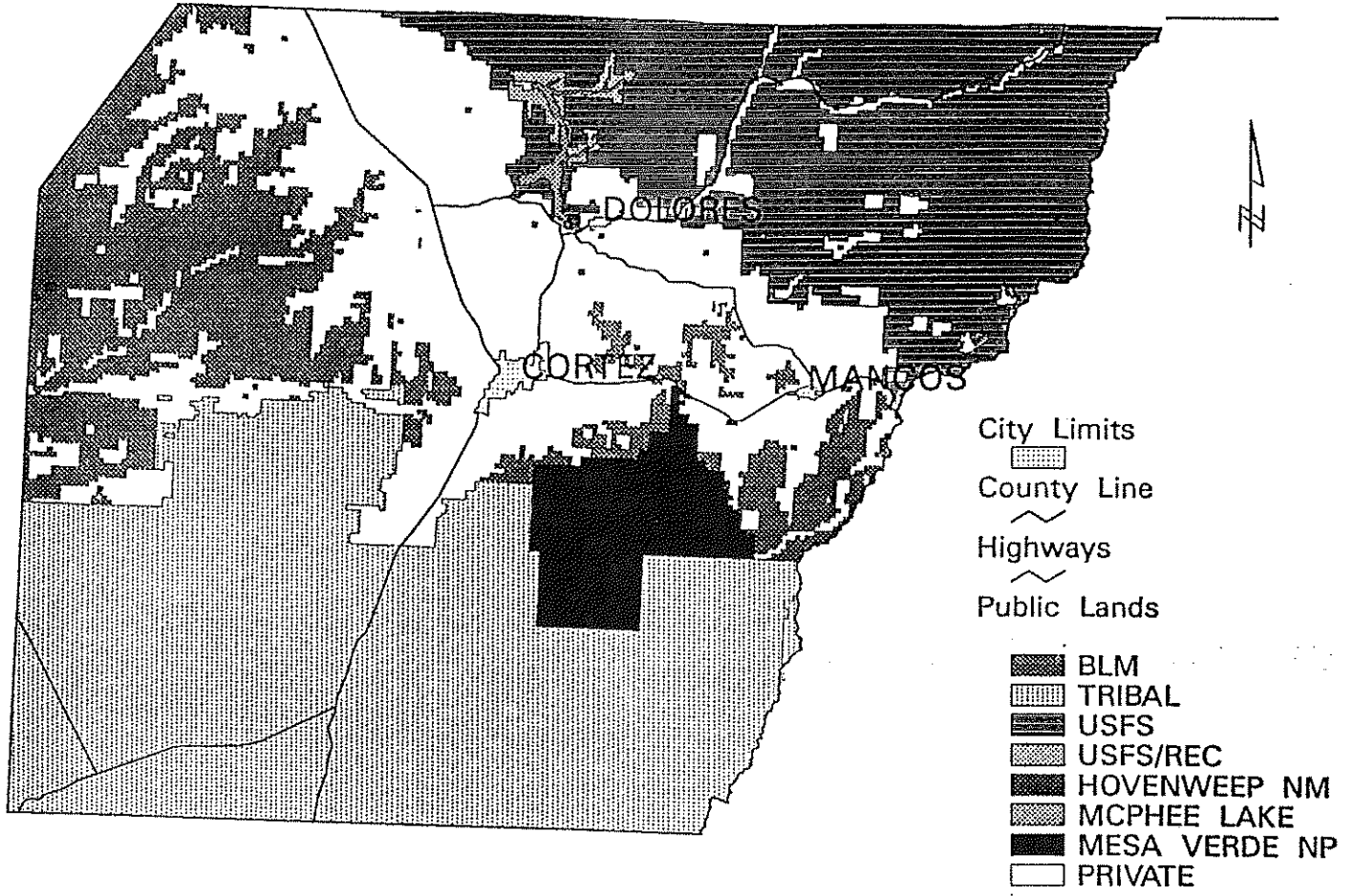
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**Who Governs the Public Lands?
Searching for Integration: Some Models**

Natural Resources Law Center
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School of Law
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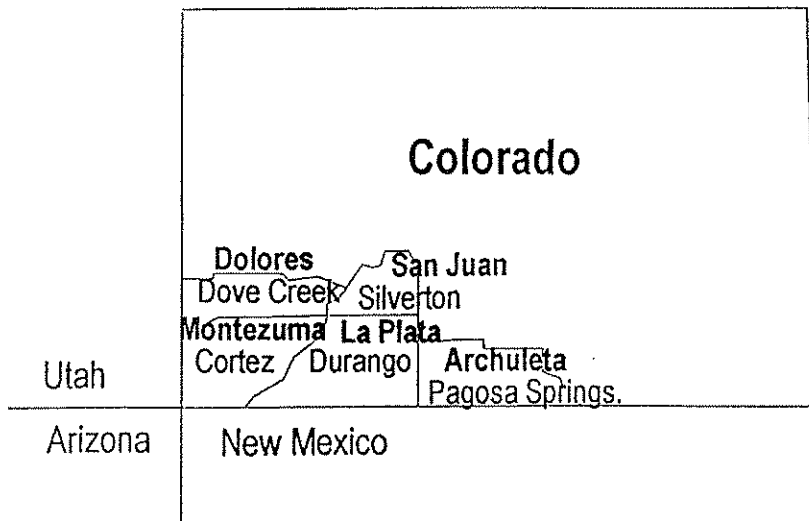
September 28-30, 1994

