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The politics of cross-boundary conservation: Meaning property and livelihood on the Rocky Mountain Front in Montana

Laurie Yung

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THE POLITICS OF CROSS-BOUNDARY CONSERVATION:
MEANING, PROPERTY, AND LIVELIHOOD
ON THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN FRONT IN MONTANA

by

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Effective cross-boundary conservation requires understanding how key players—landowners, environmentalists, and land managers—think about property and how they negotiate boundaries. This study examines how ideas about property, boundaries, and cross-boundary conservation operate in a particular location, the Rocky Mountain Front in Montana. National interest in the Rocky Mountain Front invests this area with a highly politicized symbolism, and the struggle for the future of this landscape is both discursive (involving contests over meaning and image) and material (involving contests over land, resources, and livelihood). I utilized in-depth qualitative interviews, a survey, and participant observation to understand these discursive and material struggles.

Results revealed competing discourses emphasizing either wildness or agriculture, with implications for the future of ranching, wildlife conservation, and public lands. Rural restructuring, in particular changes in landownership and land use, were altering established boundary practices because newcomers and ranchers had different views of boundaries and how to manage them. Tensions between private rights and public goods permeated most cross-boundary issues, including hunting access and subdivision. Ranchers often located the public interest at a local level, defining public goods in terms of social obligations to landscape and community. Ranchers were also strong supporters of private property rights, and viewed conservation and livelihood as inseparable.

I also examined the ways different people actually work across boundaries, and the respective roles of ranchers, newcomers, and public land managers in these efforts. Innovative work on weeds and grassbanks indicated that private property may provide opportunities for innovation rather than barriers to conservation. Effective cross-boundary conservation needs to link conservation and livelihood through incentives and working landscape programs.
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Chapter 1:
The Politics of Cross-Boundary Conservation: An Introduction

Across the American West, a struggle over the future of open, undeveloped landscapes is brewing. Biologists and environmental groups are increasingly emphasizing the ecological connections between private and public lands. While biological research and environmental policy have historically focused on public lands, emerging research establishes the importance of private lands for migrating wildlife, grassland songbirds, and connectivity between protected areas. Recognition that ecological processes and native species require habitat that spans multiple jurisdictions has led to a focus on projects and policies that involve different landowners and managers in natural resource management and conservation across property boundaries.

While there is increasing consensus about the need for cross-boundary cooperation amongst landowners, scientists, and public land managers, there is disagreement about what kinds of policies and programs should be pursued, and what roles different parties should play. Environmentalists work toward the integration of private lands in environmental policy, while ranchers argue for the protection of private property rights in the face of environmental regulations and efforts to eliminate public lands grazing. Rural communities face unprecedented changes, as new landowners purchase properties for vacation get-aways, hobby ranches, and nature preserves. Public land managers struggle to define their role in the midst of anti-government sentiment, shifting national policy, and mandates for ecosystem management.

There are diverse perspectives on the future of Western landscapes, a range of positions and a plethora of potential and actual conflicts. The political debate over the roles of public policy and private rights in cross-boundary conservation rages in the popular media, in academic journals, in rural communities, and in the offices of state and federal policy-makers. Scientists and environmentalists argue that conservation across boundaries is essential to the preservation of biological diversity. In this context, many environmentalists view private property rights as a
significant barrier to the policy changes they deem necessary for private land protection.

Ranchers see environmentalists and environmental policy as powerful forces that threaten their property rights and ability to manage their land. The private property rights movement advocates against any government intervention in the management of private lands. Public land acquisition, conservation easements, and newcomers purchasing large properties are sometimes viewed as part of a larger land grab displacing and disempowering ranchers. And environmentalists are not in agreement about the ecological role of ranching. Some environmentalists are working to remove ranching from Western landscapes, while others see ranching as vital to conservation.

The excerpts below provide a sense of the range of perspectives comprising this debate.

An environmental movement sweeping across the nation clawing at private property rights and maximizing regulatory abuse of agriculture, backed by seemingly endless financial resources...


Nature and greenie groups are obtaining easements, which are turned over to a government in the business of excessive land grabbing. Bird watcher groups are doing studies with state and federal agencies to determine which bushes and trees private landowners should voluntarily preserve to attract more migratory birds. Wealthy pretend-to-be-farmers build their mansions, taking prime farmland out of production.


Livestock grazing in the arid West is as outmoded as is whaling in today’s oceans. It is a thing of the past, a “tradition” whose practitioners are still immersed in a livelihood in which ecological reality has yet to sink in.


I am convinced that many ranchers serve a public purpose and provide a public economic benefit that is coincident to their basic work. This benefit is the management of land in a manner that helps to ensure the conservation of the West’s biodiversity.

- W. William Weeks, Executive Vice-President, The Nature Conservancy

[We need to] center our sights on nature’s organic wholeness and to downplay or eliminate artificial boundaries...Bounding a parcel gives rise to a tension, a particular kind of tension that is so well known to us: the tension between the individual and the community, between a value scheme that exalts the pieces and one that honors the collective whole

- Eric Freyfogle in Bounded People, Boundless Land (1998)
Thus the lines are drawn and reveal a number of critical questions. Will ranching save Western landscapes or destroy the last remnants of biological diversity? Are private property rights essential to stewardship or an incredible barrier to conservation and the preservation of public goods? Should property boundaries be eliminated? Is the federal government providing leadership for a new vision of ecosystem management or engaged in a land grab that threatens private landowners? Are newcomers preserving critical parcels of private lands or taking over Western valleys and turning them in to playgrounds? Should livelihood concerns be pushed aside in favor of environmental protection or should production be favored at all costs?

However thought-provoking, the questions and quotes above oversimplify the struggle for the future of Western landscapes, and the future potential of cross-boundary conservation. They imply dualistic, binary, and mutually exclusive positions in an intractable conflict, with little room for negotiation or on-the-ground work. The popular political debate over environmental policy often fails to address the complex and multifaceted power struggle for the future of Western landscapes. In some senses, a single question underscores this debate: Who will control the land and determine the future of Western landscapes? Cross-boundary conservation is one vision for the future that is increasingly considered in policy and management circles. In-depth investigation of how people in particular places are negotiating property and boundaries is needed to better understand the politics of cross-boundary conservation. Knowledge of the assumptions, positions, and interests that underlie the statements above can illuminate potential opportunities for and barriers to cross-boundary work.

In this dissertation I argue that cross-boundary conservation, cooperation between different landowners and managers, in some form, is necessary for effective natural resource management and long-term preservation of native biological diversity. It is important to note that I examine the discourse promoting cross-boundary conservation, and I position myself as a scientist within that discourse, advocating that some type of landscape level conservation is required for environmental protection. More specifically, I argue for conservation policies and
practices that address ecological needs in an equitable, fair manner that integrates livelihood and community. The overall purpose of this research, then, is to explain how ideas about place, property, and boundaries operate in a particular location, and to provide knowledge that will inform policy and management to facilitate a cross-boundary conservation that protects ecological values and incorporates rural people and their needs.

In this dissertation I examine the ways different people, in particular landowners and managers, conceptualize landscapes, property, and boundaries, and how they put these ideas into practice in a particular place, the Rocky Mountain Front in Montana. I argue that private rights and property boundaries are not inherent barriers to cross-boundary conservation. Instead, understandings of property and boundary practices reveal specific points of engagement for landowners and managers to work together across multiple ownerships. But this dissertation is about more than improving policy and management through identifying the opportunities and constraints for cooperation across boundaries. It is about the politics of cross-boundary conservation and, therefore, also examines the politics of meaning and how diverging interests and conflicts make policy and management in this arena an ongoing challenge. While better understandings and more sophisticated knowledge can sometimes improve policy and management, research cannot always overcome political differences, especially those reflecting disparities in power, wealth, and worldview.

In the remainder of this chapter I introduce and outline the research described in this dissertation. I first make a case for the necessity of cross-boundary conservation and the importance of private lands. I then examine the current set of challenges that Western rural communities and landowners face. I specifically explore the knowledge gap that this study addresses, and outline my case study on the Rocky Mountain Front in Montana. In addition, the research questions, theory, and methods that guided this project are summarized. Finally, I preview research findings and discuss how information is organized in this document.
The Emergence of Cross-Boundary Conservation

An important shift regarding our understanding and management of ecosystems is occurring. In the biological sciences, evidence that many ecological processes and native species require large landscapes for long-term survival is accumulating (Grumbine, 1996). In the United States, even larger designated wildernesses and protected areas do not necessarily have the range of habitats to sustain certain wildlife species, or to allow for processes such as fire or evolution. In particular, lower elevation habitats have been historically excluded from official conservation efforts, and are notably absent in most protected areas (Hansen and Rotella, 2002). In most cases, here and abroad, the large landscapes required for long-term ecological preservation are held by a mixture of different property owners - state, federal, private, nonprofit - with important distinctions within those categories. Undeveloped lower elevation habitat in the United States is usually owned by private landowners and is often in production agriculture, and is increasingly recognized as essential to the long-term preservation of biological diversity.

Furthermore, our knowledge about the ecological impacts of managing individual properties, whether public or private, in isolation of entire systems is becoming more sophisticated; administrative boundaries are increasingly understood to affect the structure and function of ecosystems over time (Landres, Pickett, and Caderasso, 1998). Property boundaries are even believed to be a major threat to designated wilderness (Cole and Landres, 1996).

Conservation biologists are not alone in their recognition that many ecological processes, wildlife species, and natural resource issues cross jurisdictional boundaries. Landowners witness first hand the effects of migrating grizzly bears, weeds on fencelines, and fire ranging across a landscape. These landowners understand that public land policies and their neighbors’ practices affect their ability to manage their property. Landowners realize, for instance, that habitat for nesting songbirds and water quality depend on cross-boundary management.

Policy and management proposals such as Yukon to Yellowstone, the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project, and Grizzly Bear Recovery in the Bitterroot are already
embracing a landscape, watershed, or ecosystem scale. These efforts represent a profound rethinking of land management and conservation, and the practical and ecological meanings of property boundaries.

In this dissertation I group a broad set of similar landscape level approaches under the labels of cross-boundary or landscape-level conservation. These labels are meant to be interchangeable and describe work that responds to emerging science on ecological systems and the practical realities of natural resource management across property boundaries. While landscape-level efforts typically embrace larger geographic areas than traditional natural resource management and therefore cross jurisdictional boundaries, these efforts may occur at different scales, involve different participants, and subscribe to different goals. Depending on the project and the position of the participants (public land managers, private landowners, or environmental groups), these efforts may be labeled as watershed groups, ecoregional planning, ranchland groups, landscape conservation, or ecosystem management. While there are important differences between, for instance, federal agency ecosystem management and Nature Conservancy ecoregional planning, I group these efforts together to examine different ideas about and approaches to cross-boundary conservation.

Most academic literature and public land management agency discourse in the arena of landscape conservation focuses on ecosystem management. Various definitions of ecosystem management exist. According to Grumbine (1994), ecosystem management "integrates scientific knowledge of ecological relationships within a complex sociopolitical and values framework toward the goal of protecting native ecosystem integrity over the long-term" (p. 43). Salwasser (1994) argues that "ecosystem management emphasizes the integration of ecological, social and economic factors at different temporal and spatial scales to maintain a diversity of life forms, ecological processes and human cultures" (p. 8). Cultural, social, and political factors are as integral to ecosystem management as economic and ecological knowledge. In fact, human values are extremely important in determining management goals. While scientific research plays a
significant role in policy, the choices we make for land management are also social and political
decisions. An integral part of this sociocultural landscape is the matrix of land ownership types
present in most areas. Different property owners and land managers have different interests and
values that have important implications for cross-boundary conservation.

The Role of Private Property in Landscape Conservation

In this dissertation I focus, in large part, on the role of private property and private
landowners in cross-boundary conservation. The literature on ecosystem management and
landscape conservation often mentions private lands, but usually emphasizes public lands. While
private lands are clearly a critical component of cross-boundary conservation, there is very little
research on how to effectively integrate private landowners into ecosystem management policy.

During the 1970s environmental legislation began an unprecedented reach into private
lands regulation. For example, the Clean Water Act and Endangered Species Act were passed,
governing pollution and species management on public and private lands, and wetlands were
protected through a series of national statutes (Wiebe and Meinzen-Dick, 1998). These laws
codified a growing sense that the public had a stake in private land management practices, and
that private landowners had an obligation to the greater society.

However, not all private property owners supported state regulation of private lands. A
private property rights backlash to increasing regulation emerged in the 1970s and continues
today (Bromley, 1998; Wiebe and Meinzen-Dick, 1998). Private property rights groups now span
the country, and have organized themselves into landowner rights, inholder rights, and wise use
organizations that, in some cases, wield considerable power at the local and national level. The
private property rights movement views environmental policy as antagonistic toward people and
private property (Jacobs, 1998). Private property rights discourse dramatically influences
landowners' ideas about conservation and governance, but is often regarded as extremist by
environmental groups, land management agencies, and policy-makers. The recent debate about
alleged takings and the 5th amendment demonstrates a significant momentum around attempting
to require financial compensation for property rights affected by environmental regulation.

Property rights are increasingly being recognized as an important challenge for natural
resource management and, in particular, ecosystem management (Hurley, Ginger, and Capen,
2002). Many researchers and land managers recognize that ecosystem management and other
landscape approaches have implications for private lands. As boundaries are reconceptualized by
agencies and environmental groups, private lands are often included in, and may even be the
centerpieces of, ecosystem efforts. At minimum, the corridors proposed to connect public lands
habitat across large scale landscapes traverse private lands. According to Grumbine (1994), the
biological importance of private lands means that “ecosystem management restricted to
government lands is a prescription for extinction” (p. 211). Therefore, ecosystem management
that truly addresses the connections between high and low elevation habitat must confront issues
of private property head on (Hurley, Ginger, and Capen, 2002).

In many senses, ecosystem management and other landscape conservation efforts may
lengthen the state’s reach into private property management and might be viewed as an extension
of legislative initiatives advanced in the 1970s. According to Geisler and Bedford (1998),

what is striking about ecosystem management is the unprecedented scale of its reach onto
private lands beyond its core protected (usually public) areas. If accomplished in a
fashion laid out in assorted conservation manifestos and legislative agendas, ecosystem
management promises to redraw the metes and bounds of ownership in American in
fundamentally new ways. (p. 131-132)

Private property owners within ecosystems targeted for ecosystem management have been
characterized as “ecosystem inholders” because many of their rights have been or may be
encumbered as a result of increased regulation (Geisler and Bedford, 1998). Property owners
recognize this extension of state power and in many cases feel threatened by ecosystem
management (Geisler and Bedford, 1998). At the same time, many ecosystem management
advocates place an emphasis on reconceptualizing landscapes in terms of ecological boundaries,
such as watersheds, wildlife ranges, and ecosystems, without considering the viewpoints of
private property owners. And, despite increasing interest in and much writing on landscape conservation, most on-the-ground work is limited to information exchange or a general awareness that one landowner's actions affect another, rather than sophisticated thinking about how people, in particular landowners, consider landscapes and properties, and knowledge about how they actually work across boundaries (Raedeke, Nilon, and Rikoon, 2001).

Policy struggles in the ecosystem management arena mirror larger tensions between public goods and private rights with regard to both public and private lands (Flick, Barnes, and Tufts, 1995; Inman and McLeod, 2002). Policy-makers continue to struggle with unresolved questions about how to balance the public interest with individual private rights. When and what kind of individual sacrifices should be required for public goods and who decides? And who is the public? Important questions about scale also emerge. How do cross-boundary policies move from individual properties to the landscape level? Scales that are meaningful to the residents of these landscapes – scales such as individual properties, watersheds, and communities – may prove more effective for policy-making than top down ecosystem efforts.

Geisler and Bedford (1998) suggest that “the rapid expansion of ecosystem management and its bigger-is-better operating bias makes the property-ecosystem interface a pressing research target at many levels” (p. 149). In other words, there is significant momentum around landscape-level approaches such as ecosystem management, but very little research on how property practices and ideas relate to these efforts. Much of the social research on ecosystem management focuses on public lands, and implies or explicitly states that ecosystem management rests comfortably in the realm of public land management. This is puzzling in the face of an increasing number of biological studies reporting the importance of private lands to protection of ecosystem processes and native species (see for example Hansen and Rotella, 2002). In contrast, Hurley, Ginger, and Capen (2002) argue that “among the most important social institutions engaged by EM [ecosystem management] is that of property” (p. 298). Clearly there is a need to connect existing property literature and research with ecosystem management efforts and to develop new
knowledge on the intersection between landscape conservation and property. Furthermore, we need to better understand property owners and the context in which they operate. In the Intermountain West, private property owners in rural areas are facing social and economic changes that have important implications for cross-boundary conservation.

**Private Property and Rural Change in the Intermountain West**

The Intermountain West is a region with significant potential for landscape conservation. (The Intermountain West refers here to those areas east of the populated coastal areas of California, Oregon, and Washington, but west of the Great Plains.) Remnant populations of endangered species persist; large landscapes provide important habitat and connectivity; public lands and protected areas, such as National Parks and Wilderness Areas, serve as core refuges for many sensitive species, and provide opportunities for landscape-level processes such as fire to continue; and, private lands are largely undeveloped.

However, landscapes and human communities in the Intermountain West are undergoing dramatic transitions that both limit and enhance the potential for conservation across boundaries. These communities are negotiating the affects of regional, national, and global economic trends, shifting priorities on public lands, and an influx of newcomers with different backgrounds and values (Nelson, 2001; Smutny and Takahashi, 1999). Population and in-migration are increasing faster in this region than any other in the entire U.S.. These demographic trends affect land use and ownership, the preservation or development of open space, and the viability of livelihoods such as ranching (Maestas, Knight, and Gilgert, 2001). A disproportionate number of migrants are settling outside of urban areas in rural residential subdivisions or on large properties that were previously working ranches; open space and agricultural production are often eliminated in the process. Newcomers often have different politics, values, and financial resources than longerterm residents. Rural communities are thus dealing with rapid changes in land use and ownership, local culture, and local economies.
Private lands are the lands most affected by this transformation, with important consequences for both conservation and community. In the Intermountain West, private lands usually lie in low elevation valleys with productive soils and riparian systems. While these bottomlands are often in production agriculture, they also provide winter range for migrating wildlife, habitat for grassland species, and connectivity between higher elevation public lands and protected areas. The very lands that many scientists consider the most ecologically important in the region are rapidly being converted from ranching to residential development (Hansen and Rotella, 2002). Even when new-comers retain ranches as large properties, there are usually substantial changes in land management, affecting local ecology and community culture.

Alongside regional rural change, a variety of larger scale economic and political trends are affecting private landowners and rural communities. Many ranch families are struggling economically in the face of low beef prices, international competition, rising land prices, and little control over finished products or markets. Changing economic conditions have also resulted in the closure of main street businesses in many rural communities. National environmental groups and policy makers are focusing more attention on Western landscapes, increasingly putting rural communities and landowners in the national spotlight. Ranchers often resent federal environmental policies, such as the Endangered Species Act, which affect private land management practices and livelihood. At the same time, some environmental groups argue that ranching degrades streams, causes erosion, and negatively impacts wildlife. Other environmental groups view ranchers as the key to landscape conservation and the maintenance of open space and wildlife.

**The Knowledge Gap: Concepts and Practices of Place, Property, and Boundaries**

Environmentalists, landowners, scientists, policy-makers, and public land managers are increasingly aware of the need to address natural resource issues and conservation goals at scales that transcend jurisdictional boundaries. Despite this realization, the knowledge required to
develop effective policies and programs for cross-boundary conservation is limited. Put simply, our understanding of how people in particular settings work across property boundaries is lacking. While researchers like Brunson (1998) argue that “we can sustain ecosystems across boundaries only if we understand how humans behave with respect to the places they claim as territory” (p. 66), few studies have examined the ways property owners and public land managers regard whole landscapes, different kinds of property, and the boundaries between those properties. Existing scholarship provides detail on sense of place, but rarely connects place meanings with policy objectives and cross-boundary practices. Property has been explored extensively in the legal literature and within research on property systems abroad. However, only a handful of studies examine how property owners in the U.S. regard property and boundaries, and how they work with other landowners and managers. Advocates of collaborative decision-making models argue for integration of private landowners into ecosystem management efforts, but usually fail to recognize that the contested nature of private property may stymie these efforts. While scientists are increasingly documenting land use change in the Intermountain West, we have little information about how new landowners fit into programs to manage natural resources across boundaries. Official agency discourse proclaims ecosystem management as the guiding principle of public land management, but managers do not necessarily have the skills, knowledge, inclination, or power to implement this often-vague vision. Policy-makers also seek to implement ecosystem management approaches, but political conflict over the role of state regulation on private lands is a significant barrier.

A growing number of place-specific cross-boundary efforts have emerged throughout the West. The current emphasis on ecosystem management may, in fact, obscure the range of cross-boundary efforts occurring in rural landscapes. As described earlier, some of these projects are pursued under different labels, such as watershed groups, weed cooperatives, or ranchland councils, while others are informal efforts with no label at all. Understanding different cross-
boundary approaches necessitates investigation of a range of projects, not just the limited range of programs being pursued under the official banner of ecosystem management.

Many different people, including environmentalists, landowners, scientists, policymakers, and public land managers, would benefit from a better understanding of how the politics of cross-boundary conservation are negotiated in real places by real people. The development of policies and programs that facilitate effective cross-boundary conservation requires a better understanding of how different people conceptualize place, property, and boundaries, and how they put concepts into practice at different scales.

The Study Site: The Rocky Mountain Front in Montana

Understanding the meaning of landscape, property, and boundaries and the boundary practices of landowners and land managers requires that research be situated in a particular place. In other words, understanding how people who live and work in Western landscapes think about and act on the issues of cross-boundary conservation means learning about specific people in a specific geographic location. This study addresses the knowledge gaps described above through a case study of the area known as the Rocky Mountain Front. The case study method situates research in a particular sociocultural and ecological context, providing the opportunity to investigate social phenomena in depth. The Rocky Mountain Front in North Central Montana provides an ideal location for this research because:

- The area has a mix of ownership, including public and private lands and a large wilderness complex, necessary for exploring cross-boundary and cross-jurisdictional issues.
- The area has an identity and image that appears to span different types of property. While the boundaries of the Rocky Mountain Front are not agreed upon, most people locate the area on both private and public lands.
- The private lands are not yet subdivided and developed to a great extent, but the area is experiencing some in-migration and newcomer land purchases, and may be on the cusp of increasing rural residential development, making it an ideal location to examine how residents negotiate these changes.
Family ranching is the predominant private land use, which provides an opportunity to examine private lands in the context of family-scale owner-producers.

At the outset of the study, there were few working cross-boundary efforts in the area. Two groups focused on conservation at a landscape scale formed during the research, providing an opportunity to explore the emergence of efforts that attempt to integrate different perspectives and interests across property boundaries.

Regional and national conservation interests have focused attention on this area because of its unique ecological characteristics, undeveloped nature, and the presence of a large wilderness complex. This provides an opportunity to study the politics of discourse and decision-making at multiple scales.

It is important to note that the place-name Rocky Mountain Front is contested. I use this term to refer to the study site throughout this dissertation because there are no alternative terms currently available. Readers should keep in mind that this term, as discussed in detail later, is, for some people, associated with a particular political agenda. My use of the term Rocky Mountain Front is for practical purposes only, and is not meant to endorse this political agenda.

The Research Questions

I examine the social dynamics of cross-boundary conservation as the intersection of meaning, politics, culture, livelihood, and land management. The central questions of this research are:

- What are the politics of cross-boundary natural resource management and conservation on the Rocky Mountain Front? What are the meanings and practices around place, property, and boundaries? What kinds of boundary conflicts or tensions exist? How do people actually cooperate or work across boundaries? How does this understanding affect environmental policy and on-the-ground cross-boundary efforts?

In other words, I address the ways landowners, public land managers, and others negotiate property boundaries in an area with multiple ownerships. I also examine the ways different ideas, resources, and pressures affect the potential to involve different kinds of landowners and managers in cross-boundary efforts. To understand cross-boundary efforts (or the lack thereof), I
needed knowledge of how different people think about place, property, and boundaries, and how they put their ideas into practice. I also sought to understand any existing or developing projects that spanned different properties. The purpose of this investigation was to generate knowledge to inform actual on-the-ground cross-boundary projects and policy-making related to landscape conservation.

To effectively answer the central research questions described above, I needed to answer a series of more specific questions, including:

- Are landowners and other residents in the study site experiencing economic, demographic, and land use changes similar to other areas of the Intermountain West? If so, how is rural restructuring altering the politics of cross-boundary efforts? How do new large landowners interact with resident communities and with neighbors?

- How do different people conceptualize the Rocky Mountain Front as a whole? How might the meanings, images, and ideas people have about the Rocky Mountain Front affect cross-boundary conservation?

- How do different people conceptualize different kinds of property? How do they negotiate tensions between private rights and public goods? What kinds of tensions and practices occur around the boundaries between properties? What do these boundaries mean to different people? Under what conditions are boundaries permeable and how are they negotiated?

- How do people on the ground, public land managers and landowners, envision cooperation across property boundaries and how do they actually cooperate in practice? What roles do ranchers and newcomers play in cross-boundary conservation?

- In light of these findings, what kinds of policies and programs would facilitate and promote effective and just cross-boundary efforts?
Answering these questions provided valuable information on how rural change and
landownership affect management of boundaries, how different discourses about place reveal
different political agendas for the area, how different people define the public good, and the
connections between conservation, property, and livelihood.

A Brief Description of the Research Approach

Theory and Methods

While my theoretical framework and research methods are described in detail in
subsequent chapters, I provide a brief outline of my general approach here. I view cross-
boundary conservation as a social, political, cultural, economic, and ecological process. While
this research is clearly social science, focusing on social and political dynamics, it is important to
note that I conceptualize and investigate the associated natural resource struggles and conflicts
over environmental policy as simultaneously discursive and material.

One of the most effective ways to understand people’s ideas and practices regarding
property and boundaries is to talk directly with them about these topics. What people say is a
window into specific discourses, including ideas and practices. In this dissertation I explore
many different discourses, including discourses of livelihood, privacy, property, and the state.
Discourses are ideas that are tied together in coalitions of meaning and linked to political
agendas. I examine the ways these discourses are used strategically, as conceptual tools or
weapons to fight for the interests of a particular group of people. In this sense, meaning is much
more than a simple idea or abstraction; meaning is politicized because the discourse that
dominates benefits certain sectors of society and has on-the-ground implications for particular
landscapes and communities. In other words, whomever has the power to implement their vision
(or discourse) through policy, management, or media usually succeeds in achieving their desired
future. Examining the words and stories of key players in cross-boundary conservation provides
a window into these discursive struggles.
That said, it is important to recognize that the social and political processes of cross-boundary conservation are not exclusively discursive. I also focus on material interests and material processes, including livelihood concerns, on-the-ground ecological impacts and land management, and class and property ownership. Throughout the dissertation, I examine the ways in which meanings and material interests are linked.

The research for this dissertation was conducted in residency between 1999 and 2002. I used a variety of research methods to explore different aspects of my research topic. These methods included participant observation, in-depth qualitative interviews, a quantitative mail survey, and observations of several community groups. I focused on a diverse range of residents, in particular ranchers, newcomer landowners, and public land managers, and nonresidents involved in generating discourse and policy relevant to the area.

**Critical Patterns and Key Players**

Throughout this dissertation I identify patterns that I found within particular groups of people, similarities among many, most, or all individuals within a specific category. The primary groups that I focus on are: ranchers, newcomer landowners, environmentalists, and public land management agency staff. I define ranchers as individuals or families who make a living raising livestock in the study site. Newcomer landowners are individuals or families who have purchased large properties (500 to 20,000 acres) in the study site within the last 15 years. Agency staff work for federal or state land management or wildlife management agencies. Environmentalists are individuals who are paid staff or active volunteers with non-profit environmental groups. These categories may seem straightforward at face value, but readers should resist the temptation to see these groups as monolithic. There is diversity within each group and, even where commonalities exist, there are always exceptions, certain individuals who think and act differently from their peers.
While this dissertation examines many different groups of people, residents and nonresidents, ranchers and newcomers, environmentalists and federal agency staff, the perspectives of ranchers are an important focus of this project. Ranchers are the primary private property owners throughout the Intermountain West. Their participation in cross-boundary efforts is critical to landscape conservation. Ranching is also part of the cultural history and community social fabric of many rural areas. Many ranch families have long-term tenure in areas now undergoing rapid landownership change.

Ranching and ranchers also influenced land use politics, particularly private land policy, throughout the 20th century. The role of ranchers in environmental protection is contested and hotly debated. At times ranchers have resisted national-level environmental policies such as the Endangered Species Act. But they have also played a critical role in managing some of the last lower elevation open spaces in the Intermountain West. While ranchers are clearly important as landowners and community members, they are often subsumed under the broader category of private property owner. Understanding ranchers as a specific cultural group and distinct type of private property owner is necessary for effectively incorporating private lands into landscape conservation. Thus, ranchers are central to an understanding of the politics of cross-boundary conservation and the opportunities for cooperation across jurisdictional boundaries.

