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Watershed Based Efforts: The Applegate Partnership of Southwest Oregon

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WATERSHED BASED EFFORTS
THE APPLGATE PARTNERSHIP
OF SOUTHWEST OREGON

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Applegate Partnership of
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CHALLENGING FEDERAL OWNERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT:
PUBLIC LANDS AND PUBLIC BENEFITS

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APPLEGATE PARTNERSHIP

The idea for the Applegate Partnership was born in the minds of two unlikely collaborators, Jack Shipley, an avid environmentalists, and Jim Neal, a long-time logger from Redmond, Oregon and co-director of the Aerial Forest Management Foundation. Together these two men, frustrated with the polarization of resource management issues and not willing to accept gridlock, decided that it was worth a try to get the protagonists together and hash out some undercurrent issues face to face. The result, according to Shipley, has been a very successful community-based partnership.

In the summer of 1992, Jack Shipley and Jim Neal decided to begin discussing with others their idea of a "different approach to managing the half-million acre Applegate Watershed." Located in southwest Oregon and northern California, the Applegate Watershed includes Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), state, county, and private lands. They wrote a short white paper outlining basic tenets of their plan, such as responsible extraction, no clearcuts and no pesticides. Shipley solicited comments from environmental groups and natural resource agencies (mainly the Forest Service and the BLM) and Neal similarly approached industry interests.

Surprisingly, what they found was that there was considerable overlap between the desires and interests of the environmental groups and the industry groups, centered around maintaining the long-term health of the watershed and stability of local economics.

Encouraged by this apparent common ground, Shipley and Neal organized a meeting in October 1992 with neighbors, representatives from industry, community groups, the BLM, the Forest Service, and several local environmental organizations to discuss a plan to make the Applegate Watershed a demonstration site for ecologically and financially responsible resource management.

Not wasting any time, this 60-person group elected a nine-person Board of Directors and nine Alternates, whose main job was to meet weekly to get the coalition off the ground.

According to Shipley, nominations to the Board of Directors was based not on affiliation, but on a willingness to "work toward solutions, leave partisanship at home, put ecosystem health in front of private agendas, and have the time to participate" in meetings. The group crafted the vision statement for the Applegate Partnership at the first meeting; it reads:

The Applegate Partnership is a community-based project involving industry, conservation groups, natural resource agencies, and residents cooperating to encourage and facilitate the use of natural resource principles that promote ecosystem health and diversity.

Through community involvement and education, this partnership supports management of all land within the watershed in a manner that sustains natural resources and that will, in turn, contribute to economic and community stability within the Applegate Valley.

In addition to developing a vision statement, these nine people met quietly (not announced to

the media or politicians) twice a week through the fall of 1992, creating guiding philosophical principles. The purpose was, according to the partnership publication, Applegate Partnership: Practice Trust -- Them is Us, "making future land management in the Applegate Watershed ecologically credible, aesthetically acceptable, and economically viable." The decision to not go public until the right time was prompted by fear that either members of the press or politicians would, "misportray or use information in an inappropriate way," said Shipley. The members also hoped that low profile would allow the fragile new coalition time to make mistakes and develop trust without being under the watchful eye of the media. According to the document mentioned above, the Board of Directors agreed that the partnership would:

- provide leadership in facilitating the use of natural resource principles that promote ecosystem health and natural diversity;
- work with public land managers, private landowners, and community members to promote projects which demonstrate ecologically sound management practices within the watershed;
- seek support for these projects through community involvement and education.

They also spent considerable time and energy working on developing trust and respect among the participants. "We were dealing here with arch enemies who in the past had only met

across a courtroom," noted District Ranger Su Rolle. People were very concerned about hidden agendas and relinquishing any of their power. Jack Shipley believes all this work has been worth it. He feels that there has been a fundamental shift in attitude by people sitting on the Board and comments that, "it was desperation and gridlock that brought us together, but it is trust and respect that keeps us going."

Some specific on-the-ground activities are taking the first steps toward achieving partnership goals and include plans for research and monitoring, environmental restoration, outreach and public education. Most importantly, however, is the plan to involve local communities in a visioning process of the Applegate Watershed, whereby the partnership will encourage participation of individuals and agencies in developing a range of "desired future conditions" for the watershed; a community image of what the area should look like and how it should function. Specific projects will then be judged by how well they respond to this community-developed goal of forest health and community economic stability.