Montezuma County



Southwest Colorado Region 9

5 Counties/County Seats



Community-Public Lands Partnership: The Montezuma County Federal Lands Program

In response to the question "Who Governs the Public Lands?," I was asked to talk about a model in the "Search for Integration". The model I will describe is the Montezuma County Federal Lands Program and the resulting emergence of the Community-Public Lands Partnership in Southwest Colorado. I have organized my presentation around four types of integration that we have been working to achieve:

- The integration of the **"horizontal pattern of relationships"** involving local communities, adjacent public lands, and institutions residing in communities with the authority to manage public lands.
- The integration of **"communities of place"** with **"communities of interest."**
- The Integration of **"scientific expertise"** and **"basic social values"** in resolving disagreements about the management of the public lands.
- The Integration of **"professional knowledge"** and **"ordinary knowledge"** in **"community oriented inquiries"** as a basis for **"authentic citizen participation."**

Strengthening the Horizontal Pattern of Relationships:

Communities in the rural west are increasingly dominated by a "vertical pattern" of relationships which involves extra-community systems of authority and power including "state, regional, national and international level[s] of authority, administration and decision making." By contrast, the "horizontal pattern" is the relationships among various social units to each other "insofar as they have relevance to the community system." [Warren, 1963, p. 161-162]

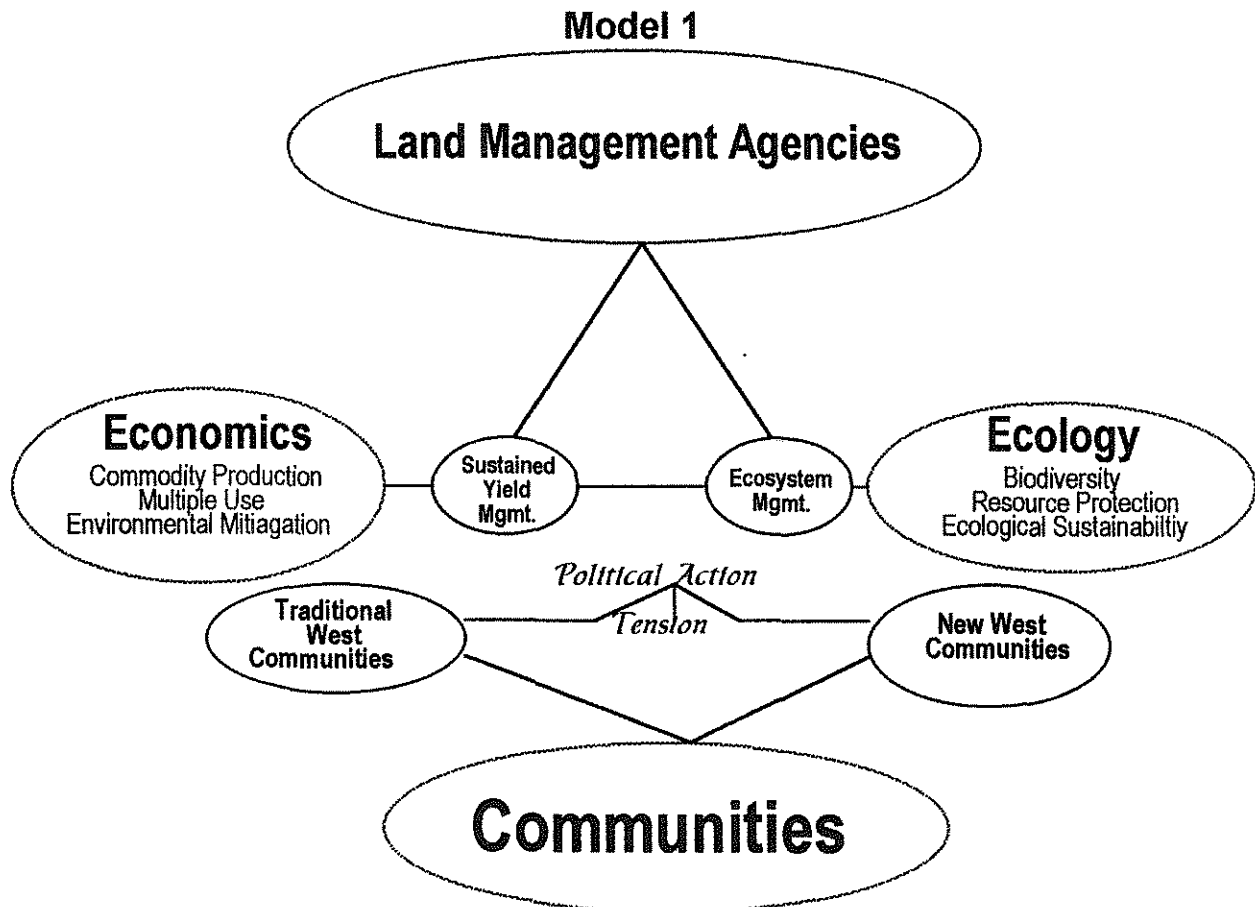
The goal of strengthening the horizontal pattern of relationships has been in the community development lexicon for a long time. But this concept, and its derivation from the word "horizon", has gained new relevance for me as I have increasingly realized how fundamentally spatial public land issues are.