A Preview of Findings and Implications

The politics of place were particularly evident on the Rocky Mountain Front, a hotly contested landscape where multiple discourses vie for dominance. Most people conceptualized the study site in one of two distinct ways - as either a wild, natural, uninhabited landscape or as a working, agricultural area with rural communities. These two discourses were connected with ideas about legitimate use, livelihood concerns, landownership change, and, in some cases, specific policy goals. Despite the pervasiveness of these competing views of the Rocky Mountain Front, some people suggested that a working landscape of ranching was compatible
with conservation goals such as biodiversity protection. This emerging third discourse points to a middle path for policy-making and for on-the-ground cross-boundary efforts.

Policy-makers and private landowners face ongoing tensions between private rights and public goods in the context of conservation on private property. On the Rocky Mountain Front, ranchers were strong advocates of private property rights and suspicious of state intervention in private lands. Ranchers saw private lands, conservation, and livelihood as inextricably linked. Conservation and livelihood were believed to be compatible and mutually reinforcing. Ranchers suggested that their obligation to manage sustainably for the public good emerged from the relationship between conservation, livelihood, and local community, not from state regulation. In contrast, environmentalists, many agency staff, newcomers, and others argued that state intervention, either in the form of private property regulation or private lands acquisition, was necessary to protect public interest in the environmental values of private lands. Different perspectives on the state’s role in private lands conservation have important implications for policy-making for landscape-level efforts such as ecosystem management.

Advocates of cross-boundary conservation often view property boundaries as a barrier to landscape-level approaches to natural resource management. I argue that instead of eliminating boundaries, we need to understand the meaning and practice of those boundaries. In this study I found that ranchers had well-understood local customs and norms for interacting around property boundaries. Landownership change was transforming these relations because newcomers often violated these norms. While ranchers were usually staunch private property rights advocates, their property boundaries were much more permeable as compared with newcomers, who valued privacy and often strictly enforced boundaries. How newcomer boundary practices will affect opportunities for cross-boundary conservation is a particularly important question.

Creativity around cross-boundary natural resource management and conservation in the study site has not emerged to any great extent from federal land management agencies, which regard their role as largely limited to providing scientific and technical expertise to private
landowners. Rather, a little known private lands group is both building on and challenging existing notions of property, boundaries, and the public interest. The work of this group demonstrates that private property institutions may provide important opportunities for flexibility and innovation in landscape conservation, as opposed to barriers, as many environmental groups suggest. Their efforts also raise important questions about what kinds of decision-making processes might most effectively integrate private lands into cross-boundary work. Policy-makers can build on the flexibility of private lands and broaden definitions of public goods to promote local level approaches that focus on conservation and livelihood.

In the conclusion of this dissertation I argue that policy-makers, environmentalists, and public land managers need to find effective ways to integrate conservation goals and livelihood issues into cross-boundary efforts in order to successfully involve private landowners. Working landscape models focusing on sustainable use of natural resources need to be evaluated and compared with traditional nature protection as a means for conservation. Furthermore, policy-makers need to broaden their concepts of public interest, to include public goods at multiple scales. Limiting our vision of the public good to the “national interest” blinds us to the important ways that rural landowners work for a locally defined, locally situated public good.

**Organization of this Dissertation**

To orient the reader to the contents of this document, I describe each chapter and its focus below. Following this introduction, there are chapters on relevant literature and theory. In Chapter 2, I describe the bodies of literature on community and livelihood, property and boundaries, and collaboration as they relate to cross-boundary conservation efforts. In Chapter 3, I situate this research within the context of several theoretical frameworks: poststructuralism, social constructionism, and theories of place and political ecology. I examine each framework and combine them into a research approach that enabled me to answer the research questions posed above.
In Chapter 4, I discuss methods and methodology. Here I cover my methodological approach and describe how my methods follow from my theoretical framework. I also detail each method utilized, the strengths and weaknesses of each, and how they complement one another.

The following six chapters form the core results of the dissertation, and are organized thematically. I begin with an analysis of rural change in the study site, outlining economic, demographic, and land use change, with a focus on how ownership changes have slowly shifted land use away from production agriculture. I then describe the contested nature of place meanings on the Rocky Mountain Front, demonstrating that even the name and location of the area are not agreed upon, and that different people have very different images of the study site. I explore the ways in which newcomer land ownership changes community and neighbor dynamics, in particular practices around property boundaries. I investigate different views of property, how public goods and private rights are negotiated, and how perspectives on different policy options are influenced by these views. I then detail specific boundary conflicts over wildlife and weeds, emphasizing the social norms and practices around the management of these cross-boundary issues, and how these are altered by changes in landownership. In the final results chapter, I analyze different perspectives on collaboration and examine a specific cross-boundary effort currently occurring in the study site. I focus on two projects, weed work and a grassbank, which demonstrate the ways landowners are working together to address conservation and natural resource management beyond individual properties.

In the conclusion, I review key findings and outline the important lessons that emerge from this research. I make recommendations to policy-makers, environmentalists, public land managers, ranchers, and newcomers. I then suggest avenues for future research, both in this study site and beyond.
Chapter 2: Community and Livelihood, Property and Boundaries, and Collaborative Decision-Making: A Literature Review

Introduction

The literature that I review in the following chapter informs the research questions I asked and frames the results described later in this dissertation. This review provides the reader with a context – the current state of knowledge in these arenas – within which to evaluate and situate the findings of this project. Most of the literature detailed below were familiar to me at the outset of the project, and informed my research design and interpretation of the data. In a few cases, however, I incorporated literature later in the process because emergent findings required closer examination of specific bodies of research and existing theory. The literature on property and boundaries was integrated during data analysis, and primarily influenced my interpretation of data and presentation of results rather than research design.

I begin by arguing that cross-boundary landscape-level conservation approaches, such as ecosystem management require the incorporation of community and livelihood into conservation projects and policy. Collaboration has been touted as a decision-making process that can effectively bring together the diverse stakeholders required for cross-boundary work. I describe and evaluate collaboration as a means for cross-boundary decision-making. Finally, I investigate relevant research and theory on property and boundaries, furthering the case made in Chapter 1 that the meaning and practice of property must be understood for effective cross-boundary conservation.

I envision the research process as a continued dialogue between data, theory, and interpretation. The literature I explored before beginning my research influenced my research questions. For example, from the literature on community-based conservation I drew my emphasis on residents’ relationship with place. During the data analysis I returned to already...
familiar bodies of literature and incorporated new bodies of literature related to specific findings. Existing theory assisted me in understanding where my results fit into or challenged current scholarly thinking on specific topics. In some cases, I found useful frameworks to explain what I had discovered. In other cases, I realized that my findings provided further explanation for existing theory, or moved into arenas not well-covered in existing literature.

**Integrating Community and Livelihood**

Landscape-level approaches cross jurisdictional boundaries and often include private lands and local communities. I make the case below that conservation efforts in general should involve local communities and landowners. Landscape-level approaches in particular, because of their scale and cross-boundary nature, cannot succeed if they ignore community interests and livelihood issues.

Over the last few decades, community has become increasingly popular as both a unit of scientific analysis and a level of political decision-making. Community is seen by many as the site of environmental policy and practice. Community approaches to natural resource management and conservation, broadly defined, involve community members in decision-making and implementation, devolve power to the local level, and connect conservation and sustainable economic development (Kellert et al, 2000).

The focus on communities emerges in part from problems associated with protected areas, particularly in developing countries. Traditional forms of nature protection, such as wilderness and parks, often restrict natural resource-based livelihoods. Depending on the specific country and designation, livestock grazing, fuelwood gathering, hunting, and other local livelihood activities may be prohibited upon establishment of a protected area. These activities are often considered incompatible with nature protection. The one exception is tourism, which is typically considered compatible with the conservation goals associated with protected places.
Unfortunately, the economic benefits of tourism, often assumed to provide jobs and an infusion of external cash into the local economy, are rarely realized (Nepal, 1997).

Other forms of environmental policy also work, in part, by restricting livelihood activities seen as detrimental to conservation. In the U.S., for example, the Endangered Species Act prohibits certain practices that are incompatible with conservation of threatened and endangered species. Policies designed to protect wetlands often prohibit draining of particular kinds of habitats.

When customary practices and livelihood activities are restricted by protected areas and other environmental policies, local resentment and resistance often results. In developing countries, environmentalists, are accused of increasing poverty and hardship among already marginalized groups of people. In the U.S., some people in rural communities even argue that environmental policies were designed to deliberately put them out of work. Conflict, sometimes violent, has erupted in many resident communities adjacent to protected areas in both developing countries and in the U.S..

These tensions and conflicts are often attributed to managers' and policy-makers' inability to effectively respond to the needs of local communities (Krahl and Henderson, 1998). Because, for instance, poaching of endangered species continues and political resistance to environmental policy grows in the face of these conflicts, some scientists and environmentalists argue that environmental protection cannot succeed in the absence of community support (Young, 1999). In this context, different kinds of community-based approaches have emerged. These approaches are variously described as community-based conservation, community-based natural resource management, social forestry, community forestry, and comanagement. They link conservation and livelihood, development and nature protection, environmental goals and social justice. Projects such as the Annapurna Conservation Area Project in Nepal and the CAMPFIRE Project in Zimbabwe are well-known efforts to pursue sustainable economic development and
biodiversity protection simultaneously. Entire countries, such as Nepal, have focused their conservation efforts around community-based approaches (Mehta and Heinen, 2001).

The key difference between a community based approach and a traditional conservation approach is the role of natural resource use. Advocates of traditional, or strict, nature protection view nonuse of natural resources as the ideal means to achieve conservation goals. Therefore, restricting resource use is fundamental to conservation. People focusing on community approaches believe that sustainable use of natural resources is possible and desirable, and compatible with biodiversity protection. In other words, proponents of community-based conservation and other like efforts believe that there are ways to use natural resources without causing environmental degradation. (In some cases, however, people may advocate for either strict nature preservation or sustainable use based on what is socially and politically feasible rather than a real belief that one way is better than another.)

It is important to note here that livelihood in this context refers to a person or family’s ability to make a living. Livelihood does not necessarily refer to subsistence, which implies self-sufficiency and a moderate, even poor, standard of living. Neither does livelihood refer to corporate profit or economic growth in the traditional capitalist sense. Allison and Ellis (2001) define livelihood as “the factors that affect the vulnerability or strength of individual or family survival strategies,” including assets (natural, social, and economic), activities, and access to assets and activities (p. 379). Incorporating local livelihoods into conservation approaches requires understanding the material economy and viewing natural resources, in part, as material resources for sustenance.

While the focus on community and livelihood seems to have overtaken international conservation and to have heavily influenced domestic conservation agendas, several important critiques merit examination. The first critique emerges from within academic circles concerned with community approaches to conservation and calls for a more complicated view of community. Like most terms used in academic literature and in this dissertation, the concept of
community has different meanings to different people. In the context of this dissertation, I am using community to indicate a geographically situated community, not a community of interest. As many scholars have pointed out, rural communities are too often envisioned as static, homogeneous, and isolated, and assumed to be ecologically sustainable. Instead, in keeping with Agrawal and Gibson (1999), I suggest that we define rural communities as the location of multiple interests and actors, with important internal differences. Communities are best described as heterogeneous groups of “people with interrelated axes of difference, including wealth, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, and, by implication, power” (Cornwall and Jewkes, 1995, p. 1673). In other words, even in small rural communities, people have different backgrounds, resources, access to political power, and take different positions on a variety of issues. The ecological sustainability of particular community activities needs to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Furthermore, rural communities need to be understood not as remote, isolated social and biological units, but as embedded in global economies, national and international political structures, and broader discourses. Communities, even those typically considered “traditional,” are dynamic and evolving. And, while communities are bounded geographically, boundaries may change over time. Altogether, this image of community means that shared norms, common ground, and community interests cannot be assumed or taken for granted. Belsky (1999) argues that overly simplified and essentialized images of community result in the misapplication of one-size-fits-all community-based approaches that ignore local differences and therefore do not succeed in practice.

Another set of recent criticisms emerge from environmentalists and scientists who believe that community-based approaches have failed and that the boundaries of strict nature preserves should be better enforced in the face of community activities that degrade protected areas. Critics such as Terborgh (1999) and Oates (1999) are responding to the urgency of the biodiversity crisis and the small number of concrete successes in community conservation. They suggest that top-down, authoritarian, even military, approaches be embraced in certain
“emergency” situations. As described earlier, these researchers and environmentalists do not envision local natural resource use as compatible with biodiversity protection. They call for community approaches to be abandoned in favor of more traditional environmental policies.

In contrast, critics who seek to problemmatize our notions of community are seeking community-based conservation efforts that acknowledge and incorporate the reality of heterogenous communities made up of multiple interests. They are not suggesting that the integration of community, livelihood, and conservation be abandoned. I agree, and argue that equity, democracy, and long-term political support for conservation depend on mutually beneficial relationships between conservation programs, including protected areas, and local communities.

In the context of landscape conservation, the importance of community and livelihood cannot be overstated. Cross-boundary efforts involve moving beyond protected areas into landscapes of multiple ownerships, landscapes that usually include private property and local communities. Effective cross-boundary efforts require the involvement of different landowners and residents. I next explore some of the decision-making processes advocated for involvement of the diverse set of stakeholders and interests necessary to landscape conservation.

**Collaborative Decision-Making Processes**

Collaborative decision-making processes have been touted as essential to ecosystem management and other cross-boundary efforts because they incorporate a diversity of interested parties and landowners. According to the Ecosystem Management Initiative at University of Michigan, an ecosystem management approach “emphasizes collaborative decision-making to deal with a landscape owned by many individuals and organizations with different values, interests and capabilities.” Collaboratives take the form of watershed groups, consensus groups, ranchland groups, and advisory councils, and they focus variously on private lands, public lands, or partnerships between private landowners and public land management agencies. Here I
describe the movement toward collaboration, outline the principles and characteristics of collaboration, and discuss critiques.

It is important to note that this dissertation is not an evaluation of the effectiveness of a particular collaborative effort, nor is it an investigation into the success or failure of collaboration in general. Rather, collaboration is discussed here because it is viewed as a potential vehicle or mechanism through which cross-boundary conservation might occur. However, it is important to keep in mind that cooperation between different landowners and managers may take many different forms and collaboration may only be possible or desirable in certain situations.

**Collaboration and Public Lands Management**

In 1996, the President's Council on Sustainable Development called for governmental agencies to encourage collaboration on natural resource issues (Van de Wettering, 1996). Federal land management agencies have seen a series of mandates from Washington instructing them to pursue more participatory forms of public involvement.

Interest in collaboration stems in large part from increasing dissatisfaction with public land management and agency decision-making, in particular the contentious, debilitating, and polarized environment in which many of these decisions occur. This dissatisfaction relates to both the product, on the ground management, and the process, NEPA-style public participation, expert-driven decision-making, and two-party winner-takes-all representative democracy. Frustration with unsustainable land management, gridlocked decisions, and unstable local economies has inspired experimentation with new ways of bringing people together to make decisions, often outside of traditional institutions and processes. Collaboratives are seen as a way to move beyond adversarial politics, in which scathing critiques of opponents are leveled but few viable solutions are put forth. In the context of ecosystem management, the federal agencies also view collaboration as a mechanism for working with private landowners across jurisdictional boundaries.
The call for natural resource collaboration is also related to growing interest in Jeffersonian democracy, community, social capital, civic society, and devolution. Within this context, collaboration is seen as a "new, more mature expression of democracy" (Bernard and Young, 1997, p. 199), what Kemmis (1990) calls “face-to-face democracy.” One way to engage citizens in “face-to-face” governance is to devolve decision-making, locating it at the community level where people see their actions as meaningful. Snow (1996) argues that “devolution of power to local levels is a natural and expected outcome of advocacy for responsive environmental management. Nature tends to decentralize" (p. 43). While partly based on organization around natural systems, the call for devolution is also related to increased mistrust and cynicism about the federal government (Wondolleck and Yaffee, 2000).

Collaboration also grows out of alternative dispute resolution as applied to environmental issues beginning in the 1970s (Snow, 1996). Advocates of collaborative processes contend that meaningful involvement in decision making by diverse interests can produce more effective and more widely supported outcomes. Collaborative efforts that focus on a relatively small, specific landscape tend to break down ideological differences, mistrust, and other barriers to decisions while fostering plans that are based on a shared passion for a landscape. (Propst, 1999)

Proponents also argue that collaborative planning "can tap an enormous reservoir of collective energy, talent, and inspiration," diffuse conflict, improve the working relationship between agencies and communities and provide a viable alternative to traditional top down planning (Frentz et al, 1999). The hope is that collaboration will result in management plans that meet the needs of the community as well as the ecosystem. Because communities feel a sense of ownership, plans generated through collaboration may be more enduring and more widely supported than traditional policy.

Elements of Collaboration

Most collaboratives are place-based in that they focus on a specific geographic location. Sense of place often provides critical common ground from which to begin a collaborative
process (Wondolleck and Yaffee, 2000). While some collaboratives are policy-based, they tend to have much less success when compared to place-based processes (Cestero, 1999). Below I describe what many people view as the ideal of collaboration. These are principles that proponents of collaboration strive to implement. However, in practice, not all of the ideal elements of collaboration are always present.

Collaboratives have open, transparent, and inclusive processes (Cestero, 1999). They abide by an open-door policy which allows anyone to participate (Bernard and Young, 1997). For a collaborative to be effective, all stakeholders need to be included toward the beginning of the process (Blumberg, 1998). (A stakeholder is any group or individual who is concerned about or will be affected by a decision (Innes, 1996).) For dialogue to take place collaboratives need to be small, and, therefore, participants tend to represent a particular part of the larger population. Participants should reflect the values and perspectives of a segment of the citizenry, rather than formally representing a hard and fast position (Enck, 1998). Horizontal linkages must be nurtured to ensure that participants communicate with their constituencies (Cestero, 1999).

Collaborative processes are characterized by dialogue. Participants are equal partners in a process of defining a problem, exploring alternatives, and agreeing on a solution. Involving people before alternatives or solutions have been formulated is critical to meaningful participation (Yung, 1999).

Dialogue facilitates mutual learning which legitimizes and values different kinds of knowledge. While traditional planning privileges scientific knowledge, collaboratives validate all kinds of knowledge, understanding the strengths and weaknesses of each. Experiential knowledge, for instance, can help reveal relevant issues and fill gaps in knowledge about specific places (Krumpe and McCool, 1997). Ideally, collaboratives integrate local knowledge with science, management, and nongovernmental expertise (Cestero, 1999).
Collaboration necessarily involves building trust. As dialogue occurs, traditional boundaries break down and relationships are built. Without trust, participants cannot be sure that others are telling the truth, or will abide by agreements.

Advocates of collaborative processes emphatically argue that collaboration should not be equated with compromise. According to Bernard and Young (1997), collaboration shows "what it means to embrace change as an inevitable part of life without losing one's roots or compromising core values" (p. 12). Instead, collaborative groups "strive for solutions that break out of the tired legacies of compromise, Robert's Rules, winners and losers, and the politics of conflict where every issue is either right or wrong" (Bernard and Young, 1997, p. 203). If the options move beyond yes or no, issues are less likely to be oversimplified and polarization is limited (Bernard and Young, 1997).

People with different backgrounds and different kinds of knowledge can often envision creative solutions that no one person could conceive of alone (Wondolleck and Yaffee, 2000). Diversity, then, is a source of innovation for collaboration. This creativity allows collaboratives to generate solutions that all stakeholders can embrace. Many collaboratives operate by consensus, but they often define consensus differently.

Collaboratives rely on both leadership and power sharing. Successful collaboration almost always depends on effective leadership. Bernard and Young (1997) describe leaders as "respected long-time residents of the community; they can see the core idea clearly and communicate it effectively in language stakeholders and residents can understand" (p. 200). However, because collaboration involves power sharing, leaders are more like facilitators than charismatic, take-charge doers.

Collaboratives usually involve changing traditional patterns of power and decision-making, at least to some extent. According to Innes (1996), these groups shift "longstanding power relationships." If a collaborative group is to have any effect on the problem at hand, it
must have some ability to act. This means that traditional decision-makers, such as the Forest Service and politicians, must relinquish some control over decisions.

In short, collaboratives bring together different kinds of people in open, inclusive processes that involve dialogue, mutual learning, and trust. They value experiential and expert knowledge, operate by consensus, and require power sharing on the part of traditional decision-makers. They seek sustainable, enduring, and equitable solutions to natural resource problems.

The Critics

Collaboration is not without its critics. The fact that a little-known collaborative, the Quincy Library Group, sparked a national controversy indicates the extent to which people are bitterly divided over the increasing use of collaborative processes. Even many advocates of collaboration caution that these processes are not appropriate for every issue. According to Snow (1996), collaboratives are "not an unconditional good, are apt to be effective only in limited circumstances, [and] are terribly inadequate in many issues (perhaps the majority of issues) now affecting the West's natural environment" (p. 40).

Michael McCloskey (1996), Director of the Sierra Club, is one of the most vocal critics of collaboration. He argues that locally-based collaborative decision-making disempowers his constituency, which is largely urban, and gives industry an unfair advantage. Critics like McCloskey fear that since most collaboratives operate by consensus and everyone has to agree, decisions sink to the lowest common denominator, and a small minority has veto power. Opponents also wonder if consensus is simply about avoiding conflict. They worry that participants "go along to get along," and that maintaining relationships is prioritized over sustainable decisions (Cestero, 1999). If the process minimizes difference or participants are coopted by other people's interests, perhaps collaboratives only serve to diffuse tension and build tolerance.
Coggins (1998) argues that existing environmental laws provide a much better basis for
assuring environmentally sound management of federal lands in comparison to collaboration. He
argues that federal lands are a national asset in which national constituencies have a legitimate
stake, and that devolving decision-making benefits local economic interests and maintenance of
the status quo. These critiques do not necessarily apply to collaborative efforts that focus on
private lands, because the national public interest in private lands has not been as widely accepted
nor codified into law when compared with public lands.

Finally, many advocates of collaboration fail to acknowledge that people come to the
table with different resources and different kinds of power. Critics have pointed out that industry
representatives are often well-paid and specifically trained in negotiating. Meanwhile community
members volunteer time after working and taking care of families. Ensuring a level playing field,
as Cestero (1999) and others encourage, is very difficult.

The Limitations of Collaboration

There are many obstacles to successful collaboration, even when participants view it as a
legitimate and effective decision-making process. Collaboration is often a lengthy process, and
sustaining participation and securing funding can be challenging. There can be significant
communication problems and debilitating legal barriers. Ensuring the participation of relevant
stakeholders may be difficult. It is not always possible to reach agreement in the face of
diverging interests.

In the case of collaboration on public lands, agency culture, training, and tradition often
impede collaborative processes. Agency employees are sometimes reluctant to give up decision-
making power and authority to collaborative groups. Some managers believe that giving up
power is an abdication of their stewardship responsibilities (Yung, 1999). Public land
management agencies have an expert-focused culture in which the knowledge of the specialist is
privileged. Agency culture evolved during a time when “technical experts divorced from the
corrupting influences of politics” were believed to “best determine the public’s interest” (Wondolleck and Yaffee, 2000, p. 11). Collaboratives require rethinking how knowledge is valued and whose knowledge is valued, which may be challenging given the expert culture of the agencies.

Landscape Conservation and Collaboration

Landscape conservation requires some type of cooperation because, by definition, different landowners are involved. Collaboration has been touted as an effective process to involve different stakeholders in decision-making. Momentum around collaboration is increasing and many models are being implemented in a range of settings. Advocates of collaboration argue for community ownership of long lasting decisions through dialogue and mutual learning. However, there are significant challenges to successful collaboration. If collaborative efforts incorporate public lands, there are potential obstacles regarding agency culture and incorporation of national interests. Furthermore, moving from public to private land management likely involves a set of challenges that has not been fully explored in the literature on collaboration.

Property and Boundaries: Concepts and Practices

In the introduction, I made the case that landscape-level efforts require an understanding of different concepts of and practices around property and boundaries. Here I review research and theory on property and boundaries. Both property and boundaries are defined here as social processes, with different meanings to different people.

Property as Social Process

Property is defined here as social process and social relationship. In 1978 Canadian property scholar C.B. Macphearson wrote, “the meaning of property is not constant. The actual institution and the way people see it, and hence the meaning they give to the word, all change
over time.” In contrast, classical scholars have often conceptualized present day Western property institutions, in particular private property, as the inevitable, “natural,” and positive evolution of societies into modern, capitalist cultures. These scholars define property in terms of economics, legal systems, and rational action on the part of owners.

The definition of property adopted in this dissertation conceptualizes property as a dynamic, everchanging social system. Bromley (1991) describes property as a social instrument, arguing that “property is not an object but rather is a social relation that defines the property holder with respect to something of value” (p. 2). Property rights govern ownership and use rights, and rights of access. According to Bromley (1991), a right “denotes a set of actions and behaviors that the possessor may not be prevented from undertaking” which “implies a duty on the part of all others to refrain from preventing those actions and behaviors” (p. 3-4). A social relations model of property suggests that rights change as the needs of society change, and that these rights exist within a larger social context. The meaning of property and the rights inherent in ownership evolve over time, as cultural norms change and notions of proper use shift (Freyfogle, 1993). These rights are relational because they emerge from the relationship between individual property owners and a larger collective (Singer, 2000). In this context, Fortmann (1998) defines property as a “social process through which people define and struggle over access to and control of property” (p. 5). In this sense property relations are continually contested, because those relations determine access to and control of resources.

The social process definition of property does not deny that material resources such as land, wildlife, and water are considered as property. Nor does it ignore the ways in which property relationships are encoded in law and institutionalized. This model simply suggests that underlying these material objects and the legal rights to these objects are social relationships and different meanings. According to Walker and Peters (2001), “property rights, even if legally sanctioned, are not static; the social meanings of private property are shaped by ongoing
discourse and practices” (p. 420). What we consider to be physical property changes over time. Property rights are not “natural” or given, but emerge from negotiations in a broader society.

**Property as a Bundle of Rights**

In America, we often envision property ownership as exclusive (Jacob, 1998). According to this view, a single owner controls or holds all or nearly all rights associated with a particular piece of property. This type of ownership is known variously as exclusive, comprehensive, full, freehold, or fee-simple ownership, or the classical view of property. This view presumes that a single owner can be identified and that this owner has full control of a definable property (Singer, 2000).

However, in practice, both in terms of legal arrangements and customary usage, exclusive ownership rarely exists. In the Western U.S., a landowner may hold title to 5,000 acres, but other parties, public and private, may own the mineral rights, the wildlife, and the water flowing through the property. There may be an access easement providing a right of way to public lands. A nearby outfitter may own recreational hunting rights on the property. A private non-profit organization may own the right to subdivide. The air space above is public domain and regulated by the state.

Because exclusive ownership is very much the exception to the rule, many scholars conceptualize property as a bundle of rights (Jacobs, 1998). According to the bundle of rights theory of property, there are multiple ownerships and claims to any particular parcel of land. Different sticks in the bundle can be separated through sale, lease, customary usage, trade, bequeath, or regulation, and different people or entities hold different rights. These rights include rights of “use, enjoyment, and disposal of resources” (Vogt, 1999). Shared rights to a single space are sometimes referred to as overlapping tenures (Geisler, 2000), hybrid property rights (Rose, 1998), partial interests (Wiebe and Meinzen-Dick, 1998), or split estate. Different owners or stakeholders in a particular property can be a mix of state, private, or communal (Wiebe and
Many innovative private lands conservation strategies, such as conservation easements, rely on separating certain sticks from the bundle of rights, assigning market value to specific rights, and purchasing or trading those rights.

**The Contested Categories of Public and Private**

In America we also tend to think of land ownership as fitting neatly into one of two categories, public or private. Each category is assumed to have a distinct and different purpose, meaning, and legal arrangement. According to Geisler (2000), "surrounding our public lands is a great reservoir of pride, mystique, and national identity" (p. 65). Huffman (1998) argues that public lands are different from private lands because public land policy responds to politics, rather than economics. Private lands, on the other hand, are associated with autonomy, economic freedom, and democracy. Geisler describes "an almost defiant conceit that private ownership is the highest and best use of land and the centerpiece of American civil liberties, lifestyle, and individualism" (p. 65).

But Geisler correctly points out that our binary conception of property in America as either public or private is an oversimplification that blinds us to nuances in both types of ownerships, and categories that are neither public nor private. Public land, for instance, is hardly a monolithic category. Very different types of public lands exist, sometimes within the same agency. For instance, wilderness differs dramatically from a ski resort or a mine, but all may be situated on Forest Service lands. Furthermore, different people conceptualize public lands in different ways, citing different purposes and different publics. There are overlapping rights within seemingly tidy public land boundaries and some of these rights might be characterized as private. For example, mineral rights on public lands are often treated as private rights despite their physical location on public property.