Because of the mix of public and private land, some projects will be implemented through cooperation with private landowners, and some will be administered and carried out by the BLM and Forest Service. A community assessment has been completed (funded through cost-sharing between FS, BLM, Southern Oregon State College and Rogue Institute of Ecology and Economy). A cooperative assessment of the ecological and economic health of the watershed has begun involving both the BLM and the Forest Service, Oregon State University, the University of Oregon, Southern Oregon State College, USFS, PNW and interested groups and individuals. A significant step toward cooperative management was

made by merging the various GIS and other analytical systems between the Forest Service and the BLM through the assistance of John Meyer, Professor of Geography at Southern Oregon State College.

When the group went public in February 1993, it was immediately hailed as a success.

Secretary of the Interior Babbitt visited the fledgling group in March 1993, soliciting ideas for the upcoming Forest Summit in areas such as implementation, ecosystem management and investing in community and economic infrastructure. The Summit itself referenced the group and asked two Applegate board members to participate in the Summit proceedings.

The notoriety was a double-edged sword in that the high profile helped with broader support and at the same time created extreme pressure on performance anxiety through increased expectations.

Rolle believes that part of the success of this effort is attributable to the federal agencies' responsiveness to a visionary idea created outside the agencies. BLM and Forest Service participants generally feel that the experience has helped them work more cooperatively and develop relationships of trust with outside interests. They are convinced that the partnership approach will result in more creative solutions to natural resource problems in the Applegate Watershed, leading to improved environmental quality with more consistency and better follow through on projects. Local industry and environmental groups have faith in the process and are encouraged by the fact that the gridlock has been broken. The success of a number of projects, a non-appealed timber sale, a USFS broad-based management project, funded through state and local cost-sharing, many watershed restoration projects on private

land, have only added to the positive feelings surrounding this partnership.

According to Rolle, "this is not a project in the sense that it has an end;" it is a process aimed at building relationships so that people and groups will be able to effectively participate in natural resource management decisions and projects. The group's hope is that eventually (in the vicinity of 5 years) the development and empowerment of informal local networks will make the formal partnership obsolete. This type of empowerment, as it is generally expressed by group members, would not only be beneficial in natural resource questions, but generate a broader feeling of empowerment for local communities. Members of the Applegate Partnership feel that their process is not just about the Northwest, nor is it just a timber issue; they believe it has broad implications for relearning lost community and social skills.

Why was this situation perceived as a success?

This partnership, regardless of its effectiveness at improving environmental and economic quality, can be called a success simply because it moved beyond people and issues and the deeply ingrained gridlock that had been so pervasive in the Applegate watershed. In place of this gridlock, positive relationships developed between polarized groups, agencies and the community; a common vision was attained. Arch enemies realized that they shared things in common.

Noteworthy changes in attitude have also occurred among the Forest Service and BLM

participants. Success with this partnership has convinced many staff people that old ways of doing things are not as effective as they might have believed and that new approaches involving collaboration are needed. Rolle has noticed a change in attitude from staff believing they were "experts with a mission to convince," to a feeling of "let's see what we can do together." In so observing, Rolle was inspired to analyze and record some of the most visible paradigm shifts she observed, such as control giving way to shared power and responsibility, public education evolving into a listening and learning together interaction, and a "we/they" orientation shifting to an "us" conception of the agency and community of interests surrounding it.

Why was success possible?

The strategic decision to avoid media and political involvement in the early stages of negotiation and decision-making appears to have facilitated the building of trust between parties. Recognizing that there had already been much misinformation and stereotyping involved in earlier conflicts, low profile was encouraged to allow the new coalition space to grow and develop relationships and trust without having to deal with the added pressure of media attention and politics.

The focus on people and interests, not on affiliation and positions also is believed by the participants to be a major factor in the success of the partnership. Rolle states that, "the partnership isn't as much about issues as it is about relationships." A lot of time was spent working on trust, with participants interacting as individuals not as representatives from a

particular organization. Because there was no lead agency or any one individual in charge, all participants could participate as equals. Many of those involved felt that the relationship-building was the most significant aspect of the entire process. In fact, at the first meeting, and before they were allowed to indicate who they were and what organization they represented, participants introduced themselves, their families and their hopes for the future. This mode of introduction highlighted participants' common interests and bonds.

Keeping the project and scope locally focused helped facilitate agreement between diverse interests. Jim Neal stated that, "abstraction is death for partnership, but that once you can sit down and talk about a definable piece of land, you can get beyond philosophy and things start to fall together -- you can agree on what is acceptable and what is not." Neal also believes that local environmental organizations are more useful groups to be involved in this sort of partnership than national organizations because they have a better understanding of local conditions and natural history. National environmental organizations, he fears, simply do not have the time to be involved in the planning stages -- local environmental organizations can be more interactive.

What barriers were faced and how were they overcome?