I have come to visualize communities arrayed on the 23% of privately owned land in Southwest Colorado around and between vast expanses of National Forest, BLM, Tribal and National Park Service lands. People move between their communities and the public lands for all kinds economic, social and spiritual purposes as do the millions of visitors that come to Southwest Colorado every year. Even for people that don't go up in the San Juan Mountains, or out on the Colorado Plateau, the public lands are on the horizon, providing the aesthetic and ecological back-drop for unique community settings.

Another relevant aspect in considering the horizontal pattern of community-public land relationships involves the array of institutional resources that are part of the rural western setting. In Southwest Colorado, we have Forest Service, Park Service, BLM, and BIA offices all reporting to different "vertical" centers of power in a variety of external locations, but all with the potential to make vital contributions to the strength of the horizontal pattern in local communities. Successful community development hinges on integrating these organizational and human resources so they have "relevance to the community system."

It's also worth pointing out the kinship between "community systems" and "ecosystems," which is important in our local efforts to come to grips with ecosystem management. But I should begin by indicating that ecosystem management was, and in most of the rural west still is, perceived as a threatening vertical (top-down) intrusion on local communities.

Model 1 was developed to illustrate the dynamic in the rural west that has emerged in reaction to the paradigm shift towards ecosystem management and the public land reforms that have become associated with this shift:



The tension between economics and ecology had been growing in the rural west for some time as the paradigm shift, on the part of the land management agencies, from "sustained yield management" (based on commodity production, multiple use and environmental mitigation) towards "ecosystem management" (emphasizing biodiversity, resource protection and ecological sustainability) became manifest.

As people at the local level began to realize the potentially profound consequences of this policy shift, tension evolved into political action as community leaders began to weigh in. "Traditional west communities" have tended to throw their weight behind commodity production and sustained yield management while "new west communities" have tended to support the shift towards a more ecological perspective.

Rangeland Reform: An Attempt to Achieve Horizontal Integration

The most dramatic confrontation between these traditional west and new west perspectives has been the debate over Rangeland Reform. The most interesting outcome of this debate has been the work of the Colorado Rangeland Reform Working Group. The Colorado Rangeland Reform Working Group was in essence a study in relationships involving seven ranchers, seven environmentalists and political leadership which included Secretary of Interior Bruce Babbitt (federal), Colorado Governor Roy Romer (state) and Montezuma County Commissioner Tom Colbert (local).

After an unprecedented eight days over two months of building personal relationships and exploring the relationships of people to the public lands a proposal emerged that is encapsulated in its title: "Models for Enhanced Community-Based Involvement." In essence the Community-Based Involvement proposal was an attempt to resolve conflicts by the "horizontal" integration of these relationships at the community level.

The thing that drew the most fire once the "Colorado Model" was re-cast into a proposed rule, was the possibility that the "Resource Advisory Councils," could include people from outside local communities who represented regional and national environmental organizations. The inclusion of this provision was in response to the concern on the part of environmental organizations that too much "local control" could undermine the national interest in the ecological protection of public lands. The possibility of external representation was re-enforced by preemptive "national standards and guidelines" which were viewed as severely limiting the opportunity to develop local approaches to fit diverse ecological and social contexts.

This inclusion of national standards and external representation in a proposal for a "community-based" approach to public land management is consistent with a principle that has been current since the French Revolution i.e. that reform must be connected with the centralization of political power to overcome local parochialism. The other side of this argument is that these provisions open up the door for "hired guns" with ideological and organizational agendas to dominate a process that ought to focus on concrete people and place related land management strategies.

Integrating Communities of Place and Communities of Interest:

The debate over whether locals can be trusted to oversee the management of the public lands and conversely whether outside guns will respect the fabric of local community/public land relationships is really a clash between "communities of place" and "communities of interest." For community-based public land planning to be successful, room must be made for comfortable and respectful participation by place oriented and interest oriented communities. While there are no easy answers, I will explore this integration by focusing on the Southwest Colorado experience which will be presented along with the principles of integrating "scientific expertise" and "basic social values," and providing opportunities for "authentic citizen participation."