Private lands are also not entirely private. One person’s private rights may conflict with another person’s rights. Conceptualizing property as a bundle of rights means that multiple
owners may have an interest in a single piece of land. Private property is also encumbered, either legally or morally, with broader public obligations. There is often a public interest in private property, sometimes acknowledged or codified. For instance, Endangered Species Act regulation of private property recognizes the public interest in wildlife habitat on private lands. Private property encumbered by public rights through local, state, and national regulation, or sale of easements and rights to recreational access might be considered as quasi-public (Geisler, 2000).

For numerous reasons, traditional distinctions between public and private property may in fact emerge from a false dichotomy. These firm distinctions hide the complex social process of property rights, whereby these rights are continually renegotiated as societies change and evolve (Benda-Beckmann, 2000). Intermingled ownership further blurs the lines between public and private lands because of the multiple, overlapping claims associated with such landscapes (Geisler, 2000).

Policy and Tensions between Public Goods and Private Rights

How public goods, such as wildlife and ecosystem conservation, and private rights are negotiated is an ongoing challenge for policy-makers in the U.S. and abroad. People’s concepts of private property influence their responses to the policies that govern use of private lands. Singer (2000) argues that the exclusive ownership model of private property makes regulation for the purposes of the public good suspect, and creates a situation where regulators bear the burden of justification because regulation of private property is inherently unjust.

In the U.S., the state seeks to preserve public goods on private lands through subsidies, incentives, compensation, regulations, purchase of specific property rights, and outright land acquisition. According to Gluck (2002), “private property rights are sufficient for production of private goods, whereas public goods have to be safeguarded by state intervention” (p. 125). It is often assumed that the state is the keeper of the public interest, and many environmentalists have come to regard private property as anathema to environmental efforts (Huffman, 1998).
However, this assumption is contested, and the role of the state in private land conservation should be examined closely. Fairfax et al (1999) argue that we should not assume the federal government holds any consistent and identifiable positions on natural resource issues, or that the government itself is monolithic.

The "Emergence" of Boundaries

I turn now to an examination of the literature on boundaries, which overlaps with and has much in common with the work on property. The study of boundaries and the concept of boundaries has emerged in a diverse set of social science disciplines in the analysis of social identity, inequality, knowledge, and community (Lamont and Molnar, 2002). The role of boundaries is central to regionalism, bioregionalism, and ecosystem management. This is not to suggest that there are more boundaries, physical or social, today. Rather, academic and political interest in boundaries appears to be on the rise.

Property boundaries separate parcels and indicate different rights for different groups of people. In this sense, boundaries are concerned with spatial relationships. While boundaries may seem to be solid, concrete objects, like property, boundaries are better conceptualized as symbols or social relationships (Walker and Peters, 2001). Boundaries are socially constructed, but manifest as physical lines on the landscape.

In a practical sense, property boundaries were necessary as white settlers moved into the West. People needed a common understanding of ownership and responsibility in a country and region with rapidly changing ownership patterns and little custom and history to build on. According to Meidinger (1998), "boundaries mark divisions of control over and responsibility for resources among individuals, organizations, and governments" (p. 87). Claiming a particular parcel of land for a particular owner, public or private, necessarily involves attention to and maintenance of boundaries (Brunson, 1998).
Despite the legal nature of property, most of the rules governing behavior around boundaries are not codified in law, but are norms understood by members of particular social groups (Brunson, 1998). For example, Ellickson (1986), in a study in Northern California, found that social norms, established and well-understood local practices, governed interactions around livestock trespass, not legal rules. What he describes as “norms of neighborliness” governed long-term relationships and determined restraint, reciprocity, and debt. Ellickson argues that norms are particularly important when people are engaged in long-term relationships. Understanding these social norms, the practices around boundaries, their maintenance, and when, where, and for whom they are permeable, is essential to understand how people relate to property across boundaries.

Boundaries Called into Question

In the context of landscape conservation, biologists and environmentalists often call for the elimination of boundaries. They see boundaries largely as barriers to ecosystem management and other landscape-level efforts. Again and again, in the literature and in the interviews for this project, environmentalists ask us to imagine the landscape without boundaries and to move beyond boundaries. This call to re-envision our landscapes emerges from the recognition that property boundaries and ecosystem processes rarely coincide. Because property boundaries usually “follow straight lines of political dictate and compromise” they “almost always fragment a landscape, disrupting the ebb and flow of individuals and ecological processes” (Knight and Landres, 1998, p. 1). As described in the Introduction, Freyfogle (1998) focuses on land health and “asks us to center our sights on nature’s organic wholeness and to downplay or eliminate artificial boundaries” (p. 21). Boundaries are accused of creating the same tensions as private property, the tension between private rights and individual interests, and public goods and the community.
Despite the fact that ecosystems do not abide by property boundaries, divisions between property are a social institution that is unlikely to disappear in the foreseeable future. Regardless, it is unclear if cross-boundary conservation requires the elimination of boundaries. Even Freyfogle (1998) admits that while conceptualizing land health across an ecosystem might require elimination of boundaries, the practice of stewardship may not. According to Brunson (1998),

Humans maintain many boundaries at once, seeking to control the spaces within these boundaries and to defend claims based on legal authority, emotional attachment, and biological inclination. The existence of these territories complicates the task of protecting ecosystems that invariably transcend human boundaries, but they exist because society cannot function without them. Cross-boundary stewardship efforts will be futile if they seek to eliminate such boundaries. Instead stewardship projects should be designed to acknowledge the existence of territories, to recognize the various mechanisms of defense that territorial claimants employ, and to accommodate the need for those claimants to maintain an acceptable level of territorial control. (81-82)

Understanding boundaries, their meanings and the practices around them, may be more important to landscape conservation than calling for erasure of all of the lines on the map.

Maps and the History of Modern Property Boundaries

Understanding modern property boundaries necessarily means examining the history and politics of maps, since property boundaries have been codified and expressed through mapping in Western society. At first glance, maps may seem factual records of easily discernable features. However, maps are much more than inert representations of topographical features and legal property definitions. Maps are discourse and, thus, “value-laden images” (Harley, 1989). A map symbolizes a particular vision of an area and a particular political agenda. For this reason, “'simply' naming or locating a feature on a map is often of political significance” (Harley, 1989, p. 278).

Because mapping is closely associated with nation building, maps are frequently the language of political power, created by and for those in power (Aberley, 1993). Numerous historical and political studies have documented the ways in which mapping was utilized to secure and maintain power as the nation-state rose to political dominance. Cadastral mapping was
first used to secure property taxes for emerging nation states, but later became a tool to extend and consolidate power for both property owners and the state. Thus, property boundaries often reflect official state discourses and agendas more than local realities and customs (Walker and Peters, 2001). Mapping is therefore a political act, which portrays a particular view of reality, usually the view of those in power.

Recently, analysis of maps produced outside of the reach of the state illustrate how different views of reality have been and can be expressed by different map makers. For example, Orlove (1991) examined two sets of maps, one produced by peasants and the other by state officials, that reflected radically different understandings of resource control. Local mapping has been also used to understand the claims of different groups of people to particular resources, such as men’s and women’s claims to resources (Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter, and Edmunds, 1995).

Countermapping techniques have been used to contest the legitimacy and location of official property boundaries. Countermapping involves local people, often in partnership with non-governmental organizations, in producing modern-style maps that redraw boundaries, sometimes through the use of GPS technology, to reflect local claims to land and resources. These maps are then used to assert local rights and formalize land claims (Walker and Peters, 2001). These efforts appropriate the state’s techniques and methods of representation to legitimate local claims (Peluso, 1995). Like the original maps of the nation-state, these maps are visions of what a particular group desires and views as legitimate.

Most countermapping has occurred outside of the U.S. In America, bioregionalists have used similar techniques to express local visions of place that redefine boundaries and units of governance according to watersheds and other ecological features (Aberley, 1993). Despite assumptions to the contrary, redrawing boundaries based on ecological features can be difficult. Zuckerman (1993) demonstrates how the northern California bioregion could be drawn four very different ways depending on whether one used watersheds, vegetation, cultural areas, or topography as the defining feature.
Even countermapping efforts, which produce visions of boundaries, property, and governance different from official state discourse, do not fully capture the nuances of resource claims and property rights. It is difficult to represent multiple claims or overlapping rights to a particular property through the use of lines on a two-dimensional map. Mapping is territorial, focusing on ownership of land, and therefore omits nonterritorial claims to resources such as rights to access, fuelwood, forage, plants for food and medicine, wildlife resources, and water. In other words, the bundle of rights in all its nuances is difficult to represent in this format. Maps imply exclusive ownership because they oversimplify property rights. Because maps cannot easily accommodate nonterritorial claims, these claims often become territorial (claims to ownership of land) in the countermapping process (Walker and Peters, 2001).

Furthermore, boundaries and property rights are fluid and evolving, but maps “freeze” them in time, limiting later renegotiation (Walker and Peters, 2001; Peluso, 1995). The dynamic nature of property rights are thereby antithetical to mapping in some senses. On the other hand, maps have an undeniable authority in modern culture and the freezing of these rights may be the only way to gain state recognition of local resource claims.

Walker and Peters (2001) encourage us to examine nonterritorial struggles over the meaning of boundaries, not just contests over the boundaries themselves. They argue that claims to resources are not always tied to claims to territory and explore “the meanings of accepted boundaries—the struggle to define how abstract lines on maps are translated into specific social practices” (Walker and Peters, 2001, p. 413). Walker and Peters depict intense struggle over what boundaries can be crossed, by whom, for what purpose, and under what conditions. They suggest that different communities make different kinds of claims based on practical political realities, and specific cultural and historical contexts.

As described earlier, in the international context, protected area boundaries have become the location of much conflict, as residents “trespass” for food, fiber, livestock forage, or game. Oftentimes this “trespass” violates the letter of the law, but is justified by local people because of
former habitation of the area, longstanding use rights, extreme poverty, and/or natural resource depletion outside of the protected area. In these cases, what boundaries mean for access, use, and control of natural resources is contested.

Conclusion

Cross-boundary conservation requires integrating community and livelihood into conservation efforts, investigating collaboration as a tool for cross-boundary work, and understanding the meaning and practices of property and boundaries. But these terms—community, collaboration, property, and boundaries—are contested, with different people defining them in different ways. Below I outline how I am defining each of the above terms and what I see as the strengths and weakness of different viewpoints. I do so to make my assumptions explicit so that the reader can better understand how the literature influenced the research described in this dissertation.

Assumptions and Definitions:

Community

- Rural communities are not static, traditional, homogeneous, and isolated. These communities are dynamic and diverse, with multiple interests and actors embedded in regional, national, and international economies and policy-making.

- Consideration of the livelihood component in research means attention to material interests and material resources.

Property

- Ecosystem management and other similar cross-boundary conservation initiatives must incorporate private lands, and therefore, must address issues of private property and private rights.

- Property is not an inevitable, natural, fixed object. Rather, property is a dynamic social process through which people define rights, obligations, and value, and contest access and control.
• While property is often conceptualized as exclusive ownership, with one identifiable owner controlling all aspects of a piece of land, property is more accurately described as a bundle of sticks with different owners or interests controlling or making claims to different aspects, including access and use of resources, of a particular property.

• Property cannot be neatly divided into public and private categories. Rather, there are private rights on public lands and public goods on private lands. Properties with multiple claims and rights might be characterized as hybrid properties.

• Tensions over private rights and public goods are ongoing and influence political debate and environmental policy-making.

Boundaries

• Research on cross-boundary conservation must investigate landowner concepts and practices of property and boundaries as they relate to existing and potential cross-boundary efforts.

• Boundaries, like property, are a social process and social relationship. Claiming and maintaining property rights involves attention to boundaries and boundary trespasses. The permeability of boundaries – who crosses property boundaries and for what purposes – is largely determined by social norms.

• Maps are discursive and political, representing the views and claims of those with the power to create the maps and draw the boundaries. Because maps are two dimensional and static, they rarely represent the complexity and evolving nature of existing layered rights and claims.

Collaboration

• Understanding cross-boundary conservation requires knowledge of the different ways that landowners, public land managers, and other stakeholders cooperate (or do not cooperate) to manage natural resources across boundaries.

• Collaboration is one decision-making approach that may be able to incorporate the diverse set of stakeholders required for successful cross-boundary conservation.

• Collaboration has strengths and weaknesses. The process promotes dialogue, values different kinds of knowledge, nurtures innovation, and may incorporate different community interests. On the other hand, collaborative processes challenge expert-driven agency culture and decision-making, disenfranchise national interests, fail to acknowledge power differentials, and cannot necessarily bridge intractable materially- or ideologically-based conflicts.
Chapter 3: Toward a Poststructuralist Political Ecology of Place: Conceptual Foundations and Research Framework

Introduction

Examining the politics of cross-boundary conservation required combining specific aspects of several theoretical frameworks. In this chapter, I evaluate three research frameworks, poststructuralism and social constructivism, place, and political ecology, outlining the strengths and weaknesses of each. I describe which aspects of each theory I am accepting and rejecting, and forge a research framework that combines elements of each approach.

I begin with an examination of poststructuralism, social constructivism, and the role of discourse. In this section, I position my research within current debates in social theory about the nature of reality and the nature of knowledge. While this dissertation is not specifically about poststructuralism, it is essential that the reader understand how my ontological and epistemological assumptions influenced my research design and interpretation of the data.

I then discuss the current focus on place and place meanings, arguing for a politics of place that integrates common ground, political difference, and material interests. I conclude with an analysis of political ecology, including how this research fits into a poststructuralist political ecology approach. At the close of this chapter, I outline the key elements of the research framework, a poststructuralist political ecology of place, that I am utilizing for this research and describe how this framework guided my research questions, choice of methods, and interpretation of data.

The Influence of Poststructuralism

Poststructuralism has influenced a whole range of academic disciplines (Bloland, 1995). Poststructuralism is often associated with postmodernism, and, indeed, postmodernism draws on
many poststructuralist ideas. At one level, poststructuralists are engaged in a critique of modernist assumptions about reality and language. Poststructuralists question the ability of language to accurately and objectively describe a knowable truth or reality (Bloland, 1995). Poststructuralism builds on structuralism's focus on language, emphasizing the arbitrary nature of language. Poststructuralists have questioned whether language can refer to a world not of its own making. In contrast, modernists assume that there are realities prior to language, and that language is simply a vehicle through which we talk about the world (Bloland, 1995).

According to poststructuralism, the meanings of words are in flux and are constantly being renegotiated (Bloland, 1995). Based on the dismantling of the relationship between words, meaning, and reality, poststructuralists have argued that humans do not have access to a prediscursive or presocial world. In other words, we know our world collectively and through discourse, and, therefore, we cannot know the world outside of language and culture. Some poststructuralists take this the next obvious step by suggesting that our world is therefore constituted socially and discursively.

If the world is socially and discursively constituted, events, ideas, and categories are culturally, temporally, and spatially situated. Because of the situated nature of social phenomenon, poststructuralists have argued against grand theories and universal explanations. They contend that these metanarratives are too totalizing and cannot account for specificities and nuances across time, space, and culture. Instead, social phenomenon are overdetermined, meaning that a range of social, political, cultural, and economic factors play a role in a particular phenomenon.

Poststructuralist theories lead to a very different conceptualization of truth when compared with modernism. Instead of one objective and knowable truth that accurately describes reality, thinkers like Foucault hold that many truths coexist and seek to discover why one truth comes to dominate at a certain moment in time and space (McHoul and Grace, 1993). Ironically, the indeterminacy of language in poststructuralist analysis leads to the primacy of discourse.
Poststructuralism, then, turns to an examination of discourse as a social and political project occurring in a particular context. Discourse, however, is more than language. For Foucault, a discourse is like a discipline, widely defined as a system of knowledge. Discourses constrain and enable what can be thought or said about an event or object. Therefore, "truth becomes a function of what can be said, written, or thought" (McHoul and Grace, 1993, p. 33). Discourse does not just represent a particular object or event, it produces that object or event.

Power is implicated here, since, in the absence of an objective, knowable truth, people vie for the supremacy of the discourse which benefits them. Under the modernist model, we assume that the accurate idea or The Truth will prevail. However, according to poststructuralism, in the absence of an objective truth, efforts to assert the superiority of particular discourses are necessarily embedded in power relations.

The growing influence of poststructuralists has led to what has been dubbed the "linguistic turn," a growing emphasis on language in many disciplines. Related to, and in many ways emerging from, this new emphasis is the current explosion of social constructivist approaches in academia.

The Rise of Social Constructivist Approaches

The assertion that nature or ideas about nature are socially constructed is increasingly common in academic scholarship on natural resource and environmental issues, emerging simultaneously in disciplines as diverse as philosophy, anthropology, linguistics, sociology, history, and even physics. Constructivism is premised on the claim that a particular topic, idea or category is socially, culturally, and historically produced, as opposed to being an inevitable, inherent, "naturally" occurring, objective truth.

Vanderveest and DuPuis (1996) point out that different conceptions of nature can exist in the same culture and the same moment in time. They argue that "supporters of environmental and ruralist movements tend to understand nature as sacred and timeless, and somehow outside of
human society,” and that this view differs substantially from the perspective of people living in rural areas (p. 2). Bell (1998) describes these differences when two people look out on a scene, a scene of any kind, they are unlikely to appreciate it in just the same way. Faced with the same material circumstances, we each see something different. Where my brother Jon saw the beauty of wild nature in that view from Glacier Point, Steph's grandmother saw wasted resources. Such differences are a part of our individuality. They reflect social differences in the apparatus of understanding that we use to organize our experience. There are larger social and historical patterns in the distinctive mental apparatuses we each bring to bear on the world around us. In a word, there is ideology at work” (p. 145).

Despite looking at the same biophysical place, we “see” different natures.

Greider and Garkovich (1994) argue that particular “landscapes’ are the symbolic environments created by human acts of conferring meaning to nature and the environment, of giving the environment definition and form from a particular angle of vision and through a special filter of values and beliefs” (p. 1). These authors believe that the social construction of nature is intimately connected with individual and collective identity. In fact, they argue that landscape meanings reflect people’s sense of who they are and who they want to be. Therefore, landscapes are really about us, and not about nature.

Landscapes are created through the use of cultural symbols, according to Greider and Garkovich, which are used to bestow and convey meaning. These symbolic meanings are created and understood intersubjectively. The biophysical world is "meaningless," in that it has no inherent meaning. Greider and Garkovich contrast this viewpoint with the notion that cultural groups simply adapt to the biophysical features of a particular environment, which denies the intervening influence of culture.

One biophysical place, then, can have multiple landscapes. In this sense, particular places are contested, since competing or contradictory landscapes often exist for the same geographical location (Blaikie, 1995).
Social Construction Through Discourse

Blaikie (1995) argues that the transition to social constructionism involves moves from science to discourse, from numbers to narratives, and from facts to knowledge claims. Many scholars examine the ways in which social constructions are constituted through discourse and particular discursive strategies. For some, discourse analysis is the approach, the methodological tool to understand social constructions. Analyzing or unpacking particular social constructions or discourses is sometimes called deconstruction, since it involves decoding and taking apart constructions to understand where meanings came from and whose interests they serve.

Discourse, here, is much more than language, discussion, or rhetoric. Earlier I described Foucault’s definition of discourse as a body of knowledge, like a discipline, which determines what can and cannot be said. According to Hajer (1995), physics, a formal discipline, is a discourse, and radical environmentalism, an informal body of knowledge, is also a discourse. A discourse is a grouping of ideas, categories, and assumptions. Discourse is defined by Hajer as "a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorizations that are produced, reproduced, and transformed in a particular set of practices through which meaning is given physical and social realities" (p. 44). Blaikie (1995) argues that discourse includes language and practice. He defines discourse as "both speaking (involving symbols and meaning) and action (involving material transformation of society and environment)" (p. 207). Discourses are not necessarily coherent, but because they involve coalitions of meanings, reference to one element of a discourse invokes the whole (Hajer, 1995). Furthermore, these coalitions of meanings are connected to political agendas and particular material interests.

Environmental discourse analysis reveals the ways in which environmental problems are framed and defined, and helps us understand why different people have different ideas about environmental problems (Hajer, 1995). Hajer argues that "discourse analysis primarily aims to understand why a particular understanding of the environmental problem at some point gains dominance and is seen as authoritative, while other understandings are discredited" (p. 44).
Discourse analysis examines how certain meanings are connected to social coalitions and particular political interests.

How people assert the superiority of certain meanings or discourses is particularly important. Hannigan (1995) examines the nature of environmental claims, the claims-making process, and who is making the claims, suggesting that the key tasks involved in making an environmental claim, or "creating" an environmental problem include assembling, presenting, and contesting environment claims. Lange (1996) also explores the different ways that environmental conflicts, specifically the old growth/spotted owl debate in the Pacific Northwest, are socially constructed. He argues that "discursive practices inherently determine the 'social construction' of any environmental conflict. What humans say about the issues - even how the issues are defined - will determine interpretation, treatment and outcome of the public debate" (p. 135-136). Lange details the interactive logic of discursive strategies, illustrating how groups respond to each other without direct communication.

As articulated by the poststructuralists, people have unequal access to power and resources, and that affects which discourses become prominent, potentially influencing policy. According to Greider and Garkovich, "in the context of landscapes, power is the capacity to impose a specific definition of the physical environment, one that reflects the symbols and meanings of a particular group of people" (p. 18). Blaikie (1995) describes the "political economic arena in which various people pursue their 'projects' with very unequal access to power in which to pack their own particular knowledge claim and to enroll others into their own project" (p. 207). Greider and Garkovich also argue that the landscape that comes to dominate is the one constructed by the group with the most power, which is affected by the groups' "ability to define what constitutes information, the control of information, and the symbolic mobilization of support," all of which are part of impression management. Impression management occurs through all sorts of mediums including laws, stories, novels, art, movies, and, in particular, the
media. Discourse analysis, according to Hajer (1995), reveals how social power is exercised in these contexts.

The Limitations of Social Constructivism and the Importance of Material Interests

While poststructuralism and social constructivism have contributed in important ways to our current understanding of social conflicts, including natural resource conflicts, a strict or strong constructivist approach has significant limitations. According to Watts and Peet (1996),

There are, in our view, grave limitations associated with a strong social constructivist position, that is the position that nature is 'constructed' not only in the sense of being 'known' through socially conditioned minds, but also 'historically produced' by discourse and knowledge. Its idealist tendencies - the notion that ideas exist first and reality, even nature, is their materialization - and its failure to recognize that not everything is socially produced (certainly not socially produced to the same degree) are deeply problematic. (p. 262)

Our social constructions are not just abstractions which float around in individuals' minds and in the social collective; they manifest in the material world. The term material refers here to aspects of the biophysical and economic worlds – everything from specific natural resources to the biological impacts of human activities, and from livelihood and household economics to the effects of pollution on human health. As Vandergeest and DuPuis (1996) point out, “the meanings of these concepts are more than just points of view because people act on their understanding of key concepts like rural, nature, and wilderness. In many cases they do so by trying to create, in the landscape, the concepts they imagine, talk about, and write about” (p. 1). This means that ideas cannot be separated from the material world, and that struggles and conflicts over constructions are also about material resources and environmental impacts. Ideas and meanings result in policies and management practices that have material consequences for humans and nature. For example, constructions of nature as a warehouse of goods to drive the American economy may lead to exploitation of oil reserves in sensitive environments. Strict or strong social construction not only shifts the focus away from the material reality of environmental degradation and human suffering, but seems to imply that humans can transcend
the biological world altogether, that they have no material needs, nor any material impacts (Murphy, 1999).

In addition to overlooking or denying the biophysical, material world, extreme social construction implies that, since there is no correct or more correct interpretation of the world, everything is a social construction. Many scholars and activists fear this “dangerous flirtation with relativism” (Proctor, 1998, p. 352). If everything is socially constructed and we have no access to an independent reality, and therefore no way to judge the accuracy of particular constructions, all knowledge claims or constructions are equally valid. However, in the face of injustice, inequality, and oppression, different claims need to be evaluated based on moral or ethical criteria. Policy-making requires passing judgement on different constructions and deciding which claims will be legitimated.

Because of the significant limitations of strict or strong constructivism, I adopt a constrained or moderate social constructivist (also called realist-constructivist) approach in this dissertation. I acknowledge that discourse and meaning influence the way that environmental conflicts are defined and framed. I also recognize that biophysical reality exists, that material differences and inequity represent real differences in power and resources and not just social constructions, and that ecological constraints are present and environmental degradation affects different species and ecological processes.

Many different studies demonstrate the ways that natural resource struggles are both material and discursive, and integrate social construction approaches into broader approaches. Peters (1984) illustrates how struggles over water in Botswana are as much struggles over meaning as struggles over physical resources. She suggests that all struggles over material resources involve struggles over meaning and ideology, through which people define and frame the issue and interpret particular events. Fortmann (1995) describes the "deliberate discursive strategies of both commercial farmers and villagers to articulate and assert the basis and legitimacy of their own claims to the commercial farm land and its resources" at her study site in
Zimbabwe (p. 1054). These discursive strategies often took the form of stories, which were used by villagers, elites, and the state to create meaning, mobilize action, and outline options. It was through these stories that people socially constructed claims to particular resources.

**Contributions and Limitations of Poststructuralism**

In summary, poststructuralism has contributed an important understanding of the arbitrary relationship between language, meaning, and reality, and they ways in which events, ideas, and categories are culturally, temporally, and spatially situated. In particular, poststructuralism emphasizes the importance of discourse. Discourse is more than language or rhetoric; Discourse is a body of knowledge, a coalition of meanings or grouping of ideas, that both constrains and enables how people speak, think, and act on a particular topic. There are competing discourses and people vie for the supremacy of the discourse that benefits them. Struggles over discourse are political struggles embedded in power relations.

If events, ideas, and categories are culturally, temporally, and spatially situated, then nature and environmental issues are socially constructed. There are different conceptions of nature, and different ways of defining and framing environmental issues. Landscapes are not just physical entities, they are symbolically constituted and imbued with meaning through social processes. People make claims about environmental issues as part of discursive strategies that are necessarily political.

While social constructivism has helped to locate, culturally and historically, particular events and categories, extreme constructivism is problematic because it denies biophysical reality (including material resources, constraints, and interests) and tends towards relativism (if everything is socially constructed, no one action or policy is better than another). I reject these tendencies, and adopt a constrained or moderate social constructivist approach, emphasizing the symbolic meaning of landscapes and the importance of discourse, but embracing material reality and interests, and the need for judgments in the policy arena. In short, I conceptualize contests
over natural resource issues and particular places as both discursive (struggles over meaning, values, and beliefs) and material (struggles over material resources embedded in power relations).

**Toward a Politics of Place**

The study of place has tremendous potential to inform natural resource policy and management. However, place research needs to be attentive to both shared meanings and political difference. Furthermore, discourse about place needs to be viewed as the intersection of meaning and material interest. A politics of place approach acknowledges the political nature of natural resource management.

**The Political Nature of Natural Resource Management**

Natural resource management and policy are by nature contentious and political. Recent natural resource management efforts have emphasized collaborative planning, processes that focus on civility, dialogue, and building common ground (Wondeleck and Yaffee, 2000). While these processes have potential to produce meaningful public involvement, innovative solutions to difficult environmental issues, and enduring management plans, conflict in the natural resources arena remains. In 1986, Allen and Gould predicted that natural resource management decisions would become increasingly wicked and complex. Natural resource issues continue to be contentious, and improved scientific understandings do not eliminate important differences in people’s perspectives on environmental issues. These differences mean that natural resource issues are often hotly contested, making environmental policy and management, in a word, political. Rapid social, economic, and demographic change in many rural areas means increasing diversity among natural resource users and local communities. Meanwhile, the growing emphasis on ecosystem management requires that public land managers work with private landowners and multiple stakeholder groups.

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The ongoing political tumult of natural resource issues is evident in recent controversies over the spotted owl in the Pacific Northwest and fire in the Northern Rockies. Disputes over the North Woods in Maine and the Headwaters Forest in Northern California indicate that forest politics are not limited to public lands. While ignoring the political dimension of these issues might be tempting, politics cannot be disconnected from natural resource management.

According to Cortner and Moote (1999),

Just as the biophysical world is the basic component of natural resources, politics is the "stuff" of people interacting with each other, their environment, and government institutions, all of which affect nature greatly. Resource management is, at heart, a very political process. All too often in the past we have tended to separate politics and resource management. (p. 1)

Moving from contentious debate to effective policy and management requires understanding the complex, and often political, relationships that people have with particular areas. The study of place has the potential to provide this understanding.

