

A Human Dimensions Inquiry in Watershed Analysis: Listening to Constituents' Views of Contested Legitimacy on the National Forest

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To understand the human dimension of a watershed from the points of view of its residents, qualitative data were collected using an approach that included both individual interviews and group discussions designed to include a full range of watershed stakeholders. A set of interrelated legitimacy patterns were apparent in the data, ranging from perceptions of exclusion and alienation to more extreme manifestations such as constitutionalist challenges to federal authority and conspiracy theories about an enormous, impending United Nations "Park" in the Cascades. Two related theoretical concepts, (1) a shift in social priorities for public lands, linked to certain economic transitions and (2) a legitimization problem, in which an excluded populace contests the legitimacy of federal management of public land, add credence to these patterns and the human dimension conditions that they suggest.

Keywords constituent voice, human dimensions identity, legitimacy, watershed analysis

During the planning of a watershed assessment project we were influenced by the work of Habermas, in particular, his concept of *legitimation problems*, and created a process that would be central to developing a better understanding of the watershed's human dimension. Though Habermas's (1976) analysis of the concept of *legitimacy* and *legitimation problems* provides a valuable framework for examining conflicts in the management of public lands (a framework to which we would later return), it did not immediately yield implications for our consideration of methodological issues. It was Yankelovich's (1991) discussion of the "expert–public gap," describing the historic and current elevation of expert technical knowledge over other forms of knowledge, that helped us move from Habermas's concept of legitimacy toward the practical, methodological implications regarding democracy and

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public involvement. In opposition to this democracy-eroding force, Yankelovich makes a compelling case for Habermas's concept of *reason*. Habermas (1976, 215) urges a return to reason as the normative path to knowledge, one that "enables people to communicate with each other across national, linguistic and ideological boundaries in ways that lead to a shared concept of what is true and what is false." How might such reason find a place within the mostly technical realm of ecosystem analysis? Describing the necessary conditions for this type of reason, Yankelovich asserts: "For reason in this sense to prevail there must be dialogue rather than monologue (i.e., people must be talking *to* and *with* each other, not *at* each other)" (1991, 216).

Habermas (1976, 217) adds, "true democracy" depends on "open dialogue among public, experts and leaders in which there is give-and-take, two-way communication rather than monologue and the genuine encounter between leaders and citizens."

Since we were working in an area where conflict was manifest as outright challenge to the federal government's management of public lands (the Chumstick Watershed, extending north of the town of Leavenworth, in Washington's Cascade Mountains, is managed by the Leavenworth Ranger District of the Wenatchee National Forest), Habermas's (1976, 178) discussion of legitimacy and legitimation problems seemed especially relevant:

Legitimacy means a political orders' worthiness to be recognized. This definition highlights the fact that legitimacy is a contestable validity claim; the stability of the order . . . depends on its (at least) de facto recognition. [Emphasis in original]

Yankelovich's assertions about dialogue and democracy, grounded in Habermas, and Habermas's (1976, 194) own admonition that the state (government) has a responsibility for "correcting the pattern of social inequality" began to converge. Together they suggested that attention to the role of both dialogue and equity in democracy should guide our research.

This emphasis on the importance of listening affirmed our intention to go beyond prior social assessment efforts in which recreation specialists had derived social meaning from counts and other estimates of visitor use. Instead, we intended to go to the residents of the Chumstick Watershed for their own words regarding their valuing and perceptions of, and their activities and interactions with, the watershed. We would ask them to describe the watershed in terms of what might be important to them. This would be an exercise built around listening.

Methods

The project included two approaches to gathering data from watershed constituents. The first utilized unstructured individual interviews with 21 key respondents, which also included asking each to suggest, or "nominate," other potential key respondents as participants for the project's second approach. In this second approach, 23 additional participants were included through three small-group interviews using a modified nominal group technique (Delbecq, Van de Ven, and Gustafson 1986). We hoped that the economy of scale and potential for synergy offered by group interviews would make it an effective means with which to capture an additional rich

set of data about the watershed's human dimension. A detailed description of these methods and a catalogue of all the data analyzed in this research are contained in McGuire (1997).