The Birth of the Montezuma County Federal Lands Program:

With reference to Model 1, Montezuma County was, and is, on the "traditional west" end of traditional west-new west spectrum. One of my first assignments after agreeing to coordinate a federal lands effort was to go with the Commissioners to a Federal Lands Council meeting to hear from Dick Manning about custom and culture, Karen Budd about the legal authorities of County governments and Carl Hess about land planning and free market environmentalism.

While the Commissioners shared many of the concerns and values expressed at this meeting, we took what we learned from the Federal Lands Council down a different path than the preemptive county land plans that were being recommended. I work for a community development program known as the Office of Community Services at Fort Lewis College (OCS/FLC). Our work has involved 15 years of grass roots community involvement, consensus building and institutional networking in Southwest Colorado. Over the years, we had worked with the County Commission on a variety of collaborative projects involving "energy boom" impacts, growth management, agricultural development and the settlement of Native American water rights issues.

With a history of successful collaborative projects the Commissioners were willing to try a similar approach on public lands. Equally important in setting our course was the fact that we had an immediate problem that needed solving. Whatever appeal doing a preemptive "land plan" held for the commissioners, it was far outweighed by their commitment to progress in solving concrete problems.

San Juan Forest Health and the Declining Supply of Timber:

The initial problem that presented itself was the declining availability of San Juan National Forest timber to local mills, most of which are located in Montezuma County. Initial efforts focused on using well developed economic information and organized community support to try and get an administrative or political fix to the problem. We started with unmet sale quantity targets, which led to timber budget shortfalls, which were related to litigation, appeals and increasing NEPA costs, which were fueled by fact that future sawtimber sales were moving into higher altitude unroaded areas.

All of these obstacles were embedded in the sudden and confusing policy shift towards ecosystem management which was soon compounded by the early stages of Forest Service reorganization and downsizing. In short we had learned "the timber sale system" just in time to watch it come grinding to a virtual standstill.

At the same time, something subtle, but ultimately more important, was happening that provided the opportunity for the community to become part of the rebuilding process. In the course of pulling the formal political and bureaucratic levers to try and get sale quantity targets reinstated, we were spending considerable time in the field and in informal communication with managers and field staff at the Dolores Ranger District.

With time, all of these policy, budget, legal and value conflicts began to take on a human dimension as local managers, community leaders and people whose livelihoods are hanging in the balance got to know one another. Out of these new relationships, two important insights began to dawn: We began to realize that the Forest Service was caught in the cross-fire between environmentalists and the timber industry and no amount of political pressure, from either side, at any level, could relieve the gridlock that had resulted. At the same time we learned that urgent forest health needs provided an opportunity to combine strategies involving selective commercial logging and controlled fire to improve ecological forest health and local timber industry sustainability. What emerged out of these insights was our first partnership to integrate

economic and ecological health. The project came to be called the Ponderosa Pine Restoration Project.

The Integration of Scientific Expertise and Basic Social Values:

In the University of Colorado Law Review devoted to the 1993 Public Lands Symposium, there is an article by Robert Nelson entitled "Government as Theater" in which Nelson discusses a "decentralist vision for public lands" in which "decentralization offers an answer to the fundamental problem of how society can resolve social disagreements that inextricably mix matters of scientific expertise with matters of basic social values . . ." "decision-making authority [is] vested in a group which is most directly affected by its decisions." (358) The Ponderosa Pine Restoration Project is an attempt to create a horizontal pattern of relationships involving existing institutions to move in the direction that Nelson is recommending.

The "Pine Project" focuses on the western end of the San Juan Forest which includes 115,000 acres of stagnated, overstocked Ponderosa Pine re-growth which is at risk for Pine Beetle infestation and wildfires. At the same time, local wood mills are starved for wood supply as areas identified for conventional saw timber sales are stymied in controversy resulting from their location in unroaded, high altitude areas. There are some roaded areas with relatively large Ponderosa Pines, but these remaining large pines are being preserved for their "old growth" characteristics. Some sales have been offered in the re-growth areas but the fact that only the smaller diameter trees have been marked for cutting has increasingly resulted in "no-bids" and uncompleted sales. The use of controlled fire, another tool in regenerating these forests, is constrained by wild fire risks resulting from high stand densities and excessive fuels on the ground. As a result little progress is being made towards improving the health of these Ponderosa Pine forests.

The goal of the Pine Project is to use a combination of fire and commercially viable thinning to move the Ponderosa Pine Forest away from pine beetle risk and closer to the range of natural variability so as to support and improve ecological health and diversity. Research indicates that average density in prehistoric stands was about 12 trees per acre, compared to an average today of about 200 trees per acre.

For the project to be viable, a predictable and affordable long term supply of wood is required to warrant private sector investments in retooling for smaller diameter trees, and the development of new products and new markets that fit the potential small diameter outputs. To achieve affordable pricing of materials without going substantially "below-cost", will require new approaches to pricing, contracting and

administering timber sales. Simply stated, the movement from sawtimber sales to restoration sales, which has occurred defacto over the past few years, must be recognized and workable rules must be developed for meaningful restoration work to proceed.