The Study of Place

The study of place has become important in a number of fields, including anthropology, geography, sociology, environmental psychology, and natural resource management, and builds on social constructivism and the emerging emphasis on discourse. Place is geographic space with particular meanings to particular people. Williams and Stewart (1998) define sense of place as "the collection of meanings, beliefs, symbols, values, and feelings that individuals and groups associate with a particular locality" (p.19). Place meanings and the study of place fit within the larger paradigm of social constructionism. Place is created through the use of cultural symbols that bestow and convey meaning (Greider and Garkovich, 1994). Interactions between individuals result in social understandings of place. These social meanings define and frame environmental issues and biophysical locations. The meanings of a particular place, or place meanings, are conveyed and created through discourse.
In the natural resources arena, attention to place is motivated by a desire to replace mechanistic, reductionist, commodity-oriented social science with more holistic, integrated social assessments (Williams and Stewart, 1998). Place research responds to the problematic nature of previous natural resource policies, revealed in conflicts like the spotted owl crisis in the Pacific Northwest. In the case of the spotted owl, the conflict was most often characterized as a collision between conservation and livelihood, represented in the slogan jobs versus owls. Livelihood was seen as the domain of the local community while conservation existed elsewhere, presumably in urban centers. This characterization of the conflict reduced a complex social landscape to a dualistic, commodity-oriented disagreement. However, researchers who examined the relationship between rural people and the place they lived found different dynamics at play. In southern Oregon, for example, low income residents saw the spotted owl as a symbol of the changes brought by newcomers who had different values and customs (Brown, 1995). Loss of jobs was important, in part, in the context of reduced access to fishing, hunting, and berry picking on private lands. For these people, the spotted owl had less to do with the actual biological conservation of the forest and more to do with social and material changes taking place in their communities. The ability of environmentalists to enforce different values through federal land management policies was emblematic of newcomers' increasing control over the future of this particular place. Carroll (1995) also found that the spotted owl controversy was, in part, a cultural battle. He points out that policy initiatives focusing on retraining and relocation failed to account for the ways in which workers were attached to particular places. Conceptualizing the debate over spotted owls in terms of jobs versus the environment limited our analysis of forest policy, and resulted in a failure to understand the nature of the conflict and the impacts of policy changes on rural communities.

A focus on place moves natural resource policy and management beyond the narrow confines of economic research by acknowledging the multiple relationships people have with geographic locations, relationships that encompass livelihood and economics, and values,
symbols, emotions, history, and identity. Place research also encourages forest planning that is site specific and attends to local social and ecological contexts.

Momentum around place-based approaches to natural resource management is growing and specific benefits have been postulated, including more efficient planning, ability to build on common ground, reduced conflict and litigation, and more enduring management plans. Place research is increasingly cited as an important component of ecosystem management (Eisenhauer, Krannich, and Blahna, 2000; Schroeder, 1996; Williams and Stewart, 1998; Williams, 1995). Many place studies explicitly link place meanings with management actions people want to see pursued in particular areas (see Schroeder, 1996; Brandenburg and Carroll, 1995). Brandenburg and Carroll (1995) claim that place research can assist public land managers in understanding different stakeholders, and reveal voices and perspectives that are missed during traditional public participation. Research on sense of place might also illuminate areas of potential common ground that were not previously obvious (Galliano and Loeffler, 1999). And, knowledge of the meanings of particular places may help managers to understand why specific proposals are contentious and when conflict might emerge (Greider and Garkovich, 1994; Williams and Stewart, 1998). All of this is believed to lead to more effective, more enduring land management that is "both ecologically sound and socially acceptable" (Brandenburg and Carroll, 1995, p. 382). The recent development of Forest Service planning protocols for sense of place indicate increasing interest on the part of managers in utilizing place meanings in National Forest planning.

Place research, like collaborative planning, promises to reduce conflict and move natural resource management beyond potential political impasses. However, to do so, place research must incorporate and illuminate natural resource politics. Realizing the potential of place, then, means conceptualizing place in terms of both common ground and political difference.
The Politics of Place

Place research encompasses a variety of focus areas, including how environmental meanings are created through social actions (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997), how attachments to localities contribute to identity formation (Tuan, 1993; Williams and Carr, 1993; Low and Altman, 1992), the relationship between sense of place and environmental values (Norton and Hannon, 1997), and how cultural symbols are connected to landscape meanings (Feld and Basso, 1996). Researchers have also examined the role of place meanings in policy-making (Vandergeest and DuPuis, 1996) and the implication of power, politics, and class in the place-making process (Soja, 1989; Shields, 1992; Harvey, 1996).

Despite growing interest in this field of study, researchers are not unified in their approach to or definition of place. Some place researchers are overtly attentive to politics, difference, and material interests, while others focus exclusively on shared meanings and commonalities. These divergences, described below, reflect different theoretical orientations and mirror broader trends across natural resource and environmental social science (see Belsky, 2002).

In 1990, Kemmis used the phrase "politics of place" to describe the ways in which politics were situated in a particular landscape and influenced by that locality. Moore (1998) later defined "politics of place" as the process through which "particular territories are imbued with meanings, shaped by cultural practices, and reworked in the rough-and-tumble of rural politics" (p. 349). Place studies in anthropology, sociology, political science, and geography often explicitly examine the political nature of place meanings. Many researchers in these fields conceptualize place as contested terrain and focus on the politics of meaning (see Feld and Basso, 1996; Gupta and Ferguson, 1997; Soja, 1989; Harvey, 1996; Vandergeest and DuPuis, 1996). According to Blaikie (1995), "landscapes and environments are perceived and interpreted from many different and conflicting points of view which reflect the particular experience, culture, and values of the viewer" (p 203). Again, these views can be linked to broader constellations of
meanings or discourses. Discourses involving particular places and place meanings are dynamic, continually created and actively contested, and not necessarily compatible. Sense of place and place meanings are thus political, based as much on difference as commonality.

In the natural resource arena, Williams and Stewart (1998) agree, arguing that landscapes have multiple meanings and that place meanings are politically contested. However, place research in this field often focuses on shared sense of place, common ground, and “likeness,” sometimes ignoring important differences and the ways in which place itself is contested. For example, leading research on place attachment, often cited in the natural resources literature, defines place in terms of shared meanings and symbols that are common to different people in a particular cultural group (see Low, 1992). And, according to Galliano and Loeffler (1999), “people frequently share a communal interpretation of place” (p. 6). While many researchers acknowledge that there may be winners and losers and that understanding sense of place cannot resolve conflict (Schroeder, 1996; Galliano and Loeffler, 1999), much of the natural resources scholarship on place shares an optimism that place research can provide a common ground that transcends conflicting interests. Where different interests are acknowledged, they are often regarded as points of interest rather than sources of conflict. This focus on commonalities presumes that “likeness” or shared meanings are the salient characteristic of place.

However, understanding the multiple meanings of place and how place is contested is important to natural resource management because place meanings are often connected to ideas about what is and is not legitimate use. In other words, a person’s sense of place is related to expectations or desires for that location, or what they believe is appropriate for that area. As described earlier, people attempt to enact their meanings in the physical landscape, often through policy change. Cantrill (1998) argues that senses of place "are quite powerful in the generation of responses to environmental policies" (p. 303). Place meanings, then, are more than values, ideas, and images; people’s understandings of place are transformed into actions (Harvey, 1996;
Shields, 1992). As actions or policies, place meanings affect people’s livelihoods, actual natural resource use and management, and local ecology.

For example, when people describe an area as a *timber town* or an *old growth forest*, their statements may reflect what they believe a particular place *should* be like, implying that certain activities, such as timber harvest, are or are not appropriate. These statements are part of discourses that convey place meanings and ideas about what is "right" or "desirable" for a particular landscape. Ideas about which management actions are appropriate inform positions on policy and management proposals. Policy and management, in turn, impact economics and ecology.

Understanding sense of place as the intersection of both common ground and contested meanings complicates the application of place research in natural resource policy and management. If place is simply about shared meanings and common ground, research can easily be integrated into decision-making, provided it complements biophysical science and economic constraints. Place researchers who focus primarily on commonalities argue that we should manage forest environments for sense of place (see Galliano and Loeffler, 1999). But, in the context of multiple and conflicting landscape meanings, there are many senses of place, leaving managers and policy-makers in the difficult position of having to choose or privilege one sense of place over another. If place meanings are assumed to be shared and institutionalized into policy and management, decision-makers could be unexpectedly broadsided by increased conflict and public opposition. These challenges point to the need for place research that incorporates shared and contested meanings, embraces the political nature of discourse, and recognizes the connections between meaning and material interests.

**Politicizing Place**

The study of place builds on social constructivism and discourse analysis. Sense of place incorporates the meanings, history, memory, values, beliefs, feelings, and sense of identity that
people associate with particular biophysical locations. Sense of place research in natural resource management responds to an overly mechanistic, commodity-oriented model of decision-making by reintegrating social and symbolic aspects of people’s relationships with the places where they live and play. Researchers conducting place studies in the natural resource and public land management arena hope to inform and improve policy and management through better understandings of people’s relationships with particular localities. The applied orientation of this research is one of its key strengths.

Too often, however, place researchers assume that people hold shared meanings and that understanding these meanings can reveal common ground. These researchers tend to ignore differences, power relations, and material interests. But natural resource management and policy are political. Natural resource issues are hotly contested at the local and national levels, and connected to livelihood, environmental degradation, and power differences. Researchers and managers who ignore politics in favor of consensus and overemphasize values while ignoring politics are simply replacing one narrowly focused model (mechanistic, commodity oriented planning) with another (planning only according to values, beliefs, and attitudes).

In this dissertation, I conceptualize place as the intersection of common ground and political difference. Multiple meanings almost always exist for a particular place. Therefore, people hold both shared and conflicting meanings. Different groups of people promote a particular discourse, or coalition of meanings, about a landscape that will benefit them. Discourse, as described earlier, is not just about values and beliefs. Discursive struggles are political because meaning is linked to material interests and political agendas. This is why sense of place research cannot always transcend conflicting interests – symbolic struggles over place are inextricably connected to material struggles over access, use, and control of resources. That said, place research can inform policy and management, although better understandings may not always resolve conflict or illuminate common ground.
Political Ecology as Research Framework

In the following section, I describe political ecology, a research framework that guided much of the research in this dissertation. Political ecology is consistent with a realist-constructivist approach, and explicitly integrates the discursive and material components of natural resource issues. Below I outline the evolution of political ecology, how poststructuralism has informed recent political ecological approaches, and the limitations of political ecology.

The Evolution of Political Ecology

Political ecology emerged from cultural ecology and political economy in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Grossman, 1998; Greenberg and Park, 1994; Bryant, 1998). In the 1960s and 1970s cultural ecology explored how human societies adapt to their environments, with particular attention to resource use. The goal of cultural ecology was to explain how cultural practices evolved in specific ecosystems, focusing on local adaptation and knowledge (Greenberg and Park, 1994). Critics of cultural ecology sought to connect human behavior with larger political economic structures and class analysis, which they believed had impacts on land use practices at the local level. Political economy, informed by neomarxist theory, explored the unequal distribution of power and resources in societies (Grossman, 1998). Political ecology, which brought cultural ecology and political economy together, was also informed by Vayda’s (1983) “progressive contextualization,” which suggested that scholars needed to link levels of analysis within a broad range of political and economic structures, from the household and community, to the regional, state, and international arenas. Put simply, political ecology sought to work at multiple scales, politicize the study of human-environment relations, and integrate ecology into social analyses.

While studies that would later be classified as political ecology predate Blaikie and Brookfield (1987), earlier work served as an important early articulation of the first phase of this framework, political economy. Blaikie (1985) describes political economy as place-based and
location-specific, but also concerned with "non-place-based or non-location specific economic, social, and political relations" (p. 81). Political economy is described as a "bottom up" approach in which research begins with land users in a specific area and moves up to local governments and agencies, the nation state, and the international arena (Blaikie, 1985). Political economy starts with questions about individual or household land use practices, but explanations are usually located in larger political economic structures (Blaikie, 1985; Hershkovitz, 1993). In its early forms, regional political ecology involves chains of explanation that link land managers with the state and global economic forces (Blaikie and Brookfield, 1987). Early political ecologists wanted to understand how the practices of land users were influenced by political and economic processes, and how conflicts over resource access and control were embedded in larger structures.

In 1987, Blaikie and Brookfield produced a compelling critique of the two predominant explanations for environmental degradation in the Third World. First, they refuted neomalthusian theories that argued overpopulation was to blame for problems like soil erosion. Second, their research helped to dismantle the notion that land users were ignorant and could not adapt to changing circumstances. Instead, they argued that poverty was a cause of environmental degradation, and that political-economic structures were implicated.

Political ecological work has focused almost entirely on non-Western cultures in Third World countries (Grossman, 1998; Bryant, 1998; Hershkovitz, 1993). Researchers are primarily geographers, but also include anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, ecological economists, and historians (Peet and Watts, 1996; Blaikie, 1999, Escobar, 1999). The political ecology framework described above has been taken in many different directions by different scholars. In 1999, Blaikie opened an article on political ecology by asking: "Political Ecology: All Things to All People?" He wondered if political ecology had become a bandwagon for academic hitchhikers. In fact, Blaikie argues that there is so much overlap with other fields that work done under political ecology could also be called environmental sociology, environmental
anthropology or political science of the environment. He concludes, however, that there is exciting work being done under the banner of political ecology, and is not particularly dismayed that political ecology lacks a more specific focus or definition. Other scholars have reached similar conclusions and argued that further definition of political ecology would be “ill-advised” (Greenberg and Park, 1994).

A Poststructuralist Political Ecology

Political ecology is currently enjoying a renaissance (Escobar, 1999). The most recent wave of political ecology is more explicitly informed by social theory, in particular poststructuralist ideas and discourse theory. Political ecology still assumes that environment and politics are connected (Bryant, 1998). However, poststructuralist political ecology emphasizes “politics rather than economics, alternative accounts of reality rather than the author’s own environmental and social data, and agency and resistance rather than structural inequity” (Blaikie, 1999, p. 135). This new direction, in part, responds to the underlying changes in social theory described earlier.

Poststructuralist political ecology specifically seeks to incorporate the ways in which natural resource conflicts are socially constructed (Blaikie, 1999; Grossman, 1998). However, most poststructural political ecologists urge a balanced position that integrates constructivist and realist positions (Escobar, 1999); Watts and Peet (1996) specifically caution against strong social constructionism, and Blaikie (1999) suggests avoiding relativism by adopting a weak social constructionist approach in which “provisional truths may be shared for a while with the actors involved” (p. 144). He argues that this position will allow political ecology to outline specific alternatives for the future.

Post and Watts (1996) argue that poststructuralist concerns call for a “more robust political ecology which integrates politics more centrally, draws upon aspects of discourse theory which demand that the politics of meaning and the construction of knowledge be taken seriously”
Escobar (1999) suggests that poststructuralist political ecology attend to the discursive, material, social, and cultural aspects of human and environment relations. This will allow political ecology to address the ways that issues of resource access, use, and control are embedded in cultural categories and framed and contested at multiple levels (Peet and Watts, 1996).

Moore (1993) describes poststructuralist political ecology as envisioning material and discursive struggles as mutually constitutive. Discourse is not merely a reflection of material struggles; symbolic struggles are material struggles, struggles over power and resources. Moore advocates a critical engagement of cultural interpretations and political economy. He argues that state policies influence social constructions, ideology mobilizes resistance, and demarcation of property boundaries affects meaning. In short, natural resource conflicts are seen as simultaneously symbolic and material.

Moore (1997) also provides an excellent model of how to integrate poststructuralist political ecology with place, true to the bottom-up approach of political ecology and attentive to the insights of recent place studies. He argues that we need to examine the "historical processes through which landscapes are materially and symbolically contested" and that "rather than conceiving of localities as inert, fixed backdrops for identity struggles, we need to see them as products of these contestations" (Moore, 1993, p. 396 & 397). Moore specifically focuses on how contests over place, what he calls the politics of place, are discursively and materially constituted.

According to Blaikie (1999), "one of the great merits of the turn to discourse, broadly understood, within political ecology, is the demand it makes for a nuanced, richly textured empirical work (a sort of political-ecological thick description) which matches the nuanced beliefs and practices of the world" (p. 141). This sort of nuanced account can incorporate the micropolitics of local communities and differentiate between land users on a number of levels.
Political ecology retains its focus on inequality under the influence of poststructuralism. How knowledge claims come to be privileged and how this may reinforce inequality are now part of the analysis (Bryant, 1998). Power is examined at multiple levels, including structures like the state and global economic institutions, as well as everyday relations. This includes attention to how particular constructions are legitimated and institutionalized and how that process affects material struggles.

Poststructuralist political ecology incorporates the lessons from poststructuralism, but does not make the mistake of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Political ecologists take a realist-constructivist position, retain reason and other insights from modernity, continue to incorporate political economy, and attend to injustice and inequity.

The Limitations of Political Ecology

Political ecology has some important limitations that merit brief mention here. As described earlier, political ecology is a broad and somewhat vague framework for examining specific natural resource issues. It is a general approach, not a specific model or theory which can be “tested” in the field. The broad nature of political ecology provides flexibility for researchers, but not specific guidance on research questions, design, and interpretation of data.

Whether political ecology, poststructuralist or not, is applicable in a non-Third World context is an open question. Political ecology often assumes poor, politically marginalized land users. How this model can be applied in a Western setting where land users are not as obviously marginalized and where public lands are also a factor is a question for future research.

Finally, while political ecology implies the incorporation of ecology into research, few, if any political ecologists lay transects or collect ecological data in any manner. Studies sometimes incorporate ecological research. More often, political ecology simply acknowledges biological constraints and impacts and the potential results of different natural resource policy and
management alternatives. Political ecology likely requires more in depth integration of ecological research in order to truly address material concerns.

An Adapted Political Ecology

Political ecology provides a research framework to examine conflicts over the access, use, and control of natural resources. Political ecology focuses on land users, owners, and managers situated in a particular geographic location. Conflicts over resource use, however, are not conceptualized as entirely local, and are seen as determined by and interacting with political and economic forces at multiple scales, regional, national, and international.

Poststructuralist political ecology envisions struggles over natural resources as both discursive and material. Contests over land, resources, money, and power are inextricably linked to contests over meaning, image, and discourse. Natural resource conflicts, then, have biological, economic, and ideological components that are mutually reinforcing and inseparable.

Political ecology has primarily been applied in a Third World context, where land users are usually politically marginalized and economically disadvantaged, and there are clear power imbalances which can be identified and, for the most part, agreed upon. Political ecology may or may not apply to a United States context, where landowners have power in some arenas and not others, and may struggle financially, but can sell land for large sums of money. In the context of this research, I suggest that different groups of people have different kinds of power and exert that power in different arenas, economic and political.

A Postructuralist Political Ecology of Place

The interrogation of the politics of cross-boundary conservation I present in this dissertation required combining aspects of poststructuralism, place, and political ecology. Forging new research frameworks through combining the strengths of different theories relative to a particular research question is certainly not new in academia. For each of the three theories
reviewed here I reject or question certain elements, including extreme relativism, extreme social 
constructivism, and the apolitical nature of some place research. I selectively accept other 
elements of these theories based on my own ontological and epistemological assumptions and 
what makes sense in the context of the research question. Below I outline the primary elements 
of the research framework I utilize for this dissertation.

A poststructuralist political ecology of place:

**Situates Research in a Particular Place** – Cross-boundary conservation can only be 
understood in the context of a particular place. A bottom-up focus on a specific 
community and landscape allows research results to be embedded in a particular social 
and biological context. This is consistent with the situated nature of social phenomena. 
(From place, political ecology, and poststructuralism)

**Links Multiple Scales** – Cross-boundary conservation is situated in a particular place, 
but is affected by and interacts with multiple scales. Broader political and economic 
forces affect land management and natural resource struggles at the local level. Not only 
does local context need to be examined, external trends in national policy-making, 
international trade, and rural economic transitions, also need to be understood. These 
trends affect the discourse and politics of natural resource use, and local actors both resist 
and use external forces to further their interests. (From political ecology)

**Focuses on Land Owners and Managers** – Cross-boundary conservation depends on 
the ideas and actions of landowners and managers. Understanding the decisions of land 
users, owners, and managers in particular is essential to investigations of natural resource 
access, use, and control. In this dissertation, I focus on ranchers, newcomer landowners, 
and public land managers. (From political ecology)

**Examines Discourse** – Understanding cross-boundary conservation requires knowledge 
of the multiple meanings of place and how different discourses affect cooperation 
between different actors. Landscapes and natural resource issues have multiple and 
contested meanings, and are, in part, socially constructed. Different ideas about places 
are expressed through discourse, or coalitions of meaning. (From poststructuralism and 
place)

**Incorporates Material Interests** – Cross-boundary conservation involves both 
discursive struggles and material interests. Natural resource conflicts are not just 
discursive; they are also material. Material contests - struggles over livelihood, power, 
and resources – cannot be overlooked in an examination of a specific natural resource 
issue. Discourse, and the assertion of particular coalitions of meanings, is linked to 
made interests – people’s desires to preserve livelihood, species, and political power. 
(From political ecology)

**Integrates Politics** – Cross-boundary conservation must be understood as necessarily 
political. Important differences, based on class, gender, race, and power, exist at multiple 
scales and influence struggles over natural resources. Politics and power relations occur
at the micro level, in people's day to day interactions and relationships, and at the macro level, through state actions and national level policy making. Multiple actors and positions in the natural resources arena mean that some conflicts are intractable. Meaning is linked to politics because discourse is a political project. Certain knowledge claims are privileged through the promotion of particular coalitions of meaning. Particular claims and discourses benefit certain interests. (From political ecology and poststructuralism)

**Informs Policy and Management** – Research on the social conflicts and processes that make up natural resource issues should connect to policy and management in some way. I link knowledge of the politics of cross-boundary conservation to policy and decision-making in the final chapter of this dissertation. (From place)

Based on this research framework, I envision cross-boundary conservation on the Rocky Mountain Front as a material and discursive political struggle over how this landscape will be managed in the future, a struggle occurring at multiple scales. This research framework has been specifically designed for an examination of cross-boundary conservation. Other research questions and topics will require different theoretical frameworks.

**How this Framework Guides this Dissertation Research**

In this concluding section, I link my research framework or approach to the specific research activities that were part of this dissertation. In other words, I show how these different bodies of theory guided my choice of research questions, my research design, and my interpretation of the data. It is important to note that poststructuralist political ecology of place provides a general framework for inquiry into particular natural resource and environmental conflicts. It does not postulate specific findings or point to hypotheses that can be tested through research. Rather, it points to potential avenues of inquiry and alerts the researcher to be aware of specific connections, such as connections between discourse and material interests, between multiple scales, and between politics and meaning.

As described above, the research framework I utilize in this dissertation might be termed a poststructuralist political ecology of place. It is a poststructuralist place approach because I pay close attention to meaning and discourse. I view the struggle over the future of the Rocky
Mountain Front and the possibilities for cross-boundary landscape conservation as a struggle that is, in part, socially constructed, with different meanings for different people. As such, language is particularly important. Utilizing interview data, participant observations, and written materials, I analyzed the meanings people assigned to the particular items. For example, throughout the dissertation, I examine the meaning of place, property, and boundaries. I look closely at how these meanings are connected, and where there is sufficient evidence of constellations of meanings I point out particular discourses. These discourses are stories, told again and again to assert particular claims to resources and decision-making power. I demonstrate how these discourses are connected to ideas about legitimate use, political agendas, and, at times, specific policy goals. I also illustrate how the prominent discourses are linked to material interests, such as rancher livelihood or endangered species protection.

While discourse is a particularly important component of this dissertation, I also incorporate material change and material interests, in keeping with the realist-constructivist and political ecology approaches I embrace. Therefore, the struggle over how natural resources will be managed on the Rocky Mountain Front is both discursive and material. Conflicts over the future of the area are simultaneously constituted through discourse and material struggle, and the two are inseparable. Throughout the dissertation, I make explicit connections between meaning and economics, livelihood, biology, and natural resource use. For example, the livelihood struggles of ranchers are not examined simply as the way ranchers feel or think about the economic and land use changes taking place around them - these struggles are also regarded as real, material issues, with tangible, physical consequences for individuals and families. When different kinds of cross-boundary natural resource issues are described, I regard them as insights into the meaning of boundaries and the on-the-ground management of natural resources. I view the differences between new large landowners and ranchers as cultural and economic.

Data on material interests and material change emerge from several sources in this dissertation. First, what people say during interviews and in other forums provided a window
into the material components of this struggle. Second, historical, census, GIS, and other existing
data allowed for qualitative and quantitative information to be paired with people’s perspectives
on material change. For example, I used existing data to illustrate land ownership change, and
employment and income trends. It is important to note, however, that while I incorporated
information on material change and material interests, this dissertation is not an economic or
ecological study.

From political ecology I also drew an emphasis on multiple scales. In keeping with the
political ecology approach, this research is bottom-up and place-based, grounded in a particular
location and particular human communities. However, I realize that policy, discourse, and
economic trends from outside of the study site have an important impact on land use and
ownership, and natural resource management at the local level. For instance, the price of beef
affects rancher livelihood and the transfer of properties to nonranchers. The Endangered Species
Act impacts wolf management in the area, and rancher attitudes toward the federal government in
general. Nonlocal factors also affect how residents think about and talk about place, property,
and boundaries. At the same time, local actors may affect state and national policy, and influence
nonresident images of the area. There is an important dialogue taking place between different
levels of decision-making and discourse creation. To better understand local interactions with
nonlocal forces, I interviewed people at the regional and national level involved in advocacy,
policy-making, or discourse production related to the study site in some way. I also encouraged
residents to discuss these connections during interviews. And, I examined written sources of
information, such as regional and national newspapers, and national ranching and environmental
group publications.

At this point, a road map for what follows should assist the reader in making connections
between the theoretical framework outlined in this chapter and the results reported in this
dissertation. In Chapter 4 I provide I detailed outline of the methods I utilized to understand
discourse and material interests at multiple scales. In Chapter 5, I evaluate the dynamics of rural
restructuring in the study site, examining data on material change, such as demographics, land ownership, and economic trends. In Chapter 6, I analyze the multiple meanings of place that different people hold for the area, and how different discourses are connected to material change and political goals. In Chapter 7, I evaluate changes in community and neighbor relations emerging from a transition of landownership from ranchers to newcomers. In Chapter 8, I examine different concepts of public and private property held by ranchers, newcomers, and environmentalists, with a focus on private rights and public goods and how those are negotiated by landowners and policy-makers. In Chapter 9, I demonstrate how concepts of and practices around property boundaries reveal differences in social norms and conflicts over management across ownerships. In Chapter 10, I investigate public land manager, rancher, and environmentalist perspectives on collaboration, with a focus on the grassbank and weed work of a newly emerged private lands collaboration. In Chapter 11, I summarize my research findings and provide a series of policy and management recommendations for more effective cross-boundary conservation.
Chapter 4: Research Methods and Methodology

Introduction

A political ecological approach to the study of cross-boundary conservation and natural resource politics on the Rocky Mountain Front required understanding both discourse and symbolic meaning and material interests, such as livelihood and land ownership, and how the two are interrelated at multiple scales. This demanded a research approach that combined different methods for accessing and analyzing the different aspects of people’s relationship with this landscape.

Understanding discourse and the symbolic meaning of the Rocky Mountain Front required an interpretive approach. Natural resource scholars are increasingly utilizing an interactionist or interpretive approach to understanding the different ways people view landscapes, how they frame natural resource conflicts, and the discursive strategies utilized in political struggles over these landscapes (Blakie, 1995; Grieder and Garkovich, 1994; Peet and Watts, 1996). An interpretive approach involves qualitative methods that open a window into the depth and complexity of the meanings people associate with a particular place. Qualitative methods are especially effective for revealing different positions and discourses involved in divisive ecological issues on which there are multiple points of view and no agreed upon solutions. The qualitative methods utilized in this project included participant observation, in-depth interviews, and observation of two community groups.

Interpretive methods also provided a window into material interests, in particular how livelihood and economic policy connected to place-meanings and on the ground cross-boundary efforts. Focusing interviews on a broad range of topics of interest to residents revealed connections between the discursive and material aspects of their relationship with place. Survey data, GIS, and socioeconomic information provided quantitative measures of changes in income,
land ownership and land prices. Combining different data sources created a well-rounded picture of natural resource struggles, livelihood and class, and land ownership and control.

The different methods utilized in this study are described in detail below. However, methods concern much more than specific techniques for collecting and analyzing data. They involve assumptions about the acquisition of knowledge and the nature of reality. Thus, the methods employed in this study emerge in part from the poststructuralist political ecology framework described in the last chapter. The methods I chose were also influenced by grounded theory, feminist methods, and participatory research. In this chapter, I provide detail about how I gathered and analyzed data, as well as why I chose to employ particular methods and the strengths and weaknesses of each.

The Rocky Mountain Front as a Case Study

The Case Study Method and the Question of Generalizability

This project is a case study about the area known as the Rocky Mountain Front in North Central Montana. The case study method allows the researcher to investigate particular sociopolitical processes in depth and detail, illuminating complexities, contradictions, and nuances. Case studies are situated and understood within a particular geographic, social, and historical context. The case study is a place-based approach and is thus consistent with the political ecology framework.