Selecting Respondents

We adopted the suggestion by Krannich et al. (1994, 123) that building inclusive measures for obtaining public input requires seeking out participants and promoting their input. More specifically, we decided to select participants across a range of local "communities of interest" (Krannich et al. 1994, 33) in order to guide our search and a diverse and equitable recruitment of *information-rich* respondents. Fortunately, a research-based catalogue of such groups already existed; a draft Social Assessment on Fire Recovery for the Wenatchee National Forest (Carroll et al. 2000) included a list of political coalitions and stakeholder groups for the Leavenworth Ranger District. With permission from the principal author, we adapted this list as a framework around which to build the sample of respondents. We derived, field-tested, and eventually used 11 "constituent groups" from the 22 political coalitions and stakeholder groups that Carroll et al. (2000) identified:

- Environmental interests.
- Orchardists and farmers.
- Timber interests.
- Nonindustrial private forest owners.
- Tourism advocates.
- Civic leaders.
- Nontourism businesses.
- Ranchers.
- Recreationists.
- Residents, both long-term and new.
- Special forest products interests.

These constituent groups served two critical purposes in building our sample. First, as a "checklist for diversity," they provided both a general guide for our selection of individual interview respondents and a set of categories around which to solicit nominations of potential participants for the group interviews. Further, this *maximum variation sampling* approach offered the potential to help reveal "shared patterns that cut across cases and derive their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity" (Patton 1990, 172). Of the 21 individual interview respondents, 11 were identified by chain-referral sampling, asking for referrals to "other knowledgeable people who might help us better understand the Chumstick Valley." Seven were people with whom we had prior contact during project design. Three respondents were first identified through routine examination of the local newspaper. Four of the 21 had USDA Forest Service connections.

Eventually, all of the respondents (except Respondent 5, Figure 1, who as a new arrival to the valley was unable to refer us to others) were identified—many nominated repeatedly—through the chain referral process. Thus, the resultant web of interviewees and chain-referral nominations (Figure 1) shows marked connectedness. We interpret this connectedness among the respondents, spanning as it does the "checklist for diversity" and the multiple independent starting points of our sampling, as an indication that we were successful at including the people most widely

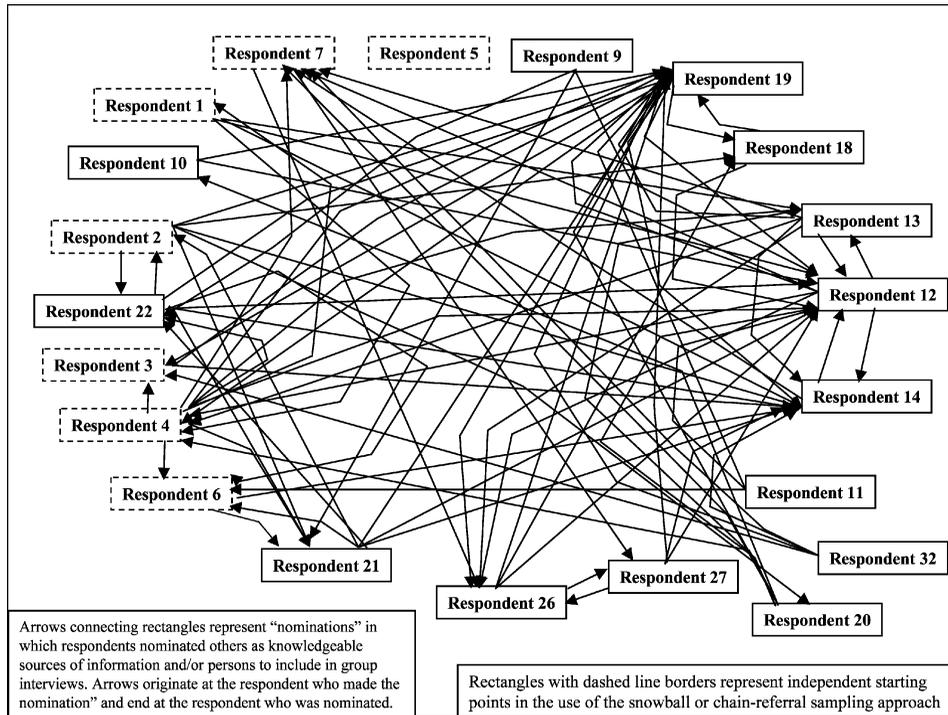


Figure 1. Chain-referral nominations showing the high degree of cross-referencing interconnectedness among interviewees.

thought of as knowledgeable in the context of the Chumstick watershed's human dimension, that is, the information-rich cases that we sought.

We identified individual interview respondents according to the constituent group categories for which they were recruited, and asked the group interview participants to self-identify according to the constituent group categories, indicating all of the categories that applied. This information was useful in evaluating the effectiveness of our efforts to recruit participants across the many constituent groups. The constituent group categories were not mutually exclusive. For example, many people who were recruited for other constituent group categories often self-identified as "recreationists," inflating the count for "recreationists."