The stability required for the Forest Service and the private sector to make these changes, hinges on broad-based public consensus about the future of the Ponderosa Pine forests. The Pine Restoration Project was undertaken as a partnership involving Montezuma County, the San Juan National Forest, and the Colorado Timber Industry Association.

In the Fall of 1994, a broad based public involvement process will be initiated involving field trips, educational modules, and public deliberation about the Desired Future Condition for the Pine Zone. In the Summer of 1995, a pilot sale will be offered. This and future sales or stewardship contracts will be monitored for refinement of standards and procedures.

If the Pine Project is successful, it will reduce the fire risk that has contributed to wildfires on millions of acres in the West this summer. The project, over time, will also move the Ponderosa Pine forest on the western San Juan from unhealthy, stunted monolithic stands to diverse stands with larger trees and a great deal more productivity and wildlife habitat diversity.

The development of the Ponderosa Pine Project moved the Federal Lands Program from confrontation, to communication to collaboration as we began to get a handle on what was going to be most effective in serving the interests of local communities. It became apparent that winning battles and scoring points was far less important than developing stable and constructive relationships between local communities and land management agencies. We had County Commissioners sitting down with Forest Service people at the Ranger Office, Forest Service people coming to Courthouse; and everyone, including forest users, going out to the woods together to try and "see" what the other person was talking about and beginning to develop a common language.

By working together, previously obscure processes and tools such as "IRI" (Integrated Resources Inventory) and GIS (Geographic Information Systems) were targeted at organizing information for the Pine Project and making it accessible to the public. The intimidation of thick technical documents began to give way to maps that cowboys, bird watchers, hikers, bikers and loggers could stand around and share their knowledge in relation to particular places on the ground.

Unprecedented things have happened such as Montezuma County's use of a Forest Service economic diversification grant, to hire a respected ecologist from Fort Lewis College (Dr. Bill Romme) to synthesize scientific information on "the range of natural variability", etymology, biodiversity, restoration thinning and the controlled use of fire in the pine zone. This information will be used to develop educational modules for the public involvement process.

The public involvement process in the Ponderosa Pine Restoration Project is designed to bring people with the full range of social values and scientific expertise into the process. Educational modules will be used which introduce scientific and socio-economic information into a process which integrates scientific and social considerations to arrive at consensus about a desired future for the pine zone.

As the pine project was developing a variety of other issues began to come into focus in which Montezuma County, the federal agencies, and public land users began to explore similar efforts to address scientific-social value issues and relationships. At the same time Montezuma County was engaged in regional initiatives that put local values about public lands into a broader regional context.

The Federal Lands Program in a Regional Context:

Montezuma County's participation, through the Region 9 Economic Development District, in regional economic development and transportation plans began to put public land issues into a regional context. The economic and transportation plans involved four rounds of public input meetings in each of the five Southwest Colorado Counties.

In addition to coordinating the Federal Lands Program I was responsible for putting together the social and economic data for the economic development and transportation plans and, along with my Associate, Dr. Sam Burns, conducting the public involvement meetings. It was striking how many of the federal land related issues in Montezuma County surfaced in meetings around the region. The three most predominate issues were:

1. The discussion of the proper balance between tourism and the traditional natural resources sectors of the economy.
2. The growing awareness of the relationships between ranching, farming, open space and winter habitat for wildlife. This awareness was prompted by a great deal of concern about rural subdivision and the fragmentation of the agricultural land base.

3. A high level of concern about rapid growth and demographic change, and the prospects for the continued viability of agricultural and working class families in Southwest Colorado.

We were asking people for their ideas about economic development, and they were responding with priorities that focused on land use, agricultural viability, affordable housing, transportation, economic stratification and quality of life. In drafting the Economic Plan, we supplemented the discussion of these issues in the county and regional sector analyses with a chapter entitled "Tourism, Natural Resources and the Federal Lands."

The community meetings and social and economic analysis triggered by economic development and transportation plans drove home the fact that the San Juan Forest, Mesa Verde National Park and the San Juan Resource Area of BLM were important in different ways to every community in the region. The San Juan Forest helped finance the economic development plan which functions as an "action plan" to guide Forest Service efforts in working with local communities. The participation of Forest and BLM people in the planning process placed their perspectives as community members and resource managers into a community context. It brought Agency people out into the community and made them participants in "community-based" deliberations.