While the case study approach cannot claim generalizability in the traditional statistical sense, case study research both informs and reforms social theory, and educates us about society as a whole. Burawoy (1991) argues that “the extended case study method derives generalizations by constituting the social situation as anomalous with regard to some preexisting theory (that is, an existing body of generalizations), which is then reconstructed” (p. 280). Instead of universal explanations, the case study provides “explanations of particular outcomes” (p.280), which serve to reconstruct social theory. According to Belsky (in review), “the significance of the case relates
to what it tells us about the world in which it is embedded, about society as a whole rather than
just about the population of similar cases (as is presumed with statistical significance tests)." Case
studies, then, retain context while informing broader social theories and our understanding of
broader social and political processes.

While this research is embedded in the context of the Rocky Mountain Front in Montana,
there are important similarities between the Rocky Mountain Front and other areas. Many of the
social and political processes discussed in the next few chapters exist elsewhere, influencing land
use and ownership, community social dynamics, and policy processes. For example, in valley
bottom areas throughout the Intermountain West land use and ownership are moving away from
family ranching and toward rural subdivision and wealthy second home buyers. In Western
Montana this transition is occurring in virtually every mountainous valley. The restructuring of
the countryside through processes of urban flight, and dramatic transitions in land use and
ownership, community social dynamics, and local economies is also a significant and well-
studied trend in rural areas in Northern European countries (Ilbery, 1998). Recent “countryside”
protests in Britain highlight the difficulties and conflicts that accompany rural restructuring
(BBC, 9/2002).

Additional similarities between the Rocky Mountain Front and other areas exist.
Ranchers throughout the American West struggle with the economic challenges of raising cattle.
Rural communities in the U.S. and internationally push for increased self-determination and deal
with the challenges of policies often designed by a largely urban population. Environmentalists
focus on key landscapes the world over, employing similar approaches to biodiversity and
protected area management. Different ideas about property affect their efforts to move beyond
the traditional focus on parks and protected areas. While the exact conditions present on the
Rocky Mountain Front at the time of this study are unlikely to exist elsewhere, many
characteristics of the study site are present in some combination in other areas and significant
comparisons are possible.
**Defining the Study Site**

I chose specific boundaries for the study site for practical purposes and to help focus this research. For the purposes of this study the Rocky Mountain Front was defined as the area in North Central Montana east of the continental divide, west of highways 89 and 287, north of highway 200, and south of Birch Creek (see Figure 4-1). I selected these boundaries for several reasons. First, the study site, while still large, was a manageable area for me, in terms of driving distances and the resident population. Second, the prairie portion of this area is primarily used for cattle ranching and is mostly native grassland. East of highways 89 and 287 farming is much more prevalent, native grasslands are radically altered, the wildlife and conservation issues are different and less prevalent because of the distance from the mountains, and different policies, such as the Conservation Reserve Program, play a prominent role when compared with the study site.
Figure 4-1: Two Sets of Boundaries for the Rocky Mountain Front

Legend
- National Forests
- National Parks
- Wilderness
- Undeveloped Forests
- Wildlife Preserves

Map compiled by Ed Madej.
Map of the Rocky Mountain Front

It is important to note that the boundaries of the Rocky Mountain Front, and even the name of this area, are not agreed upon (the contested nature of the name and location of the Rocky Mountain Front are explored in detail in Chapter 6). Some people describe the area as a narrow strip of roadless, non-Wilderness Forest Service lands, while others extend the boundaries from the continental divide to highways 89 and 287, or even beyond. In this sense, the boundaries I used in this study are generally inclusive of these cited boundaries. I also include the communities of Augusta, Choteau, Bynum, and Dupuyer.
My definition of the study site is not, however, inclusive of the various northern and southern boundaries cited by different people. Some people cite highway 200 and Birch Creek as boundaries, but others extend the southern boundary to the Wolf Creek area and the northern boundary to the Canadian border or up into Canada. I chose more restricted north-south boundaries to limit the scope of the study both geographically and substantively. Conservation issues and natural resource policies on the Blackfeet Reservation, in Glacier National Park, and in Canada may differ in substantial ways when compared with the study site. There are different institutional and cultural contexts, and different laws, land uses, and natural resource issues. Wolf Creek was excluded primarily for logistical reasons (driving time) and because the landscape changes somewhat south of highway 200.

While I chose the boundaries of the study site for specific, practical reasons, they remain, in many ways, fuzzy and permeable. As stated earlier, the contested nature of these boundaries is explored later in this dissertation. The boundaries I utilized are not meant to legitimatize a particular definition of the Rocky Mountain Front. Nevertheless, these boundaries have implications for who and what is included in this dissertation. The boundaries define what is in and out of the study, who is and is not considered a resident of the study site. Wherever possible, I am explicit about the arbitrary and contested nature of the boundaries and, at times, I attempt account for unintended consequences. For example, participants who live just a few miles outside the study site boundaries, but are members of communities included in the study site were categorized as residents in the sample.

**Nested Scales and Units of Analysis**

According to Blaikie (1987), political ecology demands that natural resource problems be examined at different scales. These scales, which may range from individual households to national governments and transnational corporations, are seen as nested and linked like “Chinese boxes.” Natural resource questions need to be investigated at multiple levels because each scale
may contribute to and influence a given natural resource conflict. Understanding an environmental issue or conflict, then, may require synthesis and integration across these scales.

However, as Blaikie clearly acknowledges, the levels at which a natural resource problem might be analyzed can be quite numerous and, practically speaking, analysis of all possibly related scales is overwhelming. Therefore, the researcher must decide throughout the project which levels are most relevant to the research question. For the purposes of this project, I focused primarily on local, regional and national scales. Political ecology also requires that the analysis be grounded in a particular geographical location. Therefore, the unit of analysis for this project is first and foremost the local level, defined here as the study site, the area known as the Rocky Mountain Front.

**Methodological Approaches**

The specific methods utilized for this study were determined by the research questions and the theory and literature described in the previous chapter. Specific methods and my general research approach were also informed and influenced by three important methodologies: grounded theory, participatory research, and feminist methods. Each of these approaches questions aspects of traditional empirical science and proposes methodological remedies.

**Grounded Theory**

While this project does not incorporate all of the elements of grounded theory, it was influenced by grounded theory in several important ways. Grounded theory was initially developed by Glaser and Straus in the mid-1960s as a method of qualitative inquiry (Glaser and Straus, 1967; Straus and Corbin, 1990). Grounded theory assumes that research participants are experts on the topic being investigated and that researchers should assume that they know little or nothing about the topic at hand. The grounded theory approach is therefore highly attentive to emergent phenomenon throughout the research process, with theory emerging from and grounded
in research results rather than predetermined by scientific literature. Grounded theory responds to the limitations of hypothesis testing by suggesting a methodology that does not establish sidebars based on existing bodies of theory. Because political ecology, the framework utilized in this project, guides research in a broad sense, but does not proscribe particular relationships or postulate findings, it is relatively compatible with a grounded theory approach.

In a pure grounded theory study, the researcher would simply begin by asking the question “What’s going on here?” without any predetermined notions of the direction the research might take. In this project, I was very attentive to emergent phenomenon, especially during Phase I of the research, but I also incorporated questions into my interview guides based on the research objectives. Participants had opportunities to raise new topics during interviews, but interviews were not entirely guided by their interests.

Because grounded theory argues for theory that emerges from research results, literature is often related to the project after the analysis is complete. In this project, I see the literature and the research in a constant process of dialogue. My reading before and throughout the research influenced the questions I asked and how I interpreted results. At the same time, my interpretation of research results led me to new bodies of literature. Specific theories did not determine the questions I asked, but findings were connected with appropriate bodies of theory where available.

Like grounded theory practitioners, I view research participants as the experts in the phenomenon being studied. However, I also acknowledge the expertise of the researcher. The researcher has specialized knowledge and skills in scientific methods and theory and academic literature. Furthermore, the researcher may be able to make connections and provide explanations previously unconsidered by research participants.

I also utilized a grounded theory-based system of open coding (described in detail below). Open coding allows for unanticipated phenomena to emerge during data analysis.
Because of the focus on unanticipated phenomena, the researcher is less likely to overlook the unexpected in an effort to confirm or disconfirm a particular theory.

Feminist Research Methods and Methodology

My research approach has also been informed by feminist research methods and methodology. Like grounded theorists, feminists have critiqued traditional scientific approaches, questioning assumptions about objectivity and reason, truth and reality, and the role of the researcher as the expert. Feminist scholars seek to dismantle the traditional scientific model of power and control, and often seek out methods that embrace and empower research participants as the true experts on their own lives. They often focus on research methods that foster trust, dialogue, reciprocal relationships, and ground research in the concrete experience of participants. However, while feminist critiques of the power imbalance between researcher and research participants have resulted in the pursuit of more participatory, egalitarian, less-exploitive research methods, many feminists acknowledge that tensions may be inherent in research relationships and that power differences cannot be easily equalized (Wolf, 1996; Kobayashi, 1994).

Feminists also reconceptualize the researcher as an active participant in the research, as opposed to the neutral and distant observer described in traditional science. In doing so, feminists reflect on their own role in the research and are often open and explicit about their position and biases. Reflexivity, as these efforts are called, is an introspective and analytically self-critical and self-conscious process of assessing the many dimensions of the researcher's relationship with the research and the participants (England, 1994; Fonow & Cook, 1991). One of the ways in which reflexivity manifests is in the careful and explicit consideration of the researcher's power and position (see Scott and Shah, 1993; Way, 1997). By explicitly discussing ourselves as researchers, we appear not as abstract, unknowable authorities, but as real, concrete people within a certain context. The reader is then free to draw their own conclusions about how the researchers' biases and background may have influenced the project (Harding, 1987).
Throughout this research, I have attempted to reflect on the ways my own role and biases influence the research at different stages through journaling, conversations with participants, and reports to funders. Undoubtedly, my position as a middle class white American woman in academia influenced how I was perceived by research participants. In one sense I may have been seen as very knowledgeable and highly educated. In another sense, I had no background in ranching and was likely also seen as very ignorant. I was very conscious that coming from the University of Montana (widely perceived as a “hippie school” in resident communities), growing up in California (for which there is a lot of animosity in rural Montana), and driving a Toyota (which may seem trivial, but stood out as different in a community where nearly everyone drives American-made vehicles), made me not only different, but potentially connected me with people believed to have very different values and agendas than those of residents. When I met people, informally or as part of the interview process, I was upfront about these three “strikes” against me, and acknowledged that these qualities might not be well received. People seemed to appreciate my honesty, and the fact that I was aware of how I might be seen through their eyes. This acknowledgement served to diffuse tension over these qualities, and also opened the door for participants to comment openly on my role and position during the interview.

Feminist research usually focuses on gender, patriarchy, and women’s experiences, although feminist research methods are increasingly being applied to topics outside of traditional feminist themes. My dissertation research does not focus on feminist theory, gender roles, or women. However, feminist thinking about research relationships and reflexivity has influenced my research approach.

Participatory Research Methods

This project was also informed by participatory research principles and techniques. In keeping with grounded theory and feminist methods, participatory research challenges the dominance of traditional, positivist science (Hall, 1993), and questions the subject/object...
dichotomy (Brydon-Miller, 1997). Practitioners argue that submission and dependence are inherent in the subject/object dualism (Fals-Borda, 1991). Research participants usually have little power and are basically subjected to the research. Researchers retain power over the direction of the study, the process of inquiry and the use of knowledge. Participatory researchers, again like feminist scholars, seek to challenge the unequal, asymmetrical power relationship of traditional science and to create nonhierarchical relationships of mutual inquiry (Chataway, 1997).

Participatory research combines knowledge production with a social change agenda. Practitioners attempt to return power to marginalized groups through giving them control of knowledge. Participatory research originates in communities and is guided by communities, from research design to collection and analysis of data (Brydon-Miller, 1997). Participation involves “meaningful involvement of people in addressing the concerns that affect their lives” (Finn, 1994, p. 26). Power sharing is key to this process. Practitioners also recognize the value of nonexpert knowledge.

As with feminist methods, many constraints and challenges impede the implementation of ideal participatory research. The complex and heterogeneous nature of communities, often unrecognized by participatory researchers, poses a number of obstacles to implementation of participatory ideals. Who exactly participates in a community that is diverse and potentially divisive? Furthermore, as feminists point out, power is not as easily equalized nor empowerment so simply conceptualized as the literature would have us believe. Given these constraints, I suggest that participation be viewed along a continuum, rather than according to an either/or dichotomy. Dialogue and reciprocity, meaningful involvement in the research process, and benefits to participants can occur in a variety of forms.

In Spring 1999 I obtained research funding from the Ford Foundation Community Forestry Research Fellowships Program, which funds projects that engage communities in participatory research. This program provides more than research money, they hold annual
workshops and provide a network of resource people to assist with research challenges. Thus, I had technical support and resources for participatory research.

That said, different components of this project were more or less participatory. Community priorities and interests influenced the research process throughout the study. During individual interviews, there were many opportunities for participants to “talk back” to me, indicating what they thought of the project, what questions they thought I should ask, and how the results might benefit local communities. In addition to these informal opportunities for dialogue, I also met individually with 10 people I called "community consultants" between Phase I and II of the interviewing. These 10 individuals included 3 ranchers, 2 Forest Service employees, 2 Nature Conservancy employees, and 3 other community leaders, all people I had previously met or interviewed. I asked each of these people the following questions: (1) What do you want to learn about your community with regard to land use, natural resources, and environment? (2) If you were me, what questions would you ask the people you interview? (3) How can this research be helpful to ranchers and to local communities? (4) How should I get this information back to communities?

These questions generated a range of responses. Some people suggested a few specific questions, while others had a broader or vaguer sense of what they wanted to learn. Many people provided recommendations of who I should talk with. These conversations were incredibly helpful, and I was able to incorporate many (although not all) of these suggestions into my research. I made changes to my sample, my interview guide, and my overall research plan as a result of these discussions.

The Community Land Use Survey (described below) employed many elements of participatory research. The survey was collaboratively designed with the purpose of informing a citizen’s committee working on growth policy recommendations in Teton County. I worked closely with this committee and other community members to design a survey that met their needs, and I made results accessible and available. I provided technical expertise on sampling,
survey design, and statistics, while community members provided ideas for questions, interpreted the results, and will make use of the survey in local policy-making.

As stated earlier, some portions of this project were more participatory than others. In all phases of the research community interests and priorities influenced the direction and approach of the project. However, I make no claim that this project is participatory research, only that my approach and methods were influenced by participatory research and that different aspects of the project embrace different participatory techniques.

**Multiple Methods**

As stated earlier, given the goals of this study, I chose a mixture of different kinds of methods. In this study, I sought to understand the way different people think and feel, their ideas, meanings, memories, sentiments, ideologies, and attachments. In addition to exploring individual meanings, I wanted to understand social relationships and processes, political tensions, policy struggles, and what discourses are relevant and how they are employed. I also examined how these were connected to people's material interests and the relationships between landscape, land use and ownership, and livelihood issues. In an effort to explore these different, but inextricably connected, aspects of people's relationships to the Rocky Mountain Front and the politics of cross-boundary land management, I utilized the following methods:

- Residency in a local community and participant observation
- Observation of two community groups
- In-depth, qualitative interviews
- A mail-back quantitative survey
- Existing socioeconomic, historical, land management, and GIS data

Each of these methods are described in detail below, including reflections on their strengths and weaknesses. I follow these descriptions with a brief explanation about how different data sources fit together and criteria for evaluating the research as a whole.
Residency and Participant Observation

Residency and participant observation provided me with important insights, contacts, and context for this research. I lived in the town of Choteau from June through August 1999 and September 2000 through May 2001. In many ways this study resembles traditional ethnographic research in which the researcher lives in the community with research participants and gathers data through informal observation as well as formalized interviews, surveys, and other techniques. Living in Choteau expedited attending meetings, conducting interviews, and gathering local materials. But more importantly, residency in the study site afforded me many opportunities for informal learning and participant observation. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) define participant observation as "research that involves social interaction between researcher and informants in the milieu of the latter, during which data are systematically and unobtrusively collected" (p. 25). Conversations with people on the street, observations of community activities, getting to know local residents on a personal level, and participation in day-to-day life all provided insights into community social dynamics and natural resource politics in the area. Informal visits with people in the community helped me to build relationships. I also had easy access to individuals who were knowledgeable about particular programs or policies (such as the Forest Service, Teton County, and Farm Services staff).

I observed the physical environment, built and natural. I took note of signs posted in town for community events and watched businesses come and go. Outside of town I observed land use and management practices wherever possible. I took photos of fencelines and other property boundaries, grasslands and weeds, physical landmarks, and no trespassing signs.

I recorded observations in field notes on my computer (if I was away from home I took verbal notes into a small tape recorder or written notes onto a notepad for transcription into field notes later). I did not record everything that I observed, only those events, conversations, and sights that seemed most relevant to the research. These observations helped provide me with a basic social and biophysical context. They also provided specific findings that compliment the
other data sources utilized in this study. I have incorporated specific observations into this
dissertation wherever they lend themselves to a more detailed or nuanced understanding of
results.

Observation of Two Community Groups

In addition to informal observations, I also attended the meetings of two community
groups, the Teton County Growth Policy Citizen's Committee and the Rocky Mountain Front
Advisory Committee. I selected these groups for observation because they included a range of
stakeholders and they addressed issues relevant to the research. I took copious notes during the
meetings of both groups, including, where possible and appropriate, direct quotes. In addition to
recording the topics and ideas discussed, I also made observations about how meetings were
facilitated, the general rapport people seemed to have with one another, and issues that were
important or seemed to cause tension.

I began attending the meetings of the Teton County Growth Policy Citizen's Committee
during Fall 2000 at the recommendation of a County Commissioner. I attended most of the 2-
hour long monthly public meetings of this group until April 2002. Meetings were usually held at
the Teton Medical Center or the County Courthouse and facilitated by the County planner, a
planning consultant, or the County Extension Agent. A detailed description of this group and my
participation in the group is outlined below under Community Land Use Survey.

Also during the Fall of 2000, I began attending the meetings of the Rocky Mountain
Front Advisory Committee. This group was initiated by the Nature Conservancy in Spring 1999
and focuses on sustaining family ranches and ecological values on private lands. Participants are
primarily long time family ranchers, but there are also Nature Conservancy staff, newcomers,
mayors, a banker, and a lawyer. (Please see Chapter 10 for a detailed description of this group
and their efforts.) Meetings (approximately 5-6 a year) are held at a Committee member's home
and are 4-5 hours in duration with lunch or dinner provided. The Nature Conservancy Rocky Mountain Front Project Director facilitates.

Advisory Committee meetings are not advertised or open to the public, participation is by invitation only, and there has been very little publicity about the group. I made contact with the facilitator and attended a meeting to request to observe the group. As part of my request I offered to help in some way. They asked me to take minutes for the group, which I gladly agreed to do. Taking minutes allowed me to take copious notes without being obtrusive. It also allowed me to give something back to a group that is graciously allowing me to participate. I have also organized the group’s files, which allowed me access to past meeting minutes and other documents. While I originally conceived of myself as an observer, I found out in June 2002 that some participants consider me a member of the Advisory Committee.

**Interviews**

The primary data source used in this dissertation is interviews. These interviews were semi-structured, in-depth qualitative interviews with one or two individuals, usually conducted in the participant’s home or office. I chose to conduct interviews for a number of reasons. First, interviews provide an opportunity to obtain detailed information about issues that are important to people and what those issues mean to them. Because participants have the opportunity to elaborate, tell stories, provide examples, redirect questions, and even contradict themselves, the researcher gains a deeper understanding than with most other data sources. Participants convey much more than what they believe, feel, or experience, they explain why they have a particular perspective and how a certain idea is connected to particular issues, groups of people, political conflicts and processes, and livelihood struggles.
Phase I and II

Interviews were conducted in two phases. Phase I took place in June, July, and August 1999. This first phase was broadly focused and consisted of 34 interviews (with 37 individuals), getting to know the community, and gathering information on specific issues. During Phase I the goal of sampling was to begin to understand the range and diversity of perspectives present in the study site and at the regional level.

Phase II examined similar, but somewhat more focused, themes in greater detail. During Phase II 74 interviews (with 82 individuals) were conducted. During the second phase, I sought to understand groups of people who were left out of or barely touched on during Phase I, and to increase the depth and detail of information from groups of people already included.

Goals and Principles of Sampling

Because the goal of interviews was not to produce statistically generalizable results or to make claims about how particular viewpoints were distributed in the larger population, sampling was purposive rather than random. Purposive sampling indicates that individuals are selected to participate based on specific criteria, in this case their backgrounds, occupations, experiences, and/or political perspectives. Purposive sampling differs from snowball sampling in that participants are carefully selected based on predetermined criteria, as opposed to selected simply because they are recommended by others.

The goal of sampling in this study was not theoretical saturation. Rather, participants were selected based on their ability to represent a diversity of backgrounds and ideas. Interviews were conducted to gain an understanding of the major viewpoints and positions people hold in relation to the Rocky Mountain Front. While it is impossible to ensure that all perspectives are represented in the sample, I have attempted to represent a diversity and range of perspectives, given the constraints and objectives of the research.
Sample size was not predetermined for this study. Rather, the goals of understanding different perspectives and having a certain number (usually a minimum of 8-10) of people in the categories most important for later comparison guided sample size. Also, I kept in mind how many interviews I could effectively analyze without significant cognitive overload. However, because this study focuses on social dynamics as opposed to individual psychological processes, understanding of groups of people and social processes (requiring more interviews) was more important than in-depth understanding of individuals (requiring lengthier analysis of fewer interviews).

Participants were selected from a list of over 200 people recommended by community members using chain referral methodology (Bradenburg and Carroll, 1995). I selected people who I knew were interested in, involved with, and/or affected by land use and management, and environmental policy. These included landowners, both multi-generational family ranchers and new large landowners, and agency staff, with a focus on National Forest and Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks staff. I also interviewed National Forest users, people known to hike, backpack, ORV, horsepack, outfit, or run cattle on these lands. I sought out individuals who were active in natural resource issues, including community leaders and decision-makers, and quiet, but opinionated individuals recommended by neighbors or relatives. I interviewed environmentalists, with a focus on Nature Conservancy staff, the one environmental group in the study site with paid staff. The term environmentalist is used throughout this dissertation to identify individuals who are paid staff or active volunteers with nonprofit environmental groups. However, it is important to acknowledge the problematic nature of this label. Nonprofit environmental groups vary widely in their philosophy and approach. Some environmental groups, such as the Nature Conservancy, might prefer the label conservationist because they support sustainable use of natural resources. Furthermore, many other kinds of people might be considered environmentalists, including ranchers.
Within each group I sought both depth and diversity. Wherever possible I was attentive to gender, race and ethnicity, and class in selecting participants. I tried to find both community leaders and marginalized, less visible individuals to interview. I looked for newcomers and oldtimers, and younger and older individuals. For example, within the rancher sample, I sought a gender balance, interviewed younger and older ranchers, newcomers and oldtimers, and those with conservation easements and those active in the private property rights movement. I talked with ranchers who were well-known community leaders and ranchers who were shunned by their neighbors and rarely mentioned in conversation. Each individual participant was selected for their ability to fill one or, in most cases, several categories important to the sample (see sample characteristics below for more detail).

Despite my efforts to be inclusive, several important groups of people are not well-represented in the sample. While Hutterites are major landowners in the study site (all or part of five Hutterite Colonies are within the study site), they are not included in the sample. I did conduct one interview with a Hutterite man, but that interview was not analyzed and is not included in the results. Hutterite contacts were difficult to obtain, and I found scheduling interviews almost impossible. Because Hutterite culture is very different from dominant white culture in the area, tape recording would not have been possible and my persistence with phone calls felt intrusive. In fact, some Hutterite scholars argue that the biggest threat to Hutterite Colonies today is the intrusion of modern, American culture (Wilson, 2000). That said, because Hutterites own substantial land within the study site and because their culture, including their views on property, are radically different from mainstream American society, we can assume that their perspectives are not only important to the future of the Front, but potentially different from those individuals who participated in this study.

Blackfeet and Metis people are also largely absent from the sample. While the study site does not include the reservation, this area was Blackfeet territory prior to white settlement, and the original reservation boundaries extended into the study site. There is evidence that some
Blackfeet still use mountain peaks within the study site for religious activities, but there are presently no formal Blackfeet land claims to the area. I decided after Phase I that reservation politics, culture, institutional and social context, and governance were different enough to merit an entirely separate study. I could not do justice to Blackfeet issues in the context of this project. Therefore, the five interviews I conducted with Blackfeet people were included for background purposes only.

Metis people (mixed European and Chipawa-Cree people) also have a long history in the area. After being driven from Canada several Metis groups settled in the canyons at the base of the mountains just west of Choteau. Their settlements are long abandoned and most of their descendents have either moved out of the area or largely integrated (at least superficially) into the dominant culture. I felt that their history and perspectives merited more in-depth treatment than I could provide within the parameters of this project. We can assume that, like the Blackfeet and the Hutterites, their different cultural background might result in different viewpoints on the topics discussed later in this dissertation.

Because my goal was to understand the politics of conservation and natural resource use in the area, I focused on residents. I took a bottom-up approach to sampling, prioritizing landowners, land managers, and local communities in the sampling process. Thus, ranchers, newcomers, public land managers, and environmentalists are disproportionately represented in the interview sample when compared with the population of the study site as a whole. However, because both policy and discourse can originate with and be heavily influenced by nonresidents, I also interviewed people at the regional and national levels. At these levels I chose individuals whose work (paid or volunteer) was related to the study site. These included agency staff, environmentalists, policy-makers, stockgrowers association staff, industry representatives, journalists, foundation staff, former elected officials and congressional staffers, and private property rights advocates. I looked for individuals who influenced the image of the area through the media and were key players in creating the discourse that framed conservation and natural
resource issues in the study site. I also talked with people who were working toward natural resource policy and management changes that would affect private and public lands and communities in the area.

Regional interviews were conducted in Montana. National interviews were conducted in Boston and Washington D.C., and by telephone with individuals in Colorado and Oregon.

Setting Up Interviews

Once I selected a potential participant, I called them on the telephone to introduce myself, the project, and to schedule an interview. I never left messages, unless I had already obtained permission to conduct the interview and I had to leave a message regarding the time and place. I chose not to leave messages (except in the cases of three hard to reach individuals at the regional and national levels) because I wanted to carefully track my response rate and was unsure how to consider unreturned phone calls. Altogether 6 people declined interviews (3 residents, 2 people at the regional level, and 1 person at the national level).

When I made contact with an individual, I explained that I was a graduate student at the University of Montana doing a project about people’s experiences of the area. I told them the name of the community member who had recommended that I talk with them (with permission from that person), and that I was interested in interviewing them. I made clear that the interview was anonymous and that their name would never be connected with anything they said, and I explained that I hoped to tape the interview.

Most people invited me to come to their home or workplace for the interview. I conducted three interviews over the telephone. I made every effort to accommodate participants’ needs in terms of time and place.

Upon arrival I reiterated that the interview was anonymous and asked permission to use the tape recorder, explaining that it helped ensure accuracy and allowed me to pay attention to the interview instead of taking notes. All interviews were taped (the only exception was the Hutterite
interview that was not analyzed). Interviews ranged in length from 30 minutes to 2 ½ hours. Most interviews were a little over 1 hour long. Interviews in people’s homes tended to be longer, and workplace or lunch interviews tended to be shorter.

**Using an Interview Guide**

I utilized interview guides for each interview to ensure comparability between interviews and to focus the interview on themes relevant to the research (Charmaz, 1991; Kvale, 1983; Patterson and Williams, 2002). The Phase I interview guide focused broadly on people’s experiences and views of the Front, their use of the forest, how the area was changing, the issues that concerned them, and what they wanted for the future. The Phase I interview guide was amended after the first 5 interviews were conducted to more effectively reveal the information desired.

Phase II interview guides were developed through a multifaceted process of attention to Phase I interviews and dialogue with community members. In preparation for Phase II interviews I reexamined coded Phase I interviews and listened to all Phase I interview tapes for a second time. I took notes on potential follow-up questions, knowledge gaps, and groups of people to focus on. I combined this information with research objectives and questions suggested by community consultants (see section on Participatory Research above), and developed an extensive list of possible questions. From that original list, I prioritized based on the goals of the research, relevance to resident communities, and a need for the interviews to be a manageable length of time. I also developed slightly different interview guides for residents, nonresidents, and ranchers. (See Appendix 2 for a sample interview guide.)

**Individualized Interview Guides**

For some interviews at the regional and national levels new interview guides were developed for specific individuals or organizations. The questions in these guides directed the
interview to topics related to the participant’s field of expertise or specific experience. For example, foundation, journalist, industry, some Forest Service, and certain activist interviews used these individualized guides. These interview guides retained applicable questions from other interviews to ensure comparability. However, especially in cases where individuals had never been to the Rocky Mountain Front or were only familiar with the area in the most general sense, some questions were deleted.

I also developed individualized interview guides for reinterviews and interviews specifically about fire. Reinterview guides contained follow-up questions developed from initial interviews with these individuals. Fire interviews focused on people’s specific experience and expertise with regard to fire in general and the fires of 1988 and 2000.