Limitations

One limitation of our approach to respondent selection is that it does not reliably capture extralocal perspectives about the Chumstick Watershed. Some of the perspectives omitted by this study are conveyed to the Forest Service through other types of relationships. The Yakima Indian Nation, for example, is by treaty designated as comanager of the Wenatchee National Forest. In addition, regional and national environmental groups make their own perspectives known to the Forest Service on a regular basis through a variety of formal and informal means.

The chain referral sampling process and "checklist for diversity" we employed did not lead us to any of the Chumstick Valley's several Hispanic residents. Other

cultural groups absent from our sample were Asians, reportedly a significant proportion of the commercial mushroom pickers who move seasonally through the National Forest.

Individual Interviews

Loflund and Loflund's (1995) *guided conversations* approach was used to cultivate an understanding of the watershed from respondents' perspectives, to identify connections they had with each other, and to collect descriptive data on each person. Interviews were unstructured and guided by broad statements or prompts that helped form the substantive frame. Prompts included phrases such as "We are trying to cast a pretty wide net so that we are able to hear the full range of different things that matter to you about the Forest Service lands in the Chumstick" and "All sorts of different kinds of information are important, how you use the forest lands, what is valuable or important to you about those lands, what other uses do you see affecting you and your use of the lands, and what you want to see protected, maintained, used, or achieved on these lands." Though sensitized to the concepts during interviewing and initial coding, we did not probe for issues of alienation or evidence of a legitimacy crisis during our interviewing, choosing instead to let the issues and relationships most salient for the respondent emerge.

Group Interviews

Following the example of Krumpke and McCoy (1995), we designed group interview questions to identify and qualify (1) current or past forest uses, activities, characteristics, places, benefits, or processes that were of value or importance to participants and (2) the perceived threats, if any, to those things of value or importance. We also asked these participants to self-identify according to the constituent group categories.

Data Analysis

Interview transcripts, nominal group transcripts, and in situ field notes were used to capture respondent comments and relevant observations about context, tone, etc. The units of analysis were the words, phrases, and sentences of the respondents representing their ideas and observations, what Glaser (1992, 390) calls "in vivo words" and Patton (1990, 45) calls "indigenous concepts." We applied a coding scheme that was a combination of open, axial, and selective coding.

All participant responses from individual and group interviews were combined and analyzed using content analysis and coding approaches that organized participant comments first for their overt topical content—comments about "forest fire," for example. Another round of coding further scrutinized the data in these topical categories, identifying and applying subcodes to emergent themes within them, often in recognition of certain attitudinal content—comments reflecting "anger about forest fires," for example.

A final coding scheme used theoretically defensible categories to organize the data for effective integration into the Forest Service's watershed analysis process. Applying this scheme meant considering each coded unit against concepts routinely applied by physical scientists to the nonhuman aspects of the watershed—current

conditions and reference conditions, for example. While for a Forest Service fire ecologist such an approach might lead to a focus on something like “excessive fuel loading on south facing slopes” and the fisheries biologist might place a priority on “excessive sedimentation in spawning habitat,” for us this coding pointed to the themes of alienation and resentment emerging from our analyzed data.

Results: Patterns of Exclusion and Legitimacy

Cutting across coding categories and cases (respondents), we found themes of alienation from and resentment toward the Forest Service and the federal government. We believed that this pattern constituted the human dimension finding that most critically needed to be incorporated into the Forest Service’s understanding of the Chumstick watershed, particularly since many of the respondents voicing such sentiments seemed to be highly regarded in their networks. This pattern is illustrated here with excerpts from field notes and transcripts and described in light of external theoretical constructs—regarding legitimacy and a shift in social priorities—whose explanatory power offers what we believe are valuable insights.

Exclusion and the Shift in Social Priorities

For one respondent the new, ascendant, and for him unwanted set of priorities is embodied in ecosystem management. He described himself as:

Dead against ecosystem management. Ecosystem [management] is a threat to the way I feel the National Forest should be run. Way too heavy into the environmental side—not enough to the logical, common sense, heritage side.

Two important relationships appear. First, the speaker nicely contrasts his perceptions of the two sets of priorities, “the environmental side,” manifest here as ecosystem management, and, his side, the “heritage side,” characterized by logic and common sense. Second, he is quite clear that ecosystem management belongs to “the environmental side.” To illustrate a further contrast that this same respondent makes between “the environmental side” and his priorities:

Under ecosystem management, snags are sacred. I can bet you a six-pack that it must be breaking the poor little hearts of . . . young women at the Forest Service to see a snag in the back of someone’s pick-up, all bucked-up for firewood.

Perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of this hyperbole is the distinction drawn between his set of priorities or values, which he casts as the practical sort that appreciates the utility of snags as firewood, and a different set of priorities or values, which he casts narrowly as regarding snags to be “sacred.” Several other entries in our field notes describe notably utilitarian views on the part of respondents regarding certain aspects of the forest. During an individual interview that took the form of a field trip around the valley, one respondent commented on some dead and downed trees that we saw along a forest road:

Look at that material going to waste. People who could benefit most from its use live right here in the valley, and it is not available for harvest.

Another speaker decried the way in which burned trees, still standing after the 1994 fires, were “going to waste” while area voters were being asked to pass a school levy. He showed a mixture of disgust and disbelief that area taxpayers would be asked to pay more when the scorched timber whose harvest could be funding the schools was standing there uncut, “going to waste.” When trying to understand how some respondents might arrive at their positions of hostility toward the federal government or the Forest Service, it is useful to note the degree to which these utilitarian priorities seem to conflict with those other (that is, environmental) priorities that are believed to be replacing them.

In this critique of ecosystem management, a resident elaborates on the consequences of this threatening new approach. He believes that the new strategy of ecosystem management has no place for timber harvest. To him, ecosystem management, which he links with the “environmental side,” excludes his livelihood as a logger from the national forest. This supports the perception that shifting priorities for forest management impacts timber related livelihoods.

Now that Ecosystem Management doesn't see any need for timber management—no need for roads—[they're] throwing gates up everywhere. Keeping us off our land!

Another respondent described a change in National Forest timber harvesting that he said had made it much harder to make a living logging. In times past loggers were able to locate, purchase, and harvest timber from the national forest in a manner similar in some respects to the way one might have prospected for minerals. They would locate trees or stands that they thought the Forest Service would approve of cutting. Then a forester from the ranger district would be consulted, and when the sales were approved, these small timber sales were called “green sheet sales,” borrowing their name from the green government form on which they were documented. Such sales provided a niche for smaller logging operations. They placed a premium on a different set of skills and resources than those required today. Success and regular income depended more on being observant, knowing the area, and being able to do the work, than on the ability to make the high bid for a timber sale.

When study participants marshal their “reasons why” in defense of timber harvest, not only does this defensive stance illustrate a reaction to shifted and shifting national social priorities for the watershed that contrast with local needs, but their justifications for timber harvest reveal some of what timber harvest means to them—the benefits of harvesting timber:

Revenue for schools and roads.
Forest economy and stability through timber availability.
Providing housing materials.
Jobs.
Thinning and salvage for fire protection.
Disease and fire protection.

This summated list from the nominal group sessions yields some insight into how timber harvest penetrates people's understanding of their lives and their

communities, as well as providing insights into what and how high the stakes are from some points of view.

Property Values and the Shift in Social Priorities

Another factor that may contribute to a feeling of increasing or impending exclusion for some Chumstick residents is a set of effects related to rising property values. A respondent reported that he and his wife had experienced in 1 year a more than 10-fold increase in their property tax bill. Worried by this trend, living on a relatively fixed income, and watching an influx of new residential development in the valley, they sold their property rather than risk losing everything by defaulting on the soaring tax bills. They now live in a mobile home on some of the land that they transferred to their grown children. This trend continues; Realtor signs abound in the Chumstick, advertising homes for sale.

Although this issue may seem removed from the concerns of the national forest, it merits consideration in any effort to understand the pressures and turbulence that may exist for the actors in the human dimension of the Chumstick watershed. It is important to keep in mind that the impacts of this trend are distributed quite differently across newcomers and long-term residents, across the affluent and those of lower or fixed income. It is also important to be aware that many of the natural amenities that help fuel this trend are those provided by the national forest. Realtors' advertisements in the local paper beckon would-be buyers with "woody serenity" and "adjacent to National Forest." This shift in social priorities for the National Forest—a proximity to forest amenities—has become a commodity to be traded in the real estate market. It suggests another way in which management decisions concerning distribution of National Forest resources to different uses have social and economic impacts that touch lives beyond forest boundaries.

The USDA Forest Service Captured by the "Agenda"

The efforts of some study participants to erect defensive arguments for timber harvest seem to imply a perception of threat. We suggest that it is the larger shift in social priorities for national forests that underlies many of the phenomena by which people feel threatened. This becomes one of the building blocks for alienation and anti-government sentiment described later. It seems worth examining, first, how participants describe the threats that they perceive to national forest timber harvest.