Learning to disagree and argue while maintaining a level of trust and respect was one of the greatest challenges the group faced. According to Dwain Cross, private logger and sawmill owner, while the group agreed upon the importance of maintaining trust, this emphasis was used by some as a tool to force private agendas by preventing others from expressing

disagreement or anger. There was a point when any expression of anger was squelched by a comment such as, "you are just acting in a way that is no longer promoting trust." The problem was brought out into the open and the participants are more aware of the need to both develop trust and openly express opinions.

According to Shipley, national and regional environmental organizations were not as impressed with the process as one might have thought; "the big groups felt that such a partnership might be good for the environment in the specific case of the Applegate Watershed, they were not convinced that the model was one that should be broadly applied." Shipley's impression is that the national environmental organizations fear under-representation in some local areas, thereby undermining some national initiatives and leaving environmental quality up to local whims.

Issues of local control created concern for some Forest Service and BLM employees. Some staff were worried about losing control of decision-making on federally managed lands and questioned the wisdom of opening up the process to this degree. To allay those fears, those staff were assured that all projects involving federal land would still go through regular agency channels. The decision-making authority of line officers was not being relinquished by this process. This realization created greater acceptance of the project within both agencies.

While the inter-group tensions and challenges were perceived by the group at the beginning of the process, it turned out that the biggest threat to the partnership would come later

because of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA). According to Rolle, FACA has really "thrown a wrench into partnership-building" through its strict regulations regarding interactions between public sector employees and their constituents. After two years of participation with the partnership, all federal employees involved in the Applegate were forced to withdraw from the Board in summer of 1994, fearing lawsuits under FACA. According to Rolle, the Applegate group still has a "clear mission and vision," but must proceed, at least for the moment, without the benefit of Forest Service or BLM participation. Rolle felt that the whole situation "was a shame...that the BLM and Forest Service will no longer have the same kind of opportunity to share information with their publics and develop relationships that only frequent meetings can facilitate...that something creative needs to be done about FACA...it was designed to assure balanced public/private interaction" and now appears to be preventing it. According to Rolle, this problem with FACA has been the "biggest thing to hit us in two years."

What lessons can be drawn for future bridging?

According to Jack Shipley, the major lesson that can be learned from the initial success of this partnership is that common ground does exist. In many issues, polarization and stereotyping tends to obscure what people and parties have in common. Participants need to look beyond disagreements and build upon what they have in common.

The second lesson to be learned here, particularly from an agency perspective is that there are advantages to shared leadership. District Ranger Rolle feels that more creative solutions

are forthcoming from this process for on-the-ground management. Since she became a part of the process, she has integrated with the community: "we are now part of the system, a neighbor and we care...because of this, we can expect greater follow through and ability to solicit community and volunteer aid."

Another lesson lies in the value of being open and responsive to ideas that are generated outside the agency. In this case, it was the ability of a number of key federal officials to recognize and embrace a visionary idea and then find an appropriate role for the agency that helped foster the success.

An important lesson expressed by logger Dwain Cross; "you need to make sure that you give other people incentives to participate." In order for people to effectively work within a partnership such as Applegate, they need to feel as if their concerns are truly being listened to and considered seriously and can get some of their needs met. Cross explains that due to the history of confrontation and the polarization of groups and issues, people tend to respond to their stereotypes rather than what people are really saying. This attitude puts a damper on meaningful discussion, making parties inaccessible to each other. Rather, Cross suggests that "we need to convince people of their importance so that they have incentives to participate." There's got to be something in it for everyone.

An overriding lesson learned by all participants in the Applegate Partnership, agency and non-agency alike, is that by adopting broader perspectives about each other and about the realm of resource management possibilities that exist, exciting opportunities for both on-the-

ground management and more productive interactions between groups will arise. In the words of a Northwest Forestry Association representative in the Applegate Partnership:

...the next step for us as far as the Applegate Partnership is getting out into the Applegate community and making connections on an informal basis with the interest groups that are in the community...these (interest groups) are communities essentially. (They are) communities of affiliation, communities of occupation, communities of interest, but they are distinct. They have their own decision-making processes, they have their own leadership, they have their own geographical locations of preference. We need to link with those and understand their issues and we need to find ways in which they can begin to bring those interests into the process. We need to create substantive mechanisms, substantive opportunities to participate in ways that gradually build their skills and opportunities so that they can be equal participants in this resource planning process when they don't know the terminology and they haven't had enough experience and they know it. If we really want them to participate, and I desperately do, we need to find those opportunities.

Note - this article was reprinted with permission from: J.Wondolleck and S.Yaffee.

Building Bridges Across Agency Boundaries: In Search of Excellence in the U.S. Forest Service (School of Natural Resources and Environment, University of Michigan, 1994)

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