**Question Order and Probes**

Questions in all interview guides were ordered based on anticipated flow of the conversation. Opening questions were designed to generate information about a person’s background and profession, and general place-meanings and perceptions about change. In Phase II interview guides, subsequent questions were grouped according to ranching, Forest Service, national attention/significance, collaboration, and the future. Within each of these categories, questions were ordered to begin with general information based on a person’s own experience and expertise. Questions within each category moved into controversial topics and questions about specific issues and ideologies gradually. Some question sequences were designed to limit order effect. For example, a question about private property rights was deliberately placed at the close of the ranching category to limit this topic’s influence on answers to prior questions. Similarly, questions about wilderness and oil and gas development on National Forest lands followed more general questions about federal land management.

During the course of the actual interview, I frequently amended question order based on topics brought up by interview participants. If a person began to discuss national attention to the
area when asked about the place-name Rocky Mountain Front, I moved into the national
attention/significance category of questions and returned to earlier questions when appropriate.
This process allowed participants to guide the interview toward topics of importance to them
while still covering questions relevant to the research project. While the resulting order effect
differed between interviews, conversational style contributed to rapport and comfort level with
contentious topics, and provided opportunities for dialogue.

Question order was also amended based on participants' background and profession. For
example, residents who were associated with the ranching community were asked ranching
questions before Forest Service questions, while residents associated with the Forest Service
would be asked Forest Service questions first. Wherever possible, the interview began with
questions related to a person's background and experience, and later moved into less familiar
topics.

I used frequent probes to direct participants to elaborate when I needed more detail or had
a specific question about a response. Probes included questions about the meaning of a particular
term (i.e. When you say that area is all locked up, what do you mean?), clarification about a
statement of opinion (i.e. Are you suggesting that ...), or elaboration on a specific idea (i.e. You
mentioned that good fences make good neighbors, can you elaborate on that?). During each
interview I made notes about potential probes while the participant was speaking and returned to
those probes at logical points in the interview, keeping in mind possible question order effects.

Other Interview Techniques

Throughout the research process, I tried to improve my interviewing techniques. These
techniques involved how to begin an interview, how to create rapport with people, and how to
keep track of topics covered and possible probes. I also made note of how my use of language
and terminology affected the interview, and made my ethics and principles explicit. Some of
these techniques are recorded in a document I developed as advice to myself following Phase I of the project (see Appendix 3).

**Characteristics of the Sample**

Different characteristics of the interview sample are described below. A total of 119 people were interviewed in 108 interviews. During Phase I, the interview sample was 34 and included 37 individuals (N=37, I=34). Phase II included 74 interviews with 82 individuals (N=82, I=74). (Details on Phase I sample only can be found in Appendix 4.) During Phase II six of the 74 interviews were follow-up sessions with individuals who were interviewed in Phase I. These individuals are only counted once in any total of individuals. However, both interviews were counted in the interview totals above.

Altogether, of individuals interviewed, there were 80 residents (33 ranchers and 47 nonranchers), 22 people at the regional level, and 17 people at the national level. Residents are defined in this study as individuals who live in the study site. The resident sample includes new large landowners, even though most live in the study site for only a portion of each year. Residents also include a few individuals who live just outside the study site. The regional sample includes individuals in Montana. The national sample includes individuals in Massachusetts, Washington D.C., Oregon, and Colorado.

Ranchers are defined here as individuals who operate a livestock operation in the study site as a primary occupation and source of income. Ranch managers were included in this category, but new large landowners were not. New large landowners are defined as individuals who have purchased between 500 and 20,000 acres in the study site in the last 15 years. All new large landowners have significant sources of income from outside of the study site, all paid recreational prices (much higher than agricultural prices) for their land, and only one resides in the study site more than 6 months of the year.
Table 4-1 categorizes individuals according to their primary occupation or the category most relevant to this study.

**Table 4-1: Primary Occupations/Categories – Phase I and II (Interview Sample)**  
Each individual is listed in one category only.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Resident</th>
<th>Regional</th>
<th>National</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rancher (not inc. ranchers in other categories)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rancher with Conservation Easement</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rancher Active in Property Rights Group</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranch Manager for Newcomer/NGO ranch</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had Ranch and Sold It</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Large Landowners</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest Service</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mt. Fish, Wildlife and Parks (current/former)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outfitter/Guest Ranch/Works with Tourists</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Business Owner</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State or National Stockgrowers Association</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Nature Conservancy Staff (current/former)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works at Local NGO (not env.)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Environmental Group Staff</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mt. Wilderness Assoc. Active Volunteers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educator/Teacher/Works at a School</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation Staff</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry Association</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real Estate Agents</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Professional</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current or Former Elected Official</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backcountry Horseman</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Environmental Group Staff (not TNC)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Private Property Rights Org. Staff</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>119</strong></td>
<td><strong>80</strong></td>
<td><strong>22</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because most individuals fit into more than one category, Table 4-2 was created. In Table 4-2, each individual is listed in multiple categories, if applicable. For example, a rancher who also works as an outfitter and is a member of the Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee is counted in all three categories.
Table 4-2: Multiple Occupations/Categories – Phase I and II (Interview Sample)

Each individual may be listed in multiple categories. Listed in descending order.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation/Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rancher (including ranch managers)</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outfitter/Guest Ranch/Works with Tourists</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mt. Wilderness Assoc. Active Volunteers</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMF Advisory Committee Member</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Nature Conservancy Staff (current/former)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New large landowner Landowners</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Business Owner</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest Service</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has Conservation Easement</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Property Rights Group</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer from just outside the study site</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranch Manager for Newcomer/NGO ranch</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist/Writer</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State or National Stockgrowers Association</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mt. Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (current or former)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Environmental Group Staff</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation Staff</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonlocal Business Owner</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real Estate Agents</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Professional</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grew up on Ranch/Had ranch and sold it</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Environmental Group Staff (not TNC)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackfeet Tribal Member</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works at Local NGO (not env.)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educator/Teacher/Works at a School</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banking/Investment Industry</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works at Local Business</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Congressional Staffers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellowstone to Yukon Staff/Volunteer</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Property Rights Org. Staff</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current or Former Elected Official</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Environmentalist</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana Industry Representative</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horsepacker (nonoutfitter)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Recreational ORV User</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 80 residents, I categorized 50 as “oldtimers” (people who lived in the study site 15 or more years) and 30 as “newcomers” (people who lived in the study site less than 15 years) (see Table 4-3). Most residents agreed that people who had lived in the study site less than 15 years were considered newcomers. While I did not inquire about individuals’ racial or ethnic
background, interviews made clear that 3 individuals were Blackfeet and 2 were mixed Native American and European descent (see Table 4-4).

Table 4-3: Length of Residence (Interview Sample)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Residents</th>
<th>50</th>
<th>30</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oldtimers (Lived in area 20 or more years)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newcomers (Lived in area less than 20 years)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4-4: Race/Ethnicity (Interview Sample)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>European Descent*</th>
<th>114</th>
<th>26</th>
<th>49</th>
<th>22</th>
<th>17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blackfeet</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metis/Mixed Descent</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Assumptions about European ancestry are based on my observation of participants. People were not asked to identify their ethnic or racial origins. The Blackfeet and mixed descent participants were explicit about their ancestry.

Of the 119 individuals interviewed, 46 were female and 73 male (see Table 4-5). This gender imbalance is due in part to the disproportionate number of men in decision-making or leadership positions in organizations relevant to the research. In cases where two people existed (for example, two individuals in leadership positions working on private property rights issues at the national level) of each gender, I often chose the woman to interview. However, most of the time, only men were available in key positions. So, despite my efforts to balance gender, the sample is disproportionately male. Where I did have many choices of individuals to interview (for example in the rancher sample), I was able to achieve a gender balance.

Table 4-5: Sex (Interview Sample)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Rancher</th>
<th>Resident(nonrancher)</th>
<th>Regional</th>
<th>National</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to these interviews, eight background interviews were conducted and not analyzed. These are interviews with groups of people not well-represented in this study – farmers east of the study site, Blackfeet, and Hutterites. I also conducted several interviews focusing on
fire that are not analyzed here. These eight interviews are not included in the descriptions of the sample above or any of the tables that characterize the sample. They were utilized for background information and context only.

**Interview Analysis**

My analysis of the interviews was guided by several principles. First, I wanted to understand patterns across individuals and broad social processes. Understanding individual interviews was a means to this goal, not a goal unto itself. Analysis across interviews was particularly important. Second, I wanted to be attentive to emergent phenomenon that were not predicted during the formative stages of the research. Thirdly, I wanted to connect analyses conducted during different stages of the interview process to ensure a continuing dialogue between data and interpretation. Finally, I kept in mind theory and academic literature throughout the process so that another level of interaction, between existing theory and emerging findings could occur.

All interviews were professionally transcribed verbatim (some "ums" and "uhhs" were excluded from the transcription). I then listened to every interview, checked the transcription for accuracy, and made any necessary corrections. Each participant was given a pseudonym; names do not appear on the corrected transcripts nor on the original tapes. While identifying information was retained in the text of interview transcripts, efforts were made to remove any such information from interview quotes utilized herein.

Interview analysis began during the actual interviews and continued through to the writing stage of the project. Throughout this process interpretation, theories and ideas from the literature, and results from interviews were compared. This iterative process ensures that interpretation is adjusted, readjusted, and finally confirmed through a process of dialogue.

During each interview, I took notes on connections between and within interviews, contradictions and further questions, additional non-interview information to obtain, and ideas for
potential focus areas. After each interview, I spoke additional notes and ideas into a small tape recorder. These notes were then transcribed into my field notes and became an essential component of the analysis. I also took analysis notes while I proofed each transcript, and while listening to Phase I interview tapes to prepare Phase II interview guides.

Phase I interviews were further analyzed during Fall 1999. I coded each of these interviews by hand on hard copy transcripts. The analytical process of coding links concepts and themes to data in a rigorous evaluation and re-evaluation of the interviews (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; Fetterman, 1998; Patterson and Williams, 2002). A system of open coding was utilized, whereby themes and meaning units were identified and organized under single words or short phrases related to the theme. Rather than beginning with a predetermined set of codes, open coding allows meaning to emerge from the data and codes are created and adapted to best fit that data. Coding provides a systematic review and organization of the data. Because coding requires the researcher to be very attentive to the details of the data, it results in a better understanding of each individual interview, and it demands comparisons across interviews. Comparisons are necessary because the researcher must constantly decide if one person is really saying something similar to another, in which case the same code would be utilized.

Phase I interviews were also summarized through a process of rereading the interviews and excerpting the passages most relevant to the research project. This process resulted in 1-2 page interview summaries containing a series of quotes that were easily accessible, but somewhat removed from the larger context of the interview. This process helped me to identify the key findings from each interview.

Phase II interviews were coded in a similar way to Phase I interviews (although summaries were not completed for Phase II interviews). Phase II coding, however, was much more detailed, often involving many overlapping codes to identify themes nested within themes. Many more codes were utilized to capture this level of detail. Also, Phase II interviews were coded into the qualitative research software Atlas-ti. This software was used for organizing...
purposes only, not for interpretation or analysis. Software in no way limited or guided the coding strategies utilized. Rather, computer software allowed for quick and easy retrieval of the text entered under different codes.

For all interviews (Phase I and II) short bios describing each participant's occupation and background were written. These bios were created to provide a shorthand context for each individual. For example, I would note that the participant was a rancher, that they ranched in the Teton area, that they had a Forest Service grazing permit, that their wife worked for an outfitter, that their great-grandparents had homesteaded the property, that they were active in the private property rights group, and that they had recently sold 2,000 acres.

While coding Phase II interviews, I wrote analysis memos. I took notes about important findings and connections between interviews. These analysis memos are not summaries of the interviews, and do not cover every theme addressed by the participant. Rather, they focus on insights gained from particular interviews and passages, and record new ideas and information not discussed elsewhere. These memos allowed me to write interpretations of the interviews during the actual coding process, and draw on this analysis during the writing stage.

After all coding was completed, I organized the list of codes thematically, combining codes where I found redundancy. Through this process of code organization, I created an outline of codes, making decisions about what topics and themes were related and how they might inform each other. I then reviewed all of my analysis notes (field notes, notes taken during proofing, and analysis memos) and used these notes to create a draft outline of research results. I also went through written materials I had gathered and examined, observations made during the research process, and survey results. I then went back to the outline to add detail and ensure that I had not left out important themes. The result was a draft outline of results to cover in this dissertation.

The writing stage involved substantial across interview analysis. During this stage all quotes related to each theme were examined and further comparisons made across interviews. Selecting quotes for inclusion in this text required analyzing the range of perspectives on
particular topic, and how different participants express similar ideas. Furthermore, at this stage, I kept in mind the individual context (each participant's background and perspective on other topics) as much as possible. Individual context was noted where relevant to understanding broader social processes.

Research results described herein are not exhaustive or comprehensive of findings or themes covered in interviews. Rather, through the process of creating an outline, I prioritized the results that I deemed most important and relevant to local communities, conservation and natural resource management, and science. I wanted to delve into a few topics in depth, rather than covering a larger number at a more superficial level. I also needed results that fit together into a cohesive whole - findings that related to one another and could be crafted into a workable story. There are, then, many topics and themes for which there are interesting results and lots of data that are not covered here, or are only briefly covered here. They include gender and ranching, meanings of and relationships to wilderness, the conceptualization and management of fire in this area, and ideas about change and continuity.

How Interview Excerpts were Selected for Inclusion in this Text

As with any qualitative research, not all interview quotes can be included when reporting research results. In this section, I outline how I selected quotes for inclusion in this text. There were almost always a number of quotes that could be utilized as evidence for any specific point. In some cases interview data are summarized or short quotes are listed without much context. Wherever quotation marks are used for punctuation the word or phrase is directly quoted from the interview. I used this approach for findings that were relatively straightforward and easy to convey, and generally agreed upon and unlikely to be contested. For example, in describing how some participants imagined the area as wild and undeveloped, I listed short phrases from a range of interviews.
For more complicated and nuanced ideas, I provided lengthier quotes with some background information about the speaker. (Appendix 5 lists all individuals, by pseudonym and by chapter, who have lengthy quotations in this text.) In some cases, only one quote is provided to convey a particular perspective. These quotes were most frequently selected because they best explained that particular idea. The quotes were clear and concise, yet provided detail and depth. In other cases, several quotes that are slightly different are used to give the reader more detail. Several quotes can also demonstrate the range of perspectives that exist on a particular topic.

Unless otherwise noted, the perspectives conveyed and discussed in this dissertation are not limited to one or two individuals in the interview sample. One or two quotes are provided as evidence of a viewpoint that is important within a particular group of people. In other words, the quotes selected for inclusion in the results chapters represent a particular perspective or idea that was conveyed by many of the interviewees. The quotes that are included represent patterns found in the interview data, patterns particular to a specific group of people or patterns that are part of a specific discourse. However, in some cases, an alternative point of view is provided to illustrate diversity or disagreement within a group. In these cases, I explicitly note this as an exception to the general direction of research results.

Where quotes are self-explanatory I often let the interview data speak for itself. Rather than repeating or rephrasing what a research participant said during an interview, I provide analysis to further elaborate connections between results, provide additional insights, or critique a particular viewpoint.

The Strengths and Weaknesses of Interview Data

As described earlier, interviews provide a window into the depth and detail of particular perspectives. Discourses are revealed through the interview process, and connections between discourse and material interests are made clear. Interviews, particularly semi-structured interviews, also allow for dialogue. Participants can “talk back” to researchers in a number of
ways. They can respond in unexpected ways, redirect questions, and elaborate on topics that the researcher was previously unaware of. This dialogue is important for two reasons. One, it gives participants power to influence the research process. Interviews assume that participants, as opposed to the researcher, are the experts on the topics at hand, and, in many ways, they place the participant in the role of the keeper of the knowledge. Second, dialogue allows for unexpected topics and themes to emerge, which ensures that research is relevant to the actual experience of participants. In this sense, interviews are an excellent method for a researcher who does not already understand exactly what is going on in a particular area.

Interviews also have weaknesses. While interview guides systematize interview content to some extent, interviews can vary significantly depending on the participant’s areas of interest and expertise, and communication style, and the rapport between the researcher and the participant. Flexibility is a strength because it allows for dialogue, emergent phenomenon, conversational style, and opportunities to probe. The price of flexibility is that interviews are not identical and comparisons across interviews are possible, but not exact.

Furthermore, the nonrandom purposive sample utilized in this study limits my ability to make statements about the distribution of particular perspectives within the larger population. In other words, if half of the ranchers interviewed were supportive of conservation easements, that does not necessarily mean that half of the ranchers in the area are supportive of conservation easements. That said, results are still generalizable in another sense. Because of the size of the sample and the variety of people interviewed, the major viewpoints and perspectives in the area are well-represented in the sample.

**Teton County Community Land Use Survey**

*Development of the Survey*

Another important data source was quantitative information from the Community Land Use Survey. This survey was developed in collaboration with the Teton County Growth Policy
Citizen’s Advisory Committee. The Growth Committee is a group of farmers, ranchers, county staff, and other community leaders working on recommendations to the Teton County Commissioners regarding future county policies and projects. The Growth Committee was established in Spring 2000 by County Commissioners and specifically tasked with developing new land use and growth management policies for the Commissioners to consider and potentially adopt.

The purpose of the survey was to gather information relevant to the work of the Growth Committee and to my dissertation research. The survey also provided an opportunity for me to work collaboratively with a group of citizens and provide a service to the communities who had generously assisted me with the research. In conducting the Community Land Use Survey I was able to put into practice many of the principles and techniques of participatory research.

Survey questions were developed collaboratively by the Growth Committee, Teton County staff and elected officials, planning consultants, and myself. The Committee was particularly interested in the opinions of Teton County residents about community, land use, regulation, and economic development. I added several questions about public land management, use of National Forest lands, conservation easements, and oil and gas development. I also asked the Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee and several other community members for ideas for questions.

The final survey was developed through a process of dialogue with the Growth Committee, other community members, academics, and myself. The Growth Committee provided ideas for questions at an initial meeting. I subsequently developed the first draft, drawing on their suggestions and my notes from previous meetings of the Growth Committee. The Committee reviewed this draft and an amended second draft. Survey drafts were also reviewed by Teton County staff and elected officials, planning consultants, and several survey experts and statisticians at the University of Montana (including Paul Wick, Mary Sexton, Dan Clark, Kate MacMahon, Bill Borrie, Mike Patterson, Wayne Freimund, Jill Belsky, and John
Survey drafts were pretested with 8 Teton County residents who were not on the Growth Committee.

Growth Committee members agreed that their names could be printed at the bottom of the survey cover letter. They were each sent a final draft of the survey, and called to ensure that they were okay with their names on the letter. Every person agreed. This was done so that people would know who was on the Growth Committee and to ensure that people understood that the survey was originating locally. The artwork on the cover was donated by local artist and County Commissioner, Sam Carlson. Teton County letterhead and envelopes were used, surveys (except replacement surveys) were sent from Teton County, and all return envelopes addressed to Teton County. All of these steps were taken to increase response rate and result in a more positive perception of the survey. I signed the letters as survey coordinator. I also oversaw sampling procedures, survey design and review, printing, assembly and mailing, data entry, and statistical analysis, and reported results to the Committee. Paul Wick, Teton County Planner, assisted with sampling, answered questions from interested parties, and collected completed surveys. (See Appendix 6 for cover letter and survey text.)

**Survey Logistics and Procedures**

The survey was funded by Teton County (PILT money and several grants were used. Tax dollars did not fund the survey.). Money was provided for survey copies and envelopes, postage, and data entry. I did not receive any compensation for survey work. The survey was conducted in January and February 2002, according to the procedures recommended by Salant and Dillman (1994). All 609 individuals who were part of the sample were sent an advance letter informing them of the survey, a survey with a cover letter and a return envelope, and a reminder postcard. Individuals who had not sent the survey back one week after the reminder postcard were sent a replacement survey and return envelope. Respondents were informed that their answers would be anonymous. Each survey had a number on the back for tracking purposes only.
Sampling and Response Rate

For the survey sample, a total of 609 individuals were randomly selected from a list of registered voters in Teton County. All 609 individuals who were selected were sent a survey. Of the 609 people selected, 43 were deceased, had moved out of Teton County, or were too elderly or ill to complete the survey (In some cases the surveys were returned by a relative or caretaker who explained why the individual was unavailable. In other cases Teton County staff received phone calls conveying this information. The Teton County elections coordinator and local post office staff assisted in determining who had moved out of the county. Local papers were also reviewed during the survey for obituaries.). Of the 566 people able to complete the survey, 83% (a total of 469) returned a completed survey.

With a response rate of 83% I am fairly confident that survey results represent the views of adults in Teton County. However, it is possible that the 17% who received but did not fill out the survey have different views than those 83% who completed the survey. Also, because only 80% of the residents of Teton County age 18 and older are registered to vote, the opinions of individuals and groups who were not registered to vote may not be represented in the results of this survey. Hutterite Colonies, college students, and individuals with second or vacation homes in the County may not be represented (With the help of County staff and officials, I estimated that approximately 50% of those not registered to vote were adult Hutterites, making them the group most likely not represented in survey results.).

The sampling error for this survey is 4%, which means that we are 95% confident that the "true" score on any particular item is plus or minus 4% of the results reported here. For example, if 60% of the respondents replied that they "strongly agreed" to a particular item and the sampling error is ± 4%, there is a 95% chance that the "true" value is between 56% and 64%.

Because Teton County does not have the same boundaries as the study site defined for this project, only a subset of the total sample was analyzed herein. The Western portion of Teton County, specifically the communities of Bynum and Choteau and the rural residents around those
towns, was examined for this dissertation. Communities east of Choteau and Bynum were considered to be outside of the study site. Areas to the east differ from the study site because the predominant land use is farming (not ranching), they are farther from the public lands and the mountains, and they function, in part, as bedroom communities for the city of Great Falls. (It is also important to note that the communities of Dupuyer and Augusta are within the study site, but not within Teton County and are not covered by the survey.) The subsample was based on which community people identified as their community in survey responses, not their mailing address. The subsample analyzed in this dissertation contains 201 people.

_data entry_

Survey answers were entered into an SPSS database by an assistant. I developed the database and checked for accuracy of data entry through periodic spot checks. After all data was entered, we also checked 10% (randomly selected) of the surveys for accuracy. This process revealed a .0005% error rate. Additional data entry errors were identified by careful attention to apparent outliers in descriptive statistics reports. All comments written on the back page of the survey booklet, "other" answers, and writing in the margins of the survey were transcribed verbatim.

There were two data entry problems that needed to be addressed. In some cases people circled two adjacent answers on a scale. For those questions, the average of those two answers was taken (so if a 3 and 4 were circled, 3.5 was recorded). Where people circled two answers that were not adjacent, that question was considered skipped. Also, many individuals checked more than one occupation category, despite instructions to check one only. Occupation was therefore recorded as if question instructions were to check all that apply. However, it should be noted that it is not clear which occupation is the primary occupation, and individuals who checked only one answer may in fact have more than one occupation.
Reporting Results to the Growth Committee

In March 2002 I developed a survey report outlining survey methods and providing descriptive statistics (means and frequencies) for every question in the survey. This report was provided to the Growth Committee and any interested citizen who contacted Teton County Planner Paul Wick. This report also encouraged interested citizens to talk with Growth Committee members about their concerns and desires for Teton County. Comments written on the backs of the surveys were also made available.

Also in March 2002 I made a presentation to the Growth Committee on the results. Using graphs and charts we examined the questions most directly related to their work. At this time the survey report was considered a draft and committee members were asked to make changes. I also asked committee members what kinds of additional information and numbers might be helpful.

In April and September 2002 I provided supplementary reports to the Growth Committee. The first compared means for different groups of people (ranchers, farmers, people in Choteau, people who went to college, people who grew up in cities, people who live in town, and different age cohorts) with the entire sample on a subset of questions. In September I provided information on differences between the ranching (primarily the western portion of the county) and the farming (primarily the eastern portion of the county) parts of Teton County.

Results for nearly all questions were reported in a local newspaper article in March. I also provided reports to and discussed results with the Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee, the Choteau mayor, Friends of the Rocky Mountain Front, and other interested citizens.

Results Reported in this Dissertation

For the purposes of this dissertation, I have reported results from those questions most relevant to the themes and topics discussed herein. Please see Appendix 7 for results for all
survey questions. The statistics reported in the following chapters are descriptive. Comparison between different groups through multiple regression or other inferential tests was beyond the scope of this dissertation.

The Strengths and Limitations of the Survey Data

As with any data source or set of methods, this survey data has some specific strengths and weaknesses that should be mentioned. Strengths include the random sample and the high response rate (83%) which provides confidence that survey results can be generalized to the adult population of Teton County. Because I developed the survey with participation from the Growth Committee, we have some assurance that questions asked were relevant to the concerns and experiences of residents. Furthermore, because survey results have been made accessible and available to community members and because the survey is connected to a decision-making process, results have the potential to inform policy decisions in the near future.

Weaknesses include the potential absence of particular segments of the population (in particular Hutterites and college students) in the survey results. Also, as with any quantitative measure, we can only speculate as to why people responded in the way they did and what their answers mean. Examining responses to several related items does provide additional explanatory power, but questions about what people mean by particular responses remain. In the context of this project, both quantitative and qualitative data can be examined on certain topics, providing some nuances and detail.

Another limitation of the survey results, but only in the context of this dissertation, is that Teton County and the study site overlap but do not share identical boundaries. The creation of the subsample, used in this document, seeks to address this issue. However, the exclusion of the community of Augusta (in Lewis and Clark County) is somewhat problematic. Community members describe Choteau and Augusta as somewhat different, citing post-Scapegoat fire attitudes toward the Forest Service in Augusta and the proximity of the Nature Conservancy.
preserve to Choteau as unique qualities of each community. While interview data support the assertion that there are some important differences in these communities, I also found a similar range of perspectives on most major themes and topics. I believe we can cautiously assume that survey data approximately represents perspectives in Augusta.

**Existing Data Utilized**

In addition to gathering data through participant observation, interviews, and the survey, I also made use of existing data sources. Some of these sources provided important background information and context for understanding the area. Other sources provided specific information and data directly related to the results reported here. Existing data utilized varied widely.

I examined Chamber of Commerce and tourist brochures for the area, websites describing local communities and amenities, publications of guest ranches and outfitters, and the local visitors’ guide to get a sense of how people described the area. I also read literature set on the Rocky Mountain Front, including the trilogy by Ivan Doig. Local histories, including the Dupuyer community history and the Teton County history, provided information on changes in the area and how these changes were considered by residents.

I had meetings with people who could provide detailed information on certain policies and programs, including Sherwin Smith, who runs the Conservation Reserve Program in the area and Brad McBratney, who is responsible for Forest Service grazing permits. I read the publications of environmental groups, in particular the Nature Conservancy and the Montana Wilderness Association, to learn what they valued in the area and how they described the threats.

The local newspaper, the Choteau Acantha, provided information on what issues were important to local communities and kept me up to date on local current events. I also collected articles on the Rocky Mountain Front from regional and national level newspapers and magazines to better understand how the area and the issues were framed at these levels. AgriNews and
Range Magazine, publications read by many ranchers in the study site, provided a window into
discourse on ranching in the West and issues of conservation and ranching.

I examined Forest Service publications, from NEPA quarterly reports to documents on
particular resource issues, such as arctic grayling or research natural areas, to learn about agency
management direction and priorities. U.S. Census and Montana figures on income, poverty, and
population were helpful in understanding socioeconomic trends in the area. I also sought out
prior research conducted in the area, including several graduate theses.

Geographic information systems (GIS) data available through the Montana Natural
Heritage program allowed me to map land ownership for the study site. I was able map and
tabulate the proportion of the study site in private, state, and federal ownership and then further
describe the percentage in conservation easements (and who they are held by), wilderness, state
wildlife management areas, and the approximate number of acres owned by new large
landowners. GIS data was supplemented with information from interviews, community
members, and copies of conservation easements to determine these proportions.

An unlimited amount of existing data could potentially inform this project. I prioritized
based on which information could best add detail and depth to the topics I was exploring.
Furthermore, findings from exploration of existing data are reported here only where they relate
to the themes and topics described.

**How Different Kinds of Data Relate to One Another**

Varied data sources were not pursued in this study with the hope that they would
triangulate on a single interpretation or conclusion and thus confirm it as the best, only, or most
accurate. Rather, they were explored because they each provide different kinds of information,
which increases the depth and complexity of understanding.

This study utilizes different data sources for two reasons. First, different sources have
different strengths and weaknesses. Second, different data sources provide different kinds of
information that fill out the picture of what is happening on the Rocky Mountain Front.

Interviews provide a variety of information, from history and land use changes, to meaning and ideology. Census data provide detail about income, while GIS provides numbers about land ownership. The survey gives us a sense of how particular ideas are distributed in the population. Taken together, these provide a more complete picture than any one source alone.

Data sources are complementary in the sense that they provide additional detail on particular topics. For example, survey results indicate that the mountains are more important than wilderness to residents. This may seem contradictory, since they are essentially the same place. However, close examination of interview data reveals that many people think of the mountains as the physical place that they use for recreation and look at everyday. Wilderness for many people is a political designation, an agenda, rather than the actual place. These individuals might love the mountains and hate wilderness. For some such topics, one source of data can illuminate or add detail to another.