Here are some of the things that participants in the nominal group sessions identified as threats to timber harvesting:

Nature worshippers.

Endangered Species Act.

Regulations and political instability threaten US Forest Service's ability to accomplish our right to cut down commercial trees and slow the spread of disease and insects, thus reducing the threat of fires, which have so reduced our ability to cut.

The identification of "nature worshippers" as a threat is reminiscent of the hyperbole cited earlier, in which ecosystem management was perceived to hold snags "sacred." The other two responses in this list identify policy as threats, including specifically the Endangered Species Act. Some participants suggest that their

perceptions of environmental regulations as threats are well grounded in the experience of people in Chumstick:

The Endangered Species Act clobbered a lot of people . . . the owl shut down ours and [neighbor's] tree farms. Now it's us who will go extinct.

Other respondents pick up the theme of “the owl” (the Northern spotted owl) in their identification of threats during nominal group sessions:

Using spotted owl just to stop stuff (logging) and keep us off and away.
Using the Owl as the method for controlling land access.

Respondents also fear that there is some larger, greater threat that underlies the ecosystem-based regulations whose effects they so dislike. This same fear is reflected in participants' use of the term “agenda” in the following comments describing threats:

Forest management decisions based upon public opinion and/or agenda rather than sound, scientific data/methods.

Interpretation of federal regulations by agenda-driven decision-makers.

Agenda motivation.

“Agenda” as used here is conversational shorthand for “environmentalist agenda,” a phrase we heard used frequently during individual interviews. It was never associated with utilitarian points of view and works as a catchall or umbrella term to sum up and refer to all of “the opposition's” plans or intentions with one word, “agenda.” This situation, in particular, is one in which the word “agenda” seems to take on extra power. Part of this added power in such adversarial situations derives from its vagueness. As a “claim of concept” (Hart 2000, 90), “agenda” is restrictive and emotive and allows the hearer's imagination to help flesh out what the term itself leaves vague. In these contexts, it clearly seems to take on the meaning of its better known cousin, “hidden agenda.”

The Forest Service, perceived by residents of the Chumstick as having an eco-centric bias under ecosystem management, has come to embody, for residents of the Chumstick, outside influence and the ascendance of “environmental control.” The central element of the “agenda theory” is the implication that the decision-making apparatus for the national forest has been co-opted by “the agenda,” that there has been a takeover:

Loss of local control on the US Forest Service.

Threat to local control by Spotted Owl, wetlands and other green issues.

Expanding environmental control by outside interests.

Outside influence.

USFS as it exists in now. In times past USFS operated to the benefit of the forest and us.

Another related path that seems to lead people to the conclusion that the Forest Service is now operating under priorities that no longer resemble their own can be found in the comment made by this respondent opposed to ecosystem management:

Now that Ecosystem Management doesn't see any need for timber management—no need for roads—[they're] throwing gates up everywhere.
Keeping us off our land!

For this respondent, ecosystem management is the culprit in excluding his livelihood as a logger from the national forest. In addition, he points out that because there will be no more timber harvest, the forest roads are being closed—“*Keeping us off our land!*” Many other respondents identified “access” as a most valued aspect of the watershed. Most respondents identified road and trail closures first, when asked to list threats. Perceptions of being excluded were based on the belief that the range of acceptable forest uses is being narrowed by such closures. Respondents also make a connection between declining Forest Service timber revenues, road maintenance budgets, and the recreational access that now seems to be in jeopardy.

User fees are one approach through which the Forest Service might partially compensate for the impact of decreasing timber revenues on forest management. However, some respondents seem concerned that national forest user fees will actually have a negative impact on access, particularly recreation-related access. They are concerned that access and use are increasingly being limited to certain privileged groups, and that user fees will only make the problem worse.

Observations like these carry an implicit accusation of not only favoritism but also the same sort of implication carried by the term “agenda.” The implication is that behind the surface of actions like road closures, user fees, or trail alterations lurk the sort of motives aimed to leave “us” out while catering to “them.” Many such closures continue to allow access to the hiker, the backpacker, or the equestrian user. These groups are seen as the beneficiaries of such closures. Hiking and backpacking (more so than riding horses) are seen as typically the hobbies of environmentalists. For the people whose favored uses are excluded by current management, closures and restrictions are easily seen as further victories for the “agenda.”