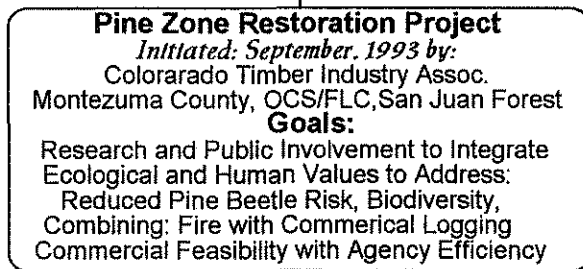
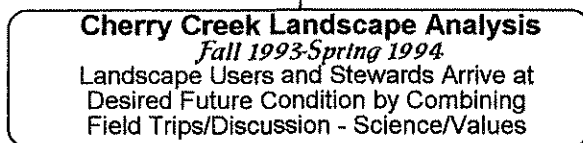
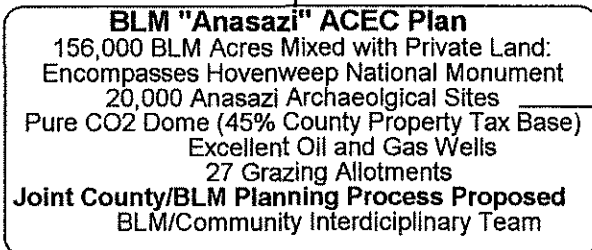
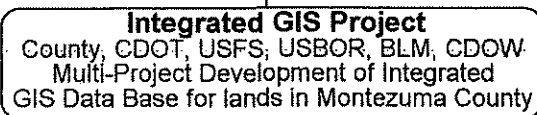
Model 2 was developed to illustrate the parallel emergence of the two primary goals of the Montezuma County Federal Lands Program. The left hand column encapsulates the Pine Zone Restoration Project along with a variety of other county level projects involving a defined set of natural resource issues in a specific land area.

Another example of a County initiative in Model 2 is the "Anasazi Area of Critical Environmental Concern" on the BLM lands which make up the western part of Montezuma and Dolores Counties. In addition to having some of the highest archaeological concentrations, and one of the largest pure CO₂ domes in the United States, this area has 27 grazing allotments that will be subject to the outcomes of Rangeland Reform. Tom Colbert, County Commissioner, and the political leadership behind the Federal Lands Program, was the only elected official on the Colorado Rangeland Reform group with the exception of Governor Romer. Tom advocated for a multi-resource perspective at the "Roundtable." At home he convened a series of meetings of livestock, environmental and recreation representatives to confirm their willingness to work together in the development of Multi-Resource Advisory Councils and Rangeland Resource Teams.

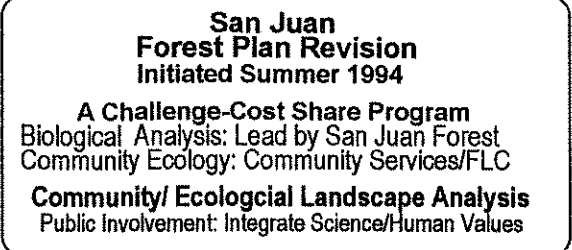
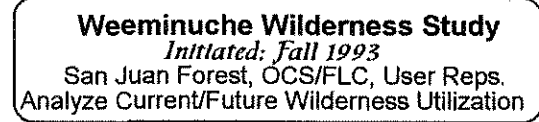
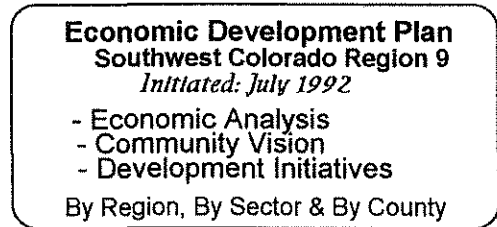
Model 2

Montezuma County Federal Lands Program and Related Regional Collaboration

Montezuma County Initiatives



Southwest Colorado Initiatives



The right-hand column of Model 2 presents projects that have emerged in relation to Montezuma County's goal of building coalitions with other communities adjacent to the San Juan Forest, San Juan Resource Area of BLM and Mesa Verde National Park.