Despite the strengths of multiple data sources, there are limitations in this set of data. Even this variety of data sources cannot provide all of the information relevant to the research. For instance, while people discuss who has control of land and land use and who has the power to frame issues in the media, this study cannot quantify power in any meaningful way. I can use the evidence gathered to reach conclusions about areas where one group seems to have more power than another, but I do not have an actual measure of power to allow me to make firm assertions about who is empowered and who is marginalized.

**Criteria for Evaluating Research**

There are three kinds of criteria I suggest be utilized to evaluate this research: procedural, product-oriented, and ethical. My methods and results must be explicit and transparent enough that the reader can make judgements about the quality of this project in all three arenas. Furthermore, the project must be rigorous (precise and proceeding according to
particular rules) and systematic (ordered, standardized practices) throughout (see Patterson and
Williams (2002) for discussion of science as rigorous and systematic).

Rossman and Rallis (1998) suggest that research should be judged based on whether it
conforms to “standards of acceptable and component practice.” Keep in mind that procedural
criteria differ depending on the method employed. For example, for the mail survey, did I follow
appropriate sampling and survey design practices? For qualitative interviews, were interview
guides sufficient to allow for comparison and flexibility? Were techniques used for analysis
rigorous and systematic? However, sound research practices are necessary, but not sufficient, to
guarantee the legitimacy of a particular research project. Patterson and Williams (2002) point out
that no single set of methods can guarantee quality.

In terms of the final product, my research needs to be persuasive, as recommended by
Patterson and Williams, and convince the reader, as recommended by Holt (1991).
Persuasiveness is achieved through compelling narrative and/or logical argument. Both need to
be supported by sufficient evidence, in the form of direct quotes from interviews (“thick
description”), historical information, facts and figures, text from other written materials, and/or
detailed observations.

Written research results also need to adequately characterize complexity and explicitly
acknowledge the partial nature of the analysis. Some oversimplification is an inevitable part of
the writing process, but as Marcus and Fischer (1986) suggest, "an accurate view and confident
knowledge" requires taking "full account of intractable contradiction, paradox, irony and
uncertainty in the explanation of human activities" (p. 14). To the extent that I have effectively
represented complexity, without glossing over contradictions, and humbly acknowledged the
partial and contextualized nature of my interpretation, I have succeeded in this area.

My research also needs to provide a new and interesting analysis of a particular
phenomenon. This is related to Thompon’s (1990) criteria of insightfulness, also used by
Patterson and Williams. Thompson, building on gestalt theory, suggests insightfulness as a
perceptual criteria for qualitative work. He argues that good research provides insights into the
phenomenon being studied. This insight might come in the form of understanding patterns, how
processes and phenomenon fit together, or how they do not fit together, even if it is
counterintuitive.

Finally, my research in general and my relationship with research participants in
particular must be ethical. I was honest and open, straightforward about my role, the research
project, and the use of results. I kept confidentiality in mind at all times, and did my best to
establish equal, reciprocal, respectful relationships. I also have ethical obligations to the various
audiences interested in this project, which means not being selective with data excerpts or
misleading about research practices or results.

Provided this project meets the above criteria, research results will be useful to various
groups of people. Insightful, complex, persuasive, ethical, soundly practiced research should
inform academic theory, increase our understanding of social phenomenon, and provide useful
information to research participants.
Chapter 5:
Rural and Community Change: Shifts in Land Use and Ownership and the Coming of the “New West”

Introduction

Understanding the politics of cross-boundary natural resource management and conservation requires examining both material and discursive dimensions. This dissertation focuses on both meaning and discourse, and the different ways different people define, imagine, and act of ideas of place, property, and boundaries, as well as material changes and interests.

Historical agricultural practices, recent rural subdivision, and different kinds of conservation efforts affect local ecological conditions. Changes in land use and land ownership shift power away from some groups and toward others. Broader economic trends affect the viability of certain land uses, such as ranching, and the ability of new large landowners to afford properties. How Americans imagine rural areas affects in-migration and policy-making. How residents think about these changes influences how they respond to shifting economics and land ownership.

The information in this chapter provides context, setting the stage for a better understanding of results reported later in this dissertation. Details about ecology, history, land ownership, and local economics and demographics paint a picture of local conditions. The information reported below should be viewed as research results, not just background or context, because the data begin to answer some of the questions posed in this study. In particular, changes in land use and ownership demonstrate some movement away from production agriculture (although ranching still dominates on private lands) toward a mixture of land uses and a diversity of owners. These changes have important implications for cross-boundary management which will be addressed in later chapters.
While I focus largely on material conditions in this chapter, including economics, population, land ownership, and ecology, this chapter is also about image, meaning, and discourse. Ideas, such as how people define and imagine rural areas, and how they frame changes in land ownership, are linked to the policy initiatives different people pursue, and on-the-ground economic and biological change on the Front.

Geology and Ecology

The area referred to as the Rocky Mountain Front is well-known for beautiful scenery and extreme weather, impressive wildlife habitat and populations, and rich paleontological resources. People often describe the Front as a “dramatic” landscape, in part because of the way in which the mountains rise abruptly from the plains. The north-south ridges and canyons that typify these mountains are part of a formation known as the overthrust belt, created 70 million years ago through the tilting and sliding of sedimentary rocks (Keller, 2001). Later, between 18,000 and 10,000 years ago, mountain glaciers and the Laurentide ice sheet carved U-shaped valleys in the mountains and large eastward running plateaus in the plains (Keller, 2001). In addition to shaping the aesthetic qualities of the area, geologic events here preserved dinosaur fossils in particular anticline formations on the plains. In 1978 a new species of duck-billed dinosaur, *maiasaura peeblesorum*, and several dinosaur nests were discovered at Egg Mountain (Martinsen, 2002). The area is considered one of the most important and productive paleontological fields in North America (McMahon, 2002).

Climate and weather are also quite dramatic in the area. Weather along the Front is more erratic and variable than surrounding areas. Temperatures can fluctuate widely on a daily basis. Precipitation is incredibly variable, from 8-40”, depending on location (Alaback, 1998). The meeting of the mountains and plains make the area particularly windy (Keller, 2001). The Front also experiences frequent Chinooks, the warm winds that melt snow and rapidly increase temperatures (Moekel, 1995).
The Rocky Mountain Front is defined by ecologists as an ecotone, the boundary between the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains (Alaback, 1998). The meeting of two ecosystems and the mix of elevations on the Front (from 3800 to 9362) mean increased species diversity compared with areas to the east and west (Keller, 2001). Out on the plains, 10 or 15 miles from the mountains, a northern mixed-grass prairie can be found. Further west, the plains are predominantly rough-fescue prairie, with limber pines on the rolling hills nearest the mountains. The elimination of fire during the last 100 years has resulted in increasing encroachment of limber pine onto grasslands (Ayres, 1996). Also on the plains, several fen systems provide unique habitat for Macoun’s gentian and Yellow Lady Slipper. Cottonwoods line eastward running creeks. As the mountains begin their upward climb, a limber pine and Douglas fir forest blankets the slopes. Above 5,000 feet, forests of subalpine fir, lodgepole pine, and Engelman spruce dominate (Alaback, 1998). From 6,000 to 8,000 feet, the often-knotted subalpine fir and tall Whitebark pine are interspersed with alpine meadows. Above timberline, mountain avens and mountain heather grow in patches between rocks in the alpine tundra zone (Alaback, 1998).

The area provides habitat for a wide array of animal species. According to Salwasser (1994), the Front is one of the few places left in the lower 48 that still supports viable populations of its native large mammal fauna: moose, elk, cougars, grizzly bears, black bears, mountain sheep, mountain goats, deer, bison, wolves, lynx, fischer, wolverines, and, of course, humans. (p. 10)

The Lewis and Clark National Forest boasts 290 wildlife and fish species (McMahon, 2002). Of these, grizzly bear, gray wolf, Canada lynx, bald eagle, and peregrine falcon are currently on the federal Endangered Species list. Other species of concern include harlequin ducks, westslope cutthroat trout, and arctic grayling. The elk herd has been estimated at 3,000 (Keller, 2001). Small predators include “bobcat, coyote, red fox, badger, raccoon, marten, mink, river otter, and weasel” (Keller, 2001, p. 17). Grassland habitat on the plains is utilized by a variety of migrating
neotropic songbirds. Bison in the area are not free-roaming; they are raised in small numbers on several area ranches.

Many biologists and environmentalists consider the area ecologically unique because of high biodiversity and relatively undeveloped public and private lands. The different ways people define and imagine the Rocky Mountain Front are explored in detail in the following chapter.

**History**

Contact with Euro-Americans brought cascading and widespread change to the area. Humans are presumed to have first entered this area via the *Old North Trail*, which runs through the Rocky Mountain Front along the eastern edge of the mountains. This trail has been well traveled for approximately 12,000 years by Native Americans moving into the lower 48 from Alaska (Salwasser, 1994). The Blackfeet are believed to have gained control of the Front in the 1700s (Keller, 2001). However, the near elimination of the bison in combination with European diseases such as smallpox resulted in a rapid decline in the Blackfeet population during the 1800s. The original reservation boundaries, established by the 1855 Stephens Treaty, extended south to the Sun River and west to the Continental Divide (Keller, 2001). In 1874, the Blackfeet were further restricted to the area north of Birch Creek and in 1896 the area just east of the Continental Divide (now Glacier National Park and the Badger-Two Medicine portion of the Lewis and Clark National Forest) was acquired by the federal government (Keller, 2001).

In the 1870s the Metis (mixed French, German, Scottish, and Chippewa-Cree people) fled persecution in Canada and came to Montana in search of the remaining bison (Martinsen, 2002). One group of Metis settled in the canyon at the mouth of the South Fork of the Teton River. Their settlement is now long abandoned, but Metis people continue to live in the area and there are several local efforts to preserve their history and culture.

Cattle and sheep ranchers first came into the area between 1860 and 1880, speeded in the 1880s by the elimination of the bison, the removal of the Blackfeet, and the completion of the
railroad (Baumeister, Salwasser, and Preston, 1996). Livestock herds throughout Montana were decimated by the harsh winter of 1886-87, spelling the end of open range ranching. Pastures were fenced and herd sizes were adjusted (Keller, 2001). The Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909, which allowed settlers to acquire 320 acres, spurred large numbers of small farmers and ranchers to settle in the area. A prolonged drought began in 1919 and many settlers were already farming on lands that could not support cultivation (Keller, 2001). More than half of the small operations on the Front were foreclosed by 1925 (Baumeister, Salwasser, and Preston, 1996). At that time, there was a dramatic decrease in the rural population.

In the wake of this homesteading experiment and the realization that local conditions could not support farming, the remaining livestock operations became quite large (5,000-10,000 acres or more is usually necessary to support one family) and very little farming is now practiced in the area. (Farming is defined here as plowing of native prairie and the cultivation of non-native crop species. Ranching in the area utilizes native prairie, for the most part, with minimum dependence on non-native hay species.) The small amount of farming that does occur is located primarily on Hutterite Colonies (Smith, 2000). Previous attempts at farming caused soil erosion and loss of fertility continues as a result in some locations. Sheep ranching was also more prominent in the earlier part of the 20th century, especially in the Dupuyer area, but most ranchers now run cattle. The transition away from sheep is a result of market factors and, possibly, problems with predators.

The Lewis and Clark Forest Reserve (now the Lewis and Clark National Forest) was established in 1897, further restricting free range livestock grazing, this time in the mountains. Concern about the decline of elk, deer, and other wildlife species during the human population boom of the early 20th century is well documented and spurred the creation of the Sun River Game Preserve and the Sun River Game Range (now the Sun River Wildlife Management Area). These efforts marked the beginning of a slow transition of lands from private agricultural production to public or nonprofit wildlife conservation.
Historically, there has been little timber harvest in the area. There were small mills at the mouths of several canyons in the early 20th century, but they produced boards primarily for local consumption and quickly exhausted the small amount of timber that was easily accessible. Presently, wood coming from the National Forest is utilized exclusively for local post, pole, and firewood needs.

Hutterites began migrating into the area from Canada in the 1950s. The Hutterites are an Anabaptist group who own property communally, and primarily farm and ranch. While they dress in homemade, traditional clothing, speak a German dialect, and educate their children on the colonies, they embrace most modern farming techniques and technologies. There are three Colonies (Miller, Rockport, and Birch Creek) entirely within the study site, and two Colonies (Milford and Pondera) partly within the study site. Hutterites are only occasionally seen in local communities. Because colonies have no labor costs and low costs of living, purchase large properties, and are often very productive, there is some local resentment toward them.

The end of World War II and the onset of the cold war brought yet another change to this landscape. Like many areas on the Northern Great Plains, the Front hosts numerous below-ground missile silos. The silos are readily visible from public roads, but rarely spoken of in local communities. Professor of Wildlife Biology Jack Ward Thomas argued in 1999 that the placement of these weapons on the Front meant that America regarded the area as a sacrifice zone.

Different groups of people have moved into and through this landscape changing local culture and land use. In many ways the period of 1860 through 1950 involved a series of experiments with different kinds of economic activities that culminated with large family ranches, interspersed by a few Hutterite Colonies. Family ranching seemed to have settled in on the Front. However, the beginnings of new and different changes were around the corner.
Local Communities: Economic, Employment, Population, and Demographic Trends

More recent changes in economics, employment, and population can be assessed in part through national and state figures for resident communities and counties. Communities in the study site include Dupuyer (approx. 40 pop.) (settled 1877), Bynum (approx. 100 pop.) (settled 1878), Choteau (1781 pop.) (settled 1877), and Augusta (approx. 500 pop.) (settled 1864). There are also portions of three counties within the study site (see Table 5-1 for details on these counties).

Table 5-1: Lewis and Clark, Pondera, and Teton Counties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>County Seat</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Square Miles</th>
<th>Community in Study Site</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lewis &amp; Clark</td>
<td>Helena</td>
<td>55,716</td>
<td>3,476</td>
<td>Augusta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pondera</td>
<td>Conrad</td>
<td>6,424</td>
<td>1,645</td>
<td>Dupuyer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teton</td>
<td>Choteau</td>
<td>6,445</td>
<td>2,294</td>
<td>Choteau and Bynum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Montana Association of Counties, 2002)

The bulk of the study site is in Teton County. However, approximately half of Teton County lies to the east of the study site. Teton County is a small, rural county, with the county seat, Choteau, within the study site. For these reasons, aggregate data for Teton County is used here to approximate trends within the study site. Keep in mind that the eastern portion of Teton County, which is not part of the study site, is primarily farming country (predominant crops include malting barley and winter wheat, with some hay, canola, and durum and spring wheat), whereas the study site is primarily cattle ranching country. Despite these limitations, census data and other information on Teton County provides a window into population and economic changes in the study site, which reveal a new set of changes beginning in the late 1970s. Interspersed with information on Teton County, Community Land Use Survey results are also described below. Community Land Use Survey results are specific to the portion of Teton County that is within the study site boundaries.
The total Teton County population has changed very little in the last 80 years. However, the population is aging and growth is occurring in the western portion of the county (the area within the study site). The county lost 220 people in the 1980s and gained 174 people in the 1990s (McMahon, 2002). During the 1990s Teton County grew 2.8%, compared with 13% growth for all of Montana. In 2000, the County was 96% white, 1.5% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 1.5% two or more races (McMahon, 2002).

Community Land Use Survey results indicate that, for the Western portion of Teton County (the area within the study site), 95.5% of people identify their community as Choteau and 4.5% as Bynum (all residents self-identify with a particular town, even when they live in a remote location many miles from that community). Many more people live in or next to town (73%) than out of town (27%). The average age was 52 years old, and the average length of residence in the County was 31 years.

Planning consultant Kate McMahon (2002) recently described Teton County's economy as diverse in comparison to many rural counties on the Great Plains. The number of jobs in wholesale trade, and in transportation and public utilities exceeds state averages. The presence of the Three Rivers Telephone Cooperative and an Anheuser-Busch facility in Fairfield (located east of the study site) partly account for this diversity.

Teton County has more proprietor employment (people who are self-employed or who own their own business, a category that would include most farmers and ranchers) at 40% than the state as a whole at 26% (McMahon, 2002). However, Community Land Use Survey results show only 25% as self-employed, indicating a potential difference between the eastern and western portions of the county.

The Teton County economy is also more agriculturally-oriented when compared with the entire state. In 1998, farm employment (which includes farms and ranches) was 23% of all jobs compared with 6% in Montana (McMahon, 2002). Community Land Use Survey results for the western portion of the county indicate that 29% of respondents are farmers, ranchers, or
employed in agricultural services or labor. In 2001, there were 56,000 head of cattle and calves in Teton County (Martinsen, 2002). In the county, farming and ranching are the primary occupation for 73% of operators. However, full-time farm or ranch operators decreased by 7% between 1992 and 1997 (McMahon, 2002). This decrease could mean that more agricultural producers have employment outside of farms and ranches. The decrease might also result from the sale of agricultural lands to non-farmers and ranchers.

The total number of jobs rose 25% in Teton County between 1970 and 1998 (McMahon, 2002). This increase occurred in every category except farm proprietors, farm employment, and services (McMahon, 2002). Keep in mind that these jobs are not necessarily fulltime, and the increase in total jobs might also reflect the number of people holding two or more part-time jobs. This increase might also reflect an increase in women entering the workforce during this period.

Community Land Use Survey results provide additional details about employment and occupation in the western portion of Teton County. Survey respondents were asked to identify to describe their employment status and their occupation (see Table 5-2). While respondents were instructed to check one occupation, a large number of people checked more than one occupation and the data was entered to retain this information. This may indicate that many people in the area are holding more than one job. However, we cannot know if respondents who only checked one occupation would have selected another if instructed to do so.

Table 5-2: Employment and Occupation (Community Land Use Survey Responses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment Status</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>employed</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>retired</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-employed</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>homemaker</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>part-time employed</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>student</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>volunteer</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unemployed</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Occupation
20% service industry
14% ranching
13% government/government enterprises
10% homemaking
10% retail trade
9% nonprofit/charitable organization
8% agricultural services or labor
8% construction
7% farming
6% health care
5% education
3% manufacturing
2% telecommunications or public utilities
2% finances
2% insurance
2% wholesale trade
2% mechanic
1% real estate

The median income for Teton County households was $30,197 in 2000, compared with $33,024 in all of Montana. When adjusted for inflation, county residents are earning far less today than 30 years ago. Average income per job (adjusted for inflation) was $43,250 in 1973. In 1998, it was $17,791 (McMahon, 2002). This marked decrease likely reflects a peak in agricultural prices during the early 1970s. It could also reflect a shift toward part-time employment.

Total personal income from farms and ranches (adjusted for inflation) decreased from $48.1 million in 1970 to $11.4 million in 1998 (McMahon, 2002). Non-farm earnings and income from dividends, interest, transfer payments, and rent increased during the same period (McMahon, 2002). The increase in dividends, interest, and transfer payments reflects the aging population and the number of retirees in the area.

Unemployment rates in the county have been consistently lower than state averages (2.1% in 2000 according to the U.S. Census Bureau and 1% for respondents to the Community Land Use Survey). However, census figures indicate that in 1999, 12% of families, 33% of families with children under 5 years old, and 17% of individuals were below the poverty line.
Despite lower unemployment, a median income only somewhat lower that the state of Montana, and a relatively diversified economy, many people in Teton County are struggling economically. Low unemployment figures, combined with increasing number of jobs, and relatively high poverty figures may indicate underemployment in the area. Many people may be partially employed or hold several part-time jobs, but remain below the poverty line.

Other results from the Community Land Use Survey provide insights into the background and education of residents (see Table 5-3). Responses indicate that most people in the study site grew up on farms or ranches or in small towns of 5,000 people or less, which is certainly not the norm for the general U.S. population. While 94% of respondents graduated from high school, only 35% completed a college degree.

Table 5-3: Places People Grew Up and Level of Education
Community Land Use Survey Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Places People Spent most of their time while growing up (to age 18)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>33% on a farm or ranch</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14% rural or small town [under 1,000 population]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21% town [1,000 - 5,000 population]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10% small city [5,000 - 10,000 population]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13% medium city [50,000 - 1 million population]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3% major city or metropolitan area [over 1 million population]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest Level of Education Completed</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3%  8th grade or less</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2% some high school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29% high school graduate or GED</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30% some college, business or trade school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19% college graduate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7% some graduate school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9% master’s, doctoral or professional degree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary, communities in the study site are beginning to experience population growth and rural subdivision, but most people continue to live in town. Ranching is declining, but remains an important and large part of the local economy. The local economy is diversified and residents are almost keeping pace with statewide income levels, but high poverty figures indicate
that many people are struggling to make ends meet and are potentially underemployed. Unlike most of America, most residents grew up on a farm or ranch, or in a small town.

**Rural Restructuring and a New Wave of Change on the Rocky Mountain Front**

This new set of changes, only just beginning on the Rocky Mountain Front, is often referred to as rural restructuring. Rural restructuring involves economic, demographic, social, and land use changes common to many communities in the Intermountain West and to rural areas in many industrialized countries. (The Intermountain West refers here to those areas east of the populated coastal areas of California, Oregon, and Washington, but west of the Great Plains.) Nelson (2001) characterizes these changes in the following diagram.

![Diagram showing Altered Human-Land Relationships](image)

*Shifts in Economic Sectors*  
*In and Out Migration*

While people often think of the Front as a part of the Great Plains, where rural areas are experiencing a depopulation, the Front’s proximity to mountains and public lands means it has much in common with the Intermountain West. One recent study of Montana revealed that communities on the eastern side of the Rockies share neither the rapid growth of Western Montana, nor the stagnation and depopulation of Eastern Montana (Swanson, 2002). Instead, these communities are growing and changing in similar ways to Western Montana, but at a much slower pace.

Communities in the study site are just beginning to experience the trends that characterize what some observers call the “New West.” These communities may be perched on the cusp of change, with newcomers beginning to migrate into the area and an increasing number of rural subdivisions. A closer look at the trends and transitions that have gripped the
Intermountain West provides a picture of what kinds of changes are beginning in resident communities and what the future might look like. However, this future is by no means predetermined, and many large scale social and economic factors, such as the U.S. economy, the public's sense of security, trends among the rich, local planning and conservation efforts, the price of beef, and potential oil and gas drilling in the study site, will affect whether or not local communities follow the path of so many other mountain towns in the Intermountain West.

*Trends from Beyond the Region*

Many international economic trends are influencing rural change in the Intermountain West. Changing patterns of production and consumption in rural areas are partly caused by larger global restructuring trends (Takahashi, 1999). Historically dominant industries, such as ranching, are increasingly vulnerable to market changes. While livestock production on the Rocky Mountain Front has always depended on outside markets, agricultural producers feel increasingly powerless in the face of international trade agreements and a perceived meat packing monopoly. In fact, ranchers face increasing competition from domestic and foreign producers (Takahashi, 1999). And, while the price of beef has remained relatively stable for the past 20 years, costs of production have steadily increased, diminishing the profitability of ranching. Ranchers have little or no control over commodity prices, finished products, marketing, and many other economic factors that determine their ability to make a living. On the Rocky Mountain Front, a recent drought (from 1998 though 2001) further diminished the ability of many family ranchers to make a living.

Researchers documenting the economic changes happening in the “New West” often focus on the recent diversification of the economy, the movement away from historic extractive activities toward high technology and service employment. However, on the Rocky Mountain Front, agriculture, while shrinking somewhat, remains an important component of a somewhat
diversified economy. And to date, the study site has not become an “investment frontier” like many other communities in the Intermountain West.

Another economic trend affecting the study site is the increase in wealth in America in the last decade or two. More and more people have a disposable income and the desire and ability to visit and settle in scenic, rural areas. Furthermore, changes in technology and transportation have made rural areas less isolated and more accessible (Johnson and Beale, 1998). Internet access is available in resident communities and modern highways make the city of Great Falls and a full service airport only 50 minutes from Choteau.

**New Images of Rural Areas**

New images of rural areas are also affecting changes in the Intermountain West. Ideas of rural, just like concepts of nature and community, are socially and culturally constructed. While there are multiple and contested definitions of *rural*, changing images of rural and “countryside” areas influence America’s current fascination with the West and the transitions many Western communities are undergoing. In many industrialized countries, there has been increasing interest in nature and growing concern with the current conditions of urban environments (Butler, 1998). Rural areas are increasingly seen as “orderly, harmonious, healthy, secure, peaceful, and a refuge from modernity” (Ilbery, 1998, p. 3). Similarly, the American West is now viewed as a refuge, remedy, and antidote (Limerick, 1997). Limerick (1997) describes the growing popularity of the West:

In the 1990s, the West is very popular indeed: popular as a remedy for social and personal discontent; popular as a setting for movies, documentaries, novels, essays, and memoirs; popular as a source of imagery for commercially appealing clothing, jewelry, furniture, buildings, and interiors; popular as a place of inspiration for seekers after spiritual connection in a disconnected world; and, perhaps most consequentially, popular as a residential sanctuary for prosperous emigrants from the East and West Coasts. (p. 154)

Riebsame (1997) argues that “the latest New Westerners are embarked on a ‘national vision quest’ to create a new American region, one that fits their lifestyles and desires for a new sense of
place" (p. 94). Migrants to the West often bring new and different values and attitudes with them, but also value and purchase what they consider to be traditional or authentic Western activities, such as rodeos and cowboy poetry (Riebsame, 1997).

**Recreation, Tourism, and Public Lands**

While tourism remains at a small scale in the study site, it has skyrocketed in other areas of the Intermountain West. The region, in this sense, is not only refuge, but playground. While some economists have hailed tourism as the magic bullet for communities transitioning out of natural resource-based industries, critics have described tourism as “the devil’s bargain” (Rothman, 1998). The Rocky Mountain Front lies between Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks, has the cachet of the Bob Marshall Wilderness, and can claim to be America’s Serengeti, but tourism in the area is largely limited to pheasant and big game hunters in the fall, a few bird watchers in the spring, visitors to the Wilderness or local guest ranches, and amateur paleontologists. There are a few small motels in Choteau, but the area has hardly been transformed by tourism in the manner of the gateway communities surrounding Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks.

In a 1991 survey of Teton County residents, responses were generally positive towards tourism, but most respondents did not believe that tourism would increase their standard of living (Martin, 1991). The top two disadvantages to tourism cited by Teton County residents were “out-of-staters discovering Montana and buying up land” and “higher prices for goods and services.”

Forest Service managers and residents in the study site agree that recreation on National Forest lands in the study site has increased. In addition, trends on this forest mirror changes that move public land management toward preservation throughout the West. In the last few decades, management and policy on public lands have shifted, to some extent, away from natural resource extraction toward recreation and preservation (Laitos and Carr, 1999). According to Laitos and Carr (1999), “recreation on multiple-use lands is increasing at a dramatic pace, while lands
dedicated to preservation are expanding in both scope and area” (p. 2). Where public land grazing fits into this shift has not yet been determined.

The Lewis and Clark National Forest does not require visitors in obtain permits and managers have little specific information on recreational use. Managers and residents believe that most people recreating in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex are nonresidents. However, several studies indicate that high number of residents also use public lands for recreation. In a 1991 survey of Teton County residents, 84% of respondents said they recreated on the Rocky Mountain Front (Martin, 1991). In the Community Land Use Survey 4% of respondents used National Forest lands for commercial outfitting, 7% for livestock grazing, and 87% for recreation. Respondents also identified a wide range of recreational activities that they participated in (see Table 5-4).

Table 5-4: Types of National Forest Recreation (Community Land Use Survey Responses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>scenic drives</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>camping</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wildlife viewing</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fishing</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hiking</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>visiting the Wilderness</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hunting</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skiing at Teton Pass</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>horsepacking</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>backpacking</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cross-country skiing</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>snowmobiling</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>backcountry snowshoeing/skiing</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATV/motorbiking</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>horseback riding</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>picnicking</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wood gathering</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most recent decisions about the management of roadless non-Wilderness lands on the Lewis and Clark National Forest reveal an overall trend toward preservation and conservation. However,
recent efforts to drill for natural gas in the area illustrate how dependent these priorities are on the goals and objectives of the administration in power.

**Land Ownership and Land Use Change**

In examining land ownership and land use trends in the study site for the last century, it is clear that many changes began long before the advent of the so-called “New West,” but have accelerated in the last 10-15 years. Overall there has been a slow shift away from ownership by family ranchers towards public and newcomer ownership. However, framing this transition as an inevitable shift away from livestock production may be misleading. Ownership is certainly shifting; while private land ownership in the study site remains predominantly with family ranchers, there is definitely a trend toward newcomer and conservation ownership. (See Table 5-5 for figures on current land ownership in the study site.)