While, for some respondents, access issues and the thought or mention of road closures seemed to consistently trigger the resentment-over-perceived-exclusion response of “[they are] trying to keep us off of our public land,” there is another issue surrounding roads and access that seems potentially more volatile: protection from forest fires. To respondents who experienced the forest fires of the summer of 1994, reducing roads available for fire protection and fire fighting makes no sense at all.

Closures seem, they clearly show a complete lack of logic. [Unused] roads, in more recent times, might have been “put to bed”—they were strategic in ‘94 Fire—when the whole Chumstick might have burned.

This observation reveals how grave the fire situation in 1994 seemed to residents. People in the Chumstick were surrounded, quite literally, by fire, explaining the lingering intense feeling regarding those fires. An interview with a husband and wife yielded an insight into this aspect of people’s perceptions about the fires. As a discussion about fire continued, the wife said:

I feel like the Forest Service has mixed purposes with regard to the ‘94 fires. There are a lot of trust issues with regard to fire and using fire. With fire, mixed messages are poison to trust. Hard to love and hate fire at the same time. People will doubt your sincerity on both counts.

As a new set of priorities changes the messages and policies regarding fire, the relationship between area residents and the Forest Service also changes. Now, when

residents see roads being removed and hear talk of “restoring fire to ecosystems”, it may appear to them that a new set of values are being given priority over their very safety.

“The Park”

People who have been set on edge by their perceptions of impending exclusion—the sense that their livelihoods and safeties are threatened, and by the appearance that values at odds with their own are being privileged—find it quite believable when neighbors, friends, talk radio hosts, or elected officials tell them that federal land management agencies have been taken over by an “environmentalist agenda.” As people come to believe that the Forest Service is in league with environmentalists—maybe even “nature worshipers”—the implausible starts to become plausible. This is what seems to underlie one of the more profound manifestations of alienation and distrust, the conspiracy theory about “the Park.” The central theme of this theory is that the government, perhaps in cooperation with the United Nations, has plans to turn most, if not all, of Washington’s Cascades into national park or, worse, an international “Peace Park.”

The “Park” theory, for those who have embraced it at some point as true, seems to provide a unifying explanation for otherwise disparate and baffling phenomena. When asked about Washington State’s Growth Management Act, one respondent volunteered that she thought it was linked to “the Park.” Her husband, who had recently returned from working near a U.S. National Park Service facility, recounted secondhand tales of park service personnel “spying on private land owners and bossing them around” and his own firsthand impression that they were “arrogant and acting as if they owned the place.” She asked, “Why would the Park Service behave that way if there is no master plan?” The idea of a “master plan” and “the Park” were offered interchangeably by many and, with a kind of resignation, as a general explanation for the sense of increasing exclusion reflected in her use of phrases like “shut down” and “shut out.”

That people are feeling “shut down,” and “shut out,” suggests a reason that “the Park” conspiracy theory may have caught on. The threat of a “park” engulfing most of the Washington Cascades likely has powerful appeal as a threat metaphor. In U.S. national parks, after all, humans are excluded except as visitors. To people feeling ever more excluded from their accustomed livelihoods and homes in the Cascades, this may appear to be the end.

Another manifestation of exclusion is a challenge to legitimacy that seems to stem from a similar set of perceptions as “agenda” and “the Park” is the body of constitutional arguments that motivates the most alienated segments of the Chumstick watershed’s human dimension. Like the “Park” theory, this springs from the perceived threat of economic and other exclusion, as well as the belief that the federal government no longer represents their interests.

For example, a participant read from his pocket-sized “Citizens Rule Book” (Adams n.d., 28) the following from the Declaration of Independence: “He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people, and eat out their substance.” He explained that in the Declaration of Independence the King of England was the tyrant who had sent officers to harass the people. He made it clear that it is now the U.S. government that plays the tyrant’s role, that the “swarms of Officers” that “harass the people and eat out their

substance” are the federal agencies whose regulations and management policies interfere with people exercising their unalienable rights. He believes that that local leaders and local people are essentially comparable to the “Founding Fathers” and the American colonists in the days of the revolution against English tyrants.

The constitutional stance goes beyond “the Park” theory, directly challenging the *legitimacy*, the “worthiness to be recognized” (Habermas 1976, 178), of the federal government to manage public lands. As one resident noted: “The forest circus management is illegal, unconstitutional, a de facto agency—[they] usurped the position.”