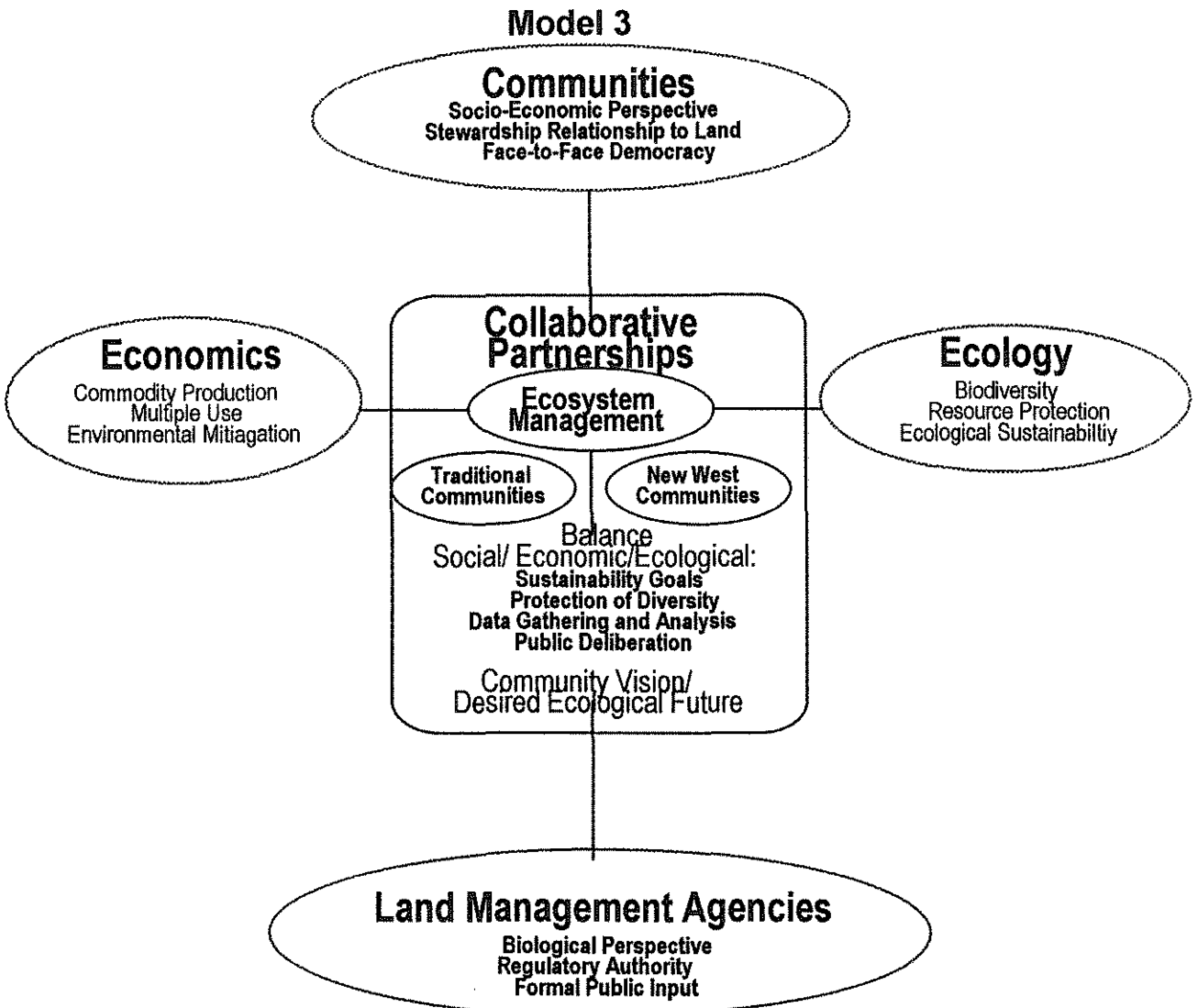
The initiatives presented as Model 2 have all been initiated in the two and a half years since the Montezuma County Federal Lands Program began. The regional initiatives depicted in Model 2 have brought traditional west perspectives (which predominate in Montezuma County) together with new west perspectives (which predominate in the Durango area of La Plata County) into a common set of initiatives. The cumulative learning that has resulted from these projects has generated the two initiatives presented at the bottom of the right hand (regional initiatives) column: The Community-Public Lands Partnership and the San Juan Forest Plan Revision.

The Community-Public Lands Partnership:

The integration of Montezuma County Federal Land initiatives with regional planning activities led to a logical next step which is known as the Community-Public Lands Partnership. This partnership is predicated on the realization that agency people and community people in the West, of all orientations, face some common pressures:

- The uncertainty inherent in a paradigm shift aimed at bringing multiple-use and bio-diversity together in the concept of "ecosystem management."
- Rapid migration to the rural west which is simultaneously impacting public and private land use, open space, social values and economic stratification.
- Down-sizing, re-organization and "re-invention" of federal agencies while local governments face similar pressures (such as the tax limitation amendment in Colorado) at a time when the issues are becoming much more complex.
- Movement in the political arena from stonewalling and obstruction to emotionally charged head on debates involving people with highly differing values.

The broad intent of the Community-Public Lands Partnership is the development of a "new axis" in the relationships between agencies and communities that draws on the strengths of each to discover appropriate social, economic and ecological balances. As Model 3 illustrates, the socio-economic perspective of communities is integrated with the biological perspective of the agencies. The stewardship relationship to the land on the part of community users is integrated with the regulatory authority of the agencies. The face-to-face democratic institutions in the communities are integrated with the formal public input processes of the Agencies:



The Partnership and the new axis between communities and land management agencies is also intended to bring traditional west communities and new west communities into the same decision space. This involves a balance of social, economic and ecological considerations:

- Sustainable ecologies must be balanced with sustainable communities.
- Biodiversity must be balanced with economic diversity
- Biological data gathering and analysis must be balanced with socio-economic data gathering and analysis.
- Public deliberation must offer an open, balanced, factual and empathetic context in which science and values can be brought together.
- Community vision and a desired ecological future must be integrated.