Discussion: A Legitimation Problem

These patterns of legitimacy and alienation gain credence when examined in the light of two connected theoretical approaches: (1) the legitimation problem (Habermas 1976), in which an excluded populace contests the legitimacy of federal management of public land, and (2) the shift in social priorities for public lands (M. Carroll personal communication 1996) that is linked to certain economic transitions (Drucker 1986; Krannich et al. 1994).

Krannich et al. (1994) outline three principal changes in the world economy that have occurred within the last three decades: First, “The primary products economy has come ‘uncoupled’ from the industrial economy”; and second, “In the industrial economy itself, production has come ‘uncoupled’ from employment”; and finally, “Economic systems of interdependence have become much more difficult to understand than was the case in the past” (Krannich et al. 1994, 15). According to Carroll (1996), three important interrelated effects on land management and their social impacts have followed these changes: (1) Fewer livelihoods are linked directly to primary production, (2) thus allowing a shift(ing) in social priorities, and (3) those workers who remain in production occupations are more vulnerable to large-scale redistributive changes such as those perceived inherent in the movement to ecosystem-based public land management.

For example, observing the ascendance, prominence, and economic power of Puget Sound’s shipping and containerized cargo industries, Boeing’s regional facilities, and, more recently, Microsoft and the computer software industry, one would expect a corresponding decline in the importance of and employment in Washington’s timber industry. Data on earnings confirms such a decline, in which combined earnings from forestry, wood products, and paper products fell from an already diminished 6.2% of total earnings by place of work in 1958 to 2.4% in 1996. A divergence consistent with the “uncoupling” described by Drucker (1986) showed up as early as 1979 as earnings growth for the three timber sectors began to diverge from growth in total earnings by place of work as well as from growth in personal income. By 1982, the divergence was clear as timber earnings experienced a decline while earnings by place of work and from personal income continued to rise (Bureau of Economic Analysis 2003).

The shift that has followed in the social priorities regarding forests is a shift from a commodity or timber harvest orientation to an amenity or even intrinsic value orientation. That is, the larger, regional, and national social priorities placed on Northwest forests have shifted from utilitarian interests in the materials the forest provides to an interest in preserving and enjoying the forest in conditions that are viewed as natural. Those who continue to try to earn a living in harvesting timber

and in related sectors are vulnerable to social and economic impacts from the redistribution of National Forests toward the new set of priorities, a set of priorities in which the role of such commodity production remains uncertain and not clearly articulated.

Habermas (1976, 178) states that a government's legitimacy is its "worthiness to be recognized" and that such legitimacy is "a contestable validity claim." He further states that legitimation problems are "unavoidable" unless the government mitigates or shields citizens from the "dysfunctional side effects of the capitalist economic process" or is able to increase the degree to which such dysfunctional side effects are acceptable. Habermas (1976, 197) indicates that one of the ways to recognize such legitimation problems is that they are "marked by a sharpened struggle over distribution."

Residents of the Chumstick are people experiencing a "sharpened struggle over distribution" with regard to public land resources that seems to be tied to a shift in the social priorities that bear upon these public lands. We identified alienation, distrust, and suspicion, up to and including the "Park" conspiracy theory. These elements also seem to have found expression in the constitutionalist stances of some participants as well as in an overt challenge to federal authority. These conditions provide convincing evidence for the existence of what Habermas (1976) calls a legitimation problem. While we cannot derive any quantitative estimate of the magnitude of this problem from our data, the manner in which alienation seems to penetrate our locally grounded and interconnected pool of respondents suggests cause for concern.

How can a government maintain or regain legitimacy? Habermas's (1976, 194) analysis of legitimation problems suggests that an indispensable part of the answer lies in protecting people from the dysfunctional side effects of the capitalist economic system:

Threats to legitimacy can be averted if the state can credibly present itself as a social welfare state which intercepts the dysfunctional side-effects of the economic process and renders them harmless for the individual. . . . In mass democracies, fulfilling this social welfare state program is, if not the foundation, at least a necessary condition of legitimacy.

With regard to the Chumstick, several of the dysfunctional side effects that underlie the challenges to the legitimacy of the Forest Service are effects that may be attributable to a shift in social priorities for the national forests. One of these was the exclusion of timber harvesting livelihoods from the national forest. An opportunity to alleviate this dysfunctional side effect presents itself in the enormous amount of work that is likely to be entailed in efforts to restore the dry forest ecosystems that characterize the east side of the Cascade Mountains. There is much work to be done, and the Forest Service now faces an important choice about how to distribute this work. This presents a critical opportunity for the Forest Service to include the constituents who seem to feel so increasingly excluded. Application of Habermas's theory suggests that the Forest Service should go to great lengths to include the remaining small, local logging operations in the required ecosystem restoration workforce. The Forest Service is likely to improve its claim to legitimacy if it can offset or mitigate some of the exclusion of livelihoods that many respondents perceive.