The Community-Public Lands Partnership initially involved the San Juan Forest and BLM Resource Area, Fort Lewis College and Montezuma County. Recently, Mesa Verde National Park has joined the partnership along with other communities in Southwest Colorado. A public lands coalition involving Montrose and Delta Counties has collaborated with Montezuma County and is being invited to join the Partnership. The Montrose-Delta Coalition has strong business and environmental participation, offering an interesting contrast to the County-Agency leadership in Montezuma County.

The intent of the Community-Public Lands Partnership is to build on the "residuals" that have come out of previous efforts. These residuals include data and factual information as well as emerging consensus about values and desired futures for local communities and the public lands. The intent is that project-specific partnerships will be developed to meet specific needs.

Each partnership initiative will begin with access to all of the residuals from previous efforts and an understanding that any new information or consensus that emerges will be available to future partnership initiatives. We are in the planning stages of what will be the most comprehensive Community-Public Land Partnership initiative to date: the San Juan Forest Plan Revision.

The San Juan Forest Plan Revision: Authentic Citizen Participation

The San Juan Forest Plan Revision is being undertaken as a "Challenge-Cost Share Project," in which the Office of Community Services at Fort Lewis College will coordinate the public involvement process and take the lead in developing the social and economic analysis. Work already done by the Agencies and the Communities (presented as Model 2) on the Economic Development Plan, the Transportation Plan, the San Juan Skyway, the Cherry Creek Landscape, the Weminuche Wilderness Study, and the Pine Zone Restoration Project will be incorporated into the planning process.

In addition to drawing on the "residuals" from previous initiatives, the Forest Plan Revision will make the community context a foundation for the planning process rather than an afterthought. My partner, Sam Burns, defines what he calls "authentic citizen participation" based on "community oriented inquiry" which integrates "ordinary" and "professional" knowledge:

When anyone proposes a change in a community, when anything is held up as progress or as improvement in the human world, there is a very important necessity to take it up with the people there. Conversation needs to be held -- people need to be listened to for their understandings of the arrangements they have made in making the community what it is. [Burns 1985: 217]

In keeping with these principles of "community oriented inquiry", "professional knowledge" will be presented in spatial formats so that everyone that has a relationship to the San Juan Forest can communicate their "ordinary knowledge" with reference to places on the Forest that they use and value.

In addition to ecological landscapes, social landscapes will be identified. Research, analysis and articulation of values will focus on the relationships between local communities and the San Juan National Forest. "Communities of interest" will have an opportunity to participate directly with "communities of place." Ecological parameters will take into account the sustainability of local communities. The range of alternatives possible within ecological parameters will be evaluated and prioritized in the context of an open consideration of human values.

Conclusion:

This conference has already addressed the complex and emotionally charged issues concerning the rangelands, the forests, and the waters that sustain them in the arid west. I have focused on the Montezuma County Federal Lands Program and the resulting emergence of the Community-Public Land Partnership which has grown in Southwest Colorado from the grass roots to encompass all levels of government. Whether these partnerships are ultimately successful or not depends on whether they can integrate communities of place and communities of interest into a working "Model for Community-Based Involvement."

Rangeland Reform has come to symbolize the painful struggle to search for a community-based model. Montezuma County Commissioner and rancher Tom Colbert was a member of the Colorado Rangeland Reform Working Group convened by Secretary Babbitt and Governor Romer last winter. At a recent public lands forum in Durango Tom evaluated the "Roundtable:"

The Roundtable was not a failure, but neither was it a success. We produced a paper with some areas of agreement, and some areas of no agreement. Mr. Babbitt changed a lot of that, but it gave everyone a place to start from. West wide hearings produced more good input. The legislature will certainly not leave it alone, but the beginning was and is grass roots. Everything worth while and good in this country usually has a grass roots beginning. [Copied from Tom Colbert's presentation notes, Public Lands Forum, Durango, August 4, 1994]

Indeed, grass roots efforts are springing up around the west to undertake the arduous task of how to make the community setting work as a context for building the kind of consensus that can lead to constructive action that supports both ecological and community health and diversity.

In recent months, I have sat around a number of tables where a fascinating array of these initiatives have been described. I see this panel this morning as a continuation of these discussions. I would like to conclude by putting two interrelated questions to this conference of distinguished natural resources lawyers, administrators policy makers and environmental advocates:

Can we create a legal and policy framework that encourages, supports and rewards collaborative grass roots efforts that will sustain healthy ecologies and healthy communities in the rural West? OR Will the law continue to be used by polarized groups as a tactical weapon to fight ideological battles?

I am convinced that the multiple answers required to address the question of "Who governs the public lands?" resides in the fertilization and cross pollination of emerging grass roots initiatives. But these efforts require your help. These efforts need to be recognized and, in many cases, authorized. These initiatives also need protection to shield any newborn consensus from the torpedoes that inevitably hit the water, from all directions, as soon as the parties begin to make real progress. Please lend your support.

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