While increasing the availability of forest-related economic opportunities could help to address the apparent legitimization problem, the Forest Service will have to make much progress in dispelling the perception that its activities are guided by an “environmentalist agenda.” Habermas’s (1976) analysis of legitimacy indicates that it depends in part on a government’s ability to employ authority in ways that are consistent with a societal sense of identity (p. 182–183). However, identifying a single normatively determined societal identity appears to be impossible, especially when it comes to the identities that people establish in relation to forests and other natural resources. Greider and Garkovich (1994, 12) describe this phenomenon in their discussion of “landscape” as a symbolic social construct related to self-definition or identity:

All of these groups—ranchers, farmers, entrepreneurs and natives—have constructed different symbolic meanings for the land thereby creating different landscapes that reflect their definitions of themselves. These definitions lead to different attitudes toward potential changes in their landscapes and to different human consequences of environmental change.

Halvorsen (2003, 540) studied the role of participatory democracy in transforming participant beliefs, and she notes, “While beliefs about USFS responsiveness changed significantly, beliefs about its performance and the value of other voices did not.” We believe that those who hold the utilitarian points of view in the Chumstick will likely continue to regard the Forest Service’s increasing attention to ecology as evidence of an “environmentalist agenda” until something is done to change that perception. What can be done?

Smith and McDonough (2001), working on Forest Service lands in Michigan, found five themes consistent with justice theory that characterizes fairness in decision-making: representation, voice, consideration, logic, and desired outcome. They concluded that representation and voice are not being met by the Forest Service there. The Forest Service could gain ground in this area of legitimacy if it could clearly articulate and establish an unequivocally independent identity or stance, erasing the appearance of allegiance to the environmental movement or to extractive industry. This might be accomplished in part by finding areas of common ground across stakeholder groups and then demonstrating concern for them, even if those areas are, strictly speaking, off forest—schools, communities, public health, and safety, for example.

As we listened to the views and values expressed by respondents, we often had the sense that we were filling a communication gap. Forester (1993), building on the work of Habermas, identified four characteristics of good communication planning: comprehensibility, sincerity, legitimacy, and truth. Failure to follow these he argues, leads to distortion and fuels distrust. Wondolleck and Yaffee (2000), who state that a collaborative process needs to be legitimate, fair, and wise if it is to be credible and accountable to the broader public interest, echo this.

Given the open distrust, suspicion, and alienation regarding the Forest Service that we encountered, public involvement and open face-to-face dialogue seem essential for advancing future forest management in the Chumstick watershed. The Forest Service needs to hear how its actions are interpreted and how these interpretations affect the legitimacy that people are willing to ascribe to those actions. It needs to

hear the concerns and fears of its Chumstick watershed constituents. Likewise, the members of the Chumstick's human dimension need to hear from the Forest Service. They need to hear that the Forest Service, in its role as steward of the National Forest, has reasons for management choices, reasons that are free of perceived hidden "agendas." As Frentz et al. (2000) conclude, key local informants must affirm policy changes if the Forest Service is to be taken seriously.

Working to defuse its legitimation problems will not be easy, but it must be done. The condition in which the Forest Service is seen as part of an illegitimate, occupying, foreign power hardly seems to be sustainable, particularly when these extreme views are seen against the backdrop of a more widespread sense of alienation and exclusion among constituents. Antypas (1995, 39) asserts that the Forest Service has "failed not only because it did not recognize complexity and interdependence or couldn't deal with it technically, but because it did not understand what its actual function in society was." He goes on to expose the Forest Service's misplaced belief that all natural resource agencies' roles were simply to manage resources, and concludes, "This belief obscured the reality that the agencies managed, created, affected and took part in the relationships among various social actors."

Cawley (2001, 95) sees this as a time "when paying close attention to public voice is not just important, but vital." Failure to do so, he says "risks the possibility of exacerbating the apparent 'legitimacy crisis' facing public administration." He also questions the thesis of ecocentrism as the new basis for legitimacy, stating:

At this moment in history ecocentrism does not define a common basis for judgments about what constitutes the "right thing" for government to do. Thus, actions which seem to put the welfare of nature (expressed, say, as *ecosystem management*) above the welfare of the population will be viewed as illegitimate by some portions of the public.

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