As discussed earlier, prior to white settlement different Native American groups used the area (although the Blackfeet dominated after the early 1700s) during different times of the year. In 1880, ranching was on the rise, but the area was open range. White settlers were free to graze cattle and sheep anywhere on the plains or the mountains. Ranchers made adjustments in response to harsh conditions, including fencing and “privatizing” what was previously a somewhat unregulated commons. The establishment of the Forest Reserves (which later became National Forests) further restricted free movement of livestock.

As conservation interest on the part of residents and nonresidents in the area grew, beginning as early as the turn of the 20th century, lands were taken out of agricultural production for the purposes of providing for wildlife habitat (at first with a focus on winter range for game animals and later with a focus on endangered species). Some of these areas were designated on lands already in public ownership, such as the Sun River Game Preserve, which is entirely within the Lewis and Clark National Forest. Livestock were eliminated from the Sun River Game Preserve by 1934 (Keller, 2001). Other areas were purchased from private landowners, such as
all three of the state Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). These WMAs allow livestock
grazing, but they are owned and managed by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

Preservation of summer and winter range has assisted in the restoration of big game herds
(the local elk herd is currently estimated at 3,000 by state wildlife officials) and endangered
species such as the grizzly bear. In some instances, winter range on public lands for ungulates
has taken pressure off private ranchlands. In other instances, rising wildlife populations have
meant increasing competition between livestock and wildlife for forage on private lands,
increasing livestock depredations and local resentment. At the same time, opportunities for big
game hunting have, on the whole, increased.

Wilderness designations on the National Forest provided further protection for ecological
and recreational values, and further restricted certain development activities. In 1941, the Sun
River, Pentagon, and South Fork Primitive Areas were established by the Forest Service. These
areas were designated as the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area by the U.S. Congress in 1964 with
the passage of the Wilderness Act. With more recent additions, the Bob Marshall totals
1,009,356 acres, with 300,000 acres within the study site. The Scapegoat Wilderness Area was
designated in 1972 and totals 239,936 acres, including 84,407 acres in the study site. The
Scapegoat is widely considered the first “citizen’s” wilderness area, because it was designated
through the efforts of Montana residents and environmental groups as opposed to the efforts of
the Forest Service.

The purchase of several ranches by the Nature Conservancy and a ranch by the Boone
and Crockett Club heralded the increasing interest and investment of non-profit conservation
organizations in the area. Both organizations graze cattle on their properties, with Boone and
Crockett managing their own herd and the Nature Conservancy leasing to neighboring private
ranchers. Despite the large numbers of acres owned by the Nature Conservancy (presently
15,485 acres), the organization is likely to impact land use in the area far more through
conservation easements. The Nature Conservancy has purchased conservation easements on
24,696 acres of private lands in the study site. Montana Land Reliance is the only other non-governmental organization with easements on the Front (one easement for 6,766 acres). One government agency, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, holds easements in the area totaling 12,880 acres. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is currently pursuing Congressional designation of the Front as a project site, which would enable additional easements to be purchased in the area. In the study site, easements have been established with both newcomers and family ranchers.

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) has had some impact on land use in the study site. CRP was established by Congress in 1985 to provide financial compensation to agricultural producers for taking marginal lands out of production for 10 years. The program is for cultivated lands only and requires landowners to replant the area in some combination of native and/or nonnative plants to conserve soil and provide wildlife habitat. Despite lofty conservation goals, CRP has been criticized for encouraging landowners to plow up native grasslands to become eligible for federal funding. In 1999 24% of the private lands in Teton County were in CRP (the limit is 25%) (Smith, 1999). However, only 10% of those lands were within the study site defined for this project. In fact, the proportion of CRP lands within the study site is decreasing because ranchers often need to utilize all of their lands to stay in production (Smith, 2000). The primary impact of CRP on local communities has been fewer farmers purchasing seed, fertilizer, equipment, and other supplies in local communities, resulting in many businesses folding in the last 15 years (Smith, 2000). Respondents to the Community Land Use Survey were divided in their opinion about whether CRP had been a benefit to local communities. While 23% strongly disagreed that CRP was a benefit to local communities, 16% strongly agreed it was, and 13% didn’t know.

Livestock production and family ranching are still the dominant land use on private lands, and most landowners have grazing leases on state lands and some on federal lands. As noted above, despite the continued dominance of ranching, there has been a slow shift away from lands
in production agriculture over the last 100 years. In some cases production agriculture still exists on lands where wildlife values are prioritized. Private land ownership has shifted somewhat away from families and towards state and national governments, and conservation organizations. To date, this shift has served to restore wildlife populations in the area, without wholly removing agriculture from the landscape. However, combined with the establishment of Hutterite Colonies and the recent arrival of newcomers, covered later in this chapter, these changes represent important alterations in land use and ownership, and in which groups of people and whose interests hold sway on the Rocky Mountain Front.

Table 5-5: Land Ownership in the Study Site
Figures computed for the area within the study site boundaries described in Chapter 4. The boundaries are the continental divide, highways 200, 287, and 89, and Birch Creek.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Ownership/Designation</th>
<th>Acres</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entire Study Site</td>
<td>1,474,743*</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Private Lands (not including TNC or TRMR)</strong></td>
<td>635,437*</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature Conservancy Easements</td>
<td>24,396</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US Fish and Wildlife Service Easements (6 landowners)</td>
<td>12,880</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana Land Reliance Easement (all Broken O)</td>
<td>6,766</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks Easement</td>
<td>313*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hutterite Colonies</td>
<td>34,027</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Forest Service (Rocky Mountain Ranger District)</strong></td>
<td>620,513*</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Wilderness</td>
<td>365,041*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roadless, nonwilderness</td>
<td>200,248*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roaded and/or developed</td>
<td>55,224</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun River Game Preserve (1913)</td>
<td>195,877</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walling Reef and Wagner Basin Research Natural Areas</td>
<td>1,513*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Non-Forest Service Federal Lands</strong></td>
<td>46,503</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Bureau of Land Management</td>
<td>25,871*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outstanding Natural Areas</td>
<td>13,078*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bureau of Reclamation</td>
<td>15,497*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US Fish and Wildlife Service</td>
<td>5,095*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bureau of Indian Affairs</td>
<td>40*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Increasing Population

According to Riebsame (1997), "Americans created the New West by moving about, changing attitudes and jobs, and revising their relationships to each other and the land" (p. 94).

The Intermountain West, like many rural areas, experienced a population decline in the 1980s, followed by a somewhat unexpected population boom in the 1990s. While Teton County only grew 2.8% during the 1990s, the Intermountain West as a whole was the fastest growing region in the U.S. during the 1990s (Hansen et al, 2002). In the last decade of the 20th century, 67% of the counties in the Rocky Mountains grew faster than the national average (Beyers and Nelson, 2000). Retirees, wealthy young adults, and computer industry professionals are among the
groups of people moving into the region (Nelson, 1999). Some economists argue that natural
amenities, scenery, wilderness, wildlife, and opportunities for outdoor recreation, are attracting
these newcomers (Johnson and Rasker, 1995; Power, 1996).

A 1991 study by Rudzitis and Johansen of 15 Western counties with Wilderness found
that 60% of respondents cited the presence of designated Wilderness as an important reason why
they moved to that county. Rasker and Hansen (2000) also found that population growth in rural
counties around the Yellowstone area was correlated with the presence of nature preserves
(designated wilderness, national parks, or wildlife refuges) and the presence of mountains.
However, they also found that proximity to major airports was an important factor in population
growth.

Many analysts believe that net in-migration to the Intermountain West will only continue
with the increasing number of retirees in the U.S. as the babyboomer generation moves out of the
workforce (Riebsame, 1997). However, some research suggests that aggregate migration
statistics oversimplify the dynamics of in and out migration in the Intermountain West. In a
cross-section of community-level studies, Beyers and Nelson (2000) found that people moved to
the region for the social and cultural amenities as much as the natural amenities. They also
discovered that many migrants were not retirees, or were retirees who still worked in some
capacity, and that many people sacrificed higher pay for quality of life when moving to the
region, or migrated and failed to make it economically.

Numbers alone do not tell the story of social, economic, and land use change in the
Intermountain West. Newcomers bring new ideas and desires; they build larger homes, drink
different beer and coffee than historic residents; they seek the “authentic” West, but not
necessarily their neighbor’s cattle mooing all night. They simultaneously stress services in small
towns and set up new businesses. Where these newcomers choose to play and live is also critical
to social and environmental change. For the most part, newcomers are not settling in town or
returning to farming. Instead, they are dispersing across the landscape in ranchettes and rural subdivisions (Johnson and Beale, 1998).

**Rural Residential Subdivision**

There is increasing evidence that the most productive and diverse lands in the Intermountain West are the privately-owned valley bottoms. These are also the location of rapid, profound, and seemingly permanent land use change. Increasing rural residential subdivision is markedly impacting land use, local culture, and ecology. Many newcomers want to live out of town, to be in closer proximity to the natural amenities that they value, usually in these very valley bottoms.

A number of studies examining the biological impacts of rural subdivision have recently emerged. Rural residential development often occurs in biodiversity hot spots, such as riparian corridors in low elevation valleys. Because of the areas that new rural residents favor, subdivision has a disproportionate impact on wildlife and biodiversity in general (Hansen and Rotella, 2002). Furthermore, some studies indicate that impacts in lower elevation areas affect the ability of nearby protected areas to sustain certain wildlife species (Hansen and Rotella, 2002). Rural subdivision development affects soil, water, vegetation, and wildlife (Maestas, Knight, and Gilgert, 2001). Homes, roads, pets, vehicles, and the spread of nonnative flora and fauna directly and indirectly impact biodiversity (Maestas, Knight, and Gilgert, 2001). Maestas, Knight, and Gilgert (2001) compared songbird, carnivore, and plant communities in protected areas, ranchlands, and rural residential developments; they found that ranches and protected areas supported more biodiversity than rural subdivisions.

According to Puckett (1999), state and federal agency staff see subdivision as the "biggest threat to the elk, grizzlies, bighorn sheep, and scores of other wildlife that still inhabit" the Rocky Mountain Front. Between 1990 and 2000 there were 69 major subdivisions of 140 lots in Teton County (McMahon, 2002). During the same period, 142 requests for new septic permits...
(perhaps a better indicator of actual sale of and construction on a property) were approved
(McMahon, 2002). Septic permit requests increased between 1997 and 2000. These new
subdivisions are not necessarily occupied year round; many are vacation homes.

Newcomers and Large Ownerships

The Teton County data outlined above indicate a growing rate of subdivision in the study
site. What these numbers do not reveal is the number of ranches that have been purchased whole
by newcomers, people with incomes and, in most cases, primary residences, situated outside of
Montana. In the last 20 years, several types of newcomers have purchased large properties in the
study site. During the 1980s, the owner of Kelly Moore Paint purchased 10-12 family ranches
near Augusta and created the Broken O, a corporate ranch with the goal of for-profit cattle
ranching. This is the only ranch in the study site that is widely regarded by residents as a
corporate ranch, although many family ranches are technically incorporated. The Broken O totals
about 135,000 acres, although only about 10,000 acres are within the study site.

Other types of newcomers purchasing large properties include hobby ranchers and
conservation buyers. These individuals have sizable incomes or inheritances from retail,
investment banking, radio and television, and other occupations. A handful are famous (such as
David Letterman), but most are not celebrities. Some allow cattle grazing on their property,
usually leasing to nearby ranchers. Nearly all prioritize conservation goals over production
agriculture on their property. Approximately 11-12 large properties were purchased by these new
owners in the last 15 years, and none have turned over since the original transition from ranch
family to newcomer. Only two of these newcomers live in the study site year round. All others
reside in the study site between several weeks and six months of the year.

All together, since 1985, approximately 60,000 deeded acres in the study site have been
sold to new large landowners, including corporate owners (this does not include small parcels in
rural subdivisions) (figures compiled from the Montana Cadastral Mapping Project and from
interview data). This constitutes 9% of the total private lands in the study site. Keep in mind, however, that deeded acres do not necessarily reflect total area controlled by these owners. Like ranchers, they usually have grazing leases on state or federal lands.

While transfer of ownership from family ranchers to new large landowners does not have the same ecological impacts as rural residential subdivision, many residents are concerned about large landowners who do not prioritize agricultural production. The stark difference in economic resources between these two groups also inspires new tensions around class. How residents and landowners are negotiating these changes, in particular with regarding to cross-boundary natural resource use and conservation is covered later in this dissertation.

**Rural Gentrification**

Newcomers with outside sources of income, purchasing both large ranches and smaller rural subdivisions, have driven up land prices throughout the Intermountain West (Gober, McHugh, and Leclerc, 1993). Along the Rocky Mountain Front, agricultural prices for ranchlands, depending on the condition and productivity of the range, are believed to be valued at somewhere between $150 and $400 per acre. This is the price a rancher could afford and still make an income producing livestock. Prices are now as high as $2,000 per acre for large properties, and $10,000 per acre for small lots in subdivisions. Agricultural producers do not pay higher taxes as a result; they remain in the agricultural tax bracket which is unaffected by “recreational” land values. However, the consequence is that ranching families cannot expand operations, new ranchers cannot move into the area, and ranch family children cannot purchase the ranch next door if there is not enough land for everyone in the family to make a living. If prices remain high, which is likely, ranches that come up for sale will be purchased by newcomers. Even the Nature Conservancy and Hutterite Colonies are struggling to afford land acquisition in the area. Chapter 7 explores residents' perspectives on newcomer change, including the impacts of gentrification.
Conclusion

Communities and land use on the Rocky Mountain Front have undergone marked changes in the last century. Different groups of people have moved into and through the area changing local culture and people’s relationships with land. A series of public land acquisitions and designations have moved portions of the landscape toward preservation and wildlife conservation. These changes reflect shifting ideas about rural places, agriculture, and land ownership. Social, economic, and land use trends also affect the ways people think about and respond to social and material change in their communities.

The displacement of Native Americans and subsequent attempts to establish a workable form of agriculture in the area characterize the late 1800s and early 1900s. Since the depression and the failure of small homesteads in early 1900s, large livestock ranches have been the dominant land use on private lands. However, communities on the Rocky Mountain Front are beginning to experience the rural restructuring common to the Intermountain West, including increasing rural subdivision, changing economic trends, purchase of large properties by new landowners, rising land prices, and shifting priorities on public lands. These changes have important material consequences, both economic and biological, and are influenced by broader economic trends at national and international levels.

The changes described above are echoed throughout the American West, and in many rural areas of Europe. Many of these changes reflect a shift from a production to a consumption focus in rural areas (Ilbery, 1998, Nelson, 2001). Instead of rural places producing food, fiber, and other natural resource commodities for urban markets, people from urban areas are now, quite literally, consuming the countryside, through recreation and tourism, and the purchase of new residences or second homes. “Rural” has become the commodity. New uses of rural space have emerged, including conservation, tourism, hobby ranching, and private nature preserves.

While there is ample evidence that communities on the Rocky Mountain Front are beginning to change in many of the ways suggested by rural restructuring and “New West”
literature, the area has not been wholly transformed and its trajectory is not predetermined. Scholarship on the "New West" tends to dismiss historic economic activities, such as ranching, and assumes that the West is inevitably transitioning away from these industries. However, as Beyers and Nelson (2000) suggest, this transformation may be overstated since ranching and other historic industries continue and even dominate many communities. In some places, such as the Rocky Mountain Front, the New West and Old West exist side by side. Family ranchers remain an important part of the local economy and the dominant private landowners. Ranchers are, therefore, critical players in cross-boundary conservation in many parts of the West.

It is unlikely, given current conditions and trends, that the Rocky Mountain Front will follow the Great Plains toward a gradual depopulation and stagnation. Whether these communities are just beginning to enter a rapid period of growth and change, or whether they will chart a course somewhat different from most of the Intermountain West remains to be seen. Growth in population and rural subdivision is moderate, but increasing; economic pressures are causing a slow, but significant decline in agricultural production; new wealthy landowners are gradually purchasing properties that ranchers can no longer afford. The social and physical landscape is certainly changing.

While the rural restructuring literature is well-developed in Great Britain, and researchers in the U.S. have begun to explore regional trends in the American West, there are few studies examining how these changes affect actual communities in the region (Nelson, 2001; Takahashi, 1999). In one of the few such studies, Nelson (2001) found that residents interpreted changes in remarkably diverse ways. According to Nelson (2001), restructuring may lead to new meanings and identities. Nelson argues that "commonly agreed upon ideas about land use, family, and class are challenged or altered in light of contemporary changes" (p. 405). The rural restructuring research emerging in the last decade from Great Britian highlights the importance of class and widening income gaps (Murdoch and Marsden, 1994; Ilbery, 1998). In the West, Nelson (2001) suggests that rural change calls into question ideas about class previously based on property
ownership. Other studies reveal local conflicts about land use and environmental regulation, and new ideas about public and private properties are increasing tension in the rural West.

Rural change challenges ideas about nature and sense of place, community identity, ranching, land use and conservation, public and private properties, and class. Questions of equity and power are embedded in these challenges. Issues of rural identity are not just about who gets to claim to be the “true” Westerner. They are about who claims the actual place, both biophysical landscape and local community. Who claims the Rocky Mountain Front? Whose image and definition of the Front frames natural resources issues in the area? In the following chapter I explore the discursive struggle for the future of the Rocky Mountain Front.
Chapter 6:
The Creation of the Rocky Mountain Front and the Politics of Image and Meaning

Introduction

In the previous chapter I described the processes of rural change occurring in the study site – newcomers purchasing large and small properties, economic restructuring and its effects on ranching, changing images of the countryside. Rural restructuring has implications for land use, livelihood, and local economies. Rural change also heralds potential renegotiation of meaning – the meaning of community, land ownership, and place.

Paralleling the rural restructuring described in chapter 5, another transformation has been taking place in the study site. The Rocky Mountain Front is increasingly in the regional and national conservation spotlight, subject to external attention and scrutiny. How the Front and natural resource issues there are defined and framed, both by residents and nonresidents, is important for understanding the politics of cross-boundary conservation. To better understand these place meanings and the discursive struggle for the Rocky Mountain Front, the following questions are addressed in this chapter. How do different groups of people define and imagine the Rocky Mountain Front? Are place meanings associated with particular political goals, material interests, or policy agendas? Do distinct discourses emerge and what are they?

While the biophysical place that people call the Rocky Mountain Front has been around for hundreds of thousands of years, the area’s identity as a conservation hotspot is fairly recent. In many ways, environmentalists, biologists, and agency personnel “created” the Rocky Mountain Front. Below I describe how the name Rocky Mountain Front was popularized by wilderness advocates in the 1980s in order to draw attention to the unique biological qualities of the area as well as threats to those qualities. I also discuss different ideas about the location of the Rocky
Mountain Front and how those differences hint at distinctions between public and private properties.

I then describe different people's place meanings - the images, values, and beliefs they hold about the study site. Examining these different senses of place provides a window into how people think about the landscape as a whole, across property boundaries. Two distinct discourses emerge, each associated with particular material interests, ideas about legitimate use, and, in some cases, political goals. The first discourse, promoted by environmentalists and newcomers, defines the area as wild, natural, and a valuable remnant of a lost past. The second discourse, deployed by residents, describes a working landscape of community, agricultural production, and natural beauty. These discourses are politicized because they are associated with very different visions for future land use and land management in the study site, and they are actively promoted by advocates for those visions.

While the two views of the Rocky Mountain Front described above appear to be mutually exclusive, there may be a third discourse emerging that envisions livelihood and conservation, and ranching and wildlife as compatible. I briefly describe this viewpoint at the end of this chapter, and revisit it later on in this dissertation.

The Conservation Spotlight

During the last 20 years, there has been increasing national conservation attention to the Rocky Mountain Front. The area is the top priority for the Montana Nature Conservancy, partly because the Front is the last place in the Lower 48 where grizzly bears still migrate onto the prairie. According to Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, the Front is in the top 1% of wildlife habitat in North America. Furthermore, wilderness advocates are pushing for wilderness designation of Forest Service roadless lands. According to a Forest Service employee, it is "politically sexy" for environmentalists to focus on the Front because of the presence of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex.
Recent precedent-setting Forest Service decisions indicate that national conservation efforts have been successful in affecting policy and management on federal lands. In 1996, former Lewis and Clark Forest Supervisor Gloria Flora banned oil and gas leasing for 15 years on Forest Service lands in the area. In 2001, Forest Service Chief Mike Dombeck withdrew Forest Service lands on the Front from mineral entry. This is the largest area ever withdrawn from mineral entry by the Forest Service.

Both of these decisions were covered in front-page articles in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* (Cushman, 1999; Kenworthy, 1997a and 1997b). Articles on the Rocky Mountain Front have appeared in numerous national magazines and newspapers, including the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Hartford Courant*, and the *Christian Science Monitor* (Whitman, 2000; Knickerbocker, 1999; Halloran, 2001). Coverage of natural resource and conservation issues on the Front has also been common in regional newspapers, in particular the *Great Falls Tribune*. For example, the pending sale of one 1200-acre ranch sparked numerous articles and editorials in the Great Fall Tribune during 1999 (see Puckett, 1999a and 99b; Neal, 1999; and editorial 1 and 2).

Residents are aware of the outside attention the area garners. According to one rancher, “it seems like we get a lot more focus, just because it’s the Rocky Mountain Front.” Another rancher suggested that “someplace there’s some people looking at this,” referring to nonresident attention to the area. Many residents expressed a sense of being in the national spotlight, and a perception that national level environmentalists, policy-makers, journalists, and oil and gas industry representatives were paying attention to the area.

**It’s All in the Name: Naming as Claiming**

The promotion of the name Rocky Mountain Front was part of a deliberate effort by wilderness advocates to create an image for this area, an image believed to further a particular conservation agenda focused on wilderness preservation for public lands. The *Rocky Mountain*
"Front" as a place-name came into common usage about 10 or 20 years ago, although there was occasional use of the term *East Slope* or *Front Range* prior to that time. Historically, the Blackfeet called this area the *backbone of the world*. The term Rocky Mountain Front appeared at the same time that the Forest Service was exploring the possibility of oil and gas leasing in the area, and when the Nature Conservancy purchased several ranches to create a large preserve. Most people interviewed were unsure of the name’s exact origins and several commented that they had “taken it for granted.”

Community Land Use Survey results indicated that most residents use the name Rocky Mountain Front. When respondents were asked which term best described the area where they lived, 83% selected *Rocky Mountain Front*. According to one rancher, “people ask where you live and you tell them that and they know.” Recently developed signs at the three entrances to Choteau read *Welcome to Choteau: Gateway to the Rocky Mountain Front*. The local visitors guide is entitled *Visitors Guide to the Rocky Mountain Front*. Guide books and guest ranch websites refer to the area by that name. In a very short period of time, Rocky Mountain Front has become a widely used name for this landscape. However, interview data indicate that, despite widespread usage, the name is contested and resisted by some residents.

Most long-term residents agreed that the term “the mountains” or "going to the mountains" was used in the past, and to some extent continues to be used, for the area now called the Rocky Mountain Front. Many residents referred to the area by more specific place-names, such as Blackleaf Canyon or the South Fork, as opposed to using the term Rocky Mountain Front. A rancher and business owner who grew up on the Front said

> All the maps you see is Rocky Mountain Front and you see it in newspapers. Us locals here we have Ear Mountain, we have Corragated Ridge, we have Teton. We got the name Sawtooth, we have names for certain mountains. But the media has called everything the Rocky Mountain Front and that's where that come from I'm sure. You know like everybody calls the wilderness, the Bob. Well, I've never called it the Bob in my life. Are you going to Cabin Creek, are you going to Gates Park or going to the Chinese Wall? You know, that's coming from different people than the locals. Nobody ever called it the Bob.
According to another rancher, “in the old days it was more the Blackleaf Canyon, the Teton Canyon, the folks that lived in the Blackleaf Canyon, the Teton Canyon, the Bellview people, the Augusta people, and then they have their little subdrainages and roads.” Note that this rancher not only refers to specific drainages, rather than the entire area, but also includes the residents as part of the landscape.

There was general agreement among the residents and nonresidents interviewed that the term Rocky Mountain Front was created and popularized either by the Forest Service, the Nature Conservancy, or by environmentalists who did not live in the area. (As described in the last chapter, the term environmentalist is used in this dissertation to identify individuals who are paid staff or active volunteers with non-profit environmental groups, including wilderness advocacy groups and the Nature Conservancy. There were a range of viewpoints within this category. However, when interviewees who fit this description expressed common ideas, I grouped them together for ease of comparison. Wherever possible, I provide more specific labels for individuals described). How people felt about the origins of the name was related to their perception of conservation efforts and groups, as well as their perspective on outside attention. Long-term residents, newcomers, and nonresidents who were sympathetic to conservation efforts claimed that the term simply developed during the oil and gas leasing controversy of the late 1970s, and that it was a geologic or geographic term for a place where the mountains seem to thrust up in a front. According to one resident, the name is “probably a logical term that developed when they were looking at preserving it and starting to become aware of the naturalness of the area, the natural beauty of the area, and the wildlife and everything.”

However, to some long-term residents the name symbolized unwanted conservation and outside attention. An elderly trapper from the area said of the term Rocky Mountain Front

That was concocted by some of these people that were sitting there in the cities in the big easy chairs, wanting all the whole area clear out here to the front as the wilderness. But do they take care of it? What good is it? Outside of a few people that could either hike it or hire horses from a pack outfit to go see the country. And what good is the wilderness, they've outlawed all logging, all mining, and so on. You can't use it.
The conservation agenda that some residents associate with the place-name is clearly different from their own. However, even some conservation-oriented long-term residents resisted this externally imposed identity for their home. A rancher whose family homesteaded in the area, who self-identifies as a "conservationist," "trusts" the Nature Conservancy like a "neighbor," and has a conservation easement said

It's a new word, and I'm against a lot of this change and that's change. It's a new word and it bothers me. I guess it's the attention-getter. I don't like all the attention that's being given to the so-called Rocky Mountain Front. I guess it's just the publicity that goes with it.

Some residents equated the name with active promotion of the area and increasing tourism. Two guest ranch operators associated the name with "making an image" or "caricature of the place" and efforts to "glamorize it" and "make it sexy and attractive."

Others explicitly connected the name with outsiders' or newcomers' claims to the area. A mixed Native American and European decent man, who is also "pro-conservation," argued that

This Rocky Mountain Front, East Slope, things like that, that's just a baby name. I don't know exactly how that really for sure got started. I can tell you it wasn't by the native people. That got started by newcomers coming in here and all of a sudden they named this or that. I've seen this happen with a lot of things around here. New people will come into this area and all of a sudden, in about 2 or 3 days, they know all the history, they know everything that went on around here. Well, there's no way they can, and when they tell people and talk about things they don't really go by the respect of the elders and what have you in the area, they just start naming something something. Then all of a sudden everybody knows it by that name. But our old people, all they ever called this up here was just the mountains.

A retired rancher in the area said of the name, "that came in with the nuts. And it's like it's theirs." The perceived arrogance of "outsiders" appropriating place through naming, and the power of that naming angered some long-term residents.

The name Rocky Mountain Front, then, is more than a neutral referent for a geographical location. One resident argued that "when you get a name to a place it becomes an entity." The name, for many, is less symbolic of the actual physical space than it is for an externally imposed environmental agenda and the struggle over who controls this landscape. According to a Forest
Service employee, there are people "that live here that don’t even know the Front exists." These people are clearly familiar with the landscape, but may not be aware of the identity and particular goals for the Front popularized by some groups.

Residents’ suspicions about the origins of the term were confirmed by nonresident agency and environmental group staff. The first official use of the name is in a 1977 Forest Service Environmental Statement Draft for the Rocky Mountain Front Planning Unit. However, the term was actively promoted by regional environmentalists. An environmentalist from Great Falls described the effort to “name” the area.

TERRY: The way that it got started being called the Rocky Mountain Front was because we - as the wilderness people that wanted the areas protected along there - we started calling it the Rocky Mountain Front. Other people just called it the edge of the Rockies or the edge of the Bob. It really didn't have a name like that. It wasn't referred to as the Rocky Mountain Front and we just kept calling it the Rocky Mountain Front over and over and over again, and so that's how it started to be called the Rocky Mountain Front. Often times when we get together we say “well that's one thing that we accomplished was to have a name for it.” Because now when you turn on the television the weatherman says the forecast for the Rocky Mountain Front. And so, like weather people differentiate and call it the Rocky Mountain Front. I think the people in the towns along there call it the Rocky Mountain Front. In books, maps, oh I don't know about maps particular, but different things, tourist information, things like that, they refer to it as the Front or the Rocky Mountain Front. And that is just because people that were trying to conserve the area just kept saying it over and over and over again, until we finally got people to call it that.

LAURIE: Why was it so important to give the area a name?

TERRY: I think because we felt that we all loved it and we thought of it as a special place...we worked real hard at trying to get people to realize that the Rocky Mountain Front was there and that that had to be a protection for the Bob Marshall Wilderness and that it also had it's own attributes that needed to be protected.

Terry cried the first time she heard the weather reported explicitly for the Rocky Mountain Front because “they recognize it. And, it's just a wonderful feeling to all of a sudden realize that there were others besides we conservationists that recognized it and realized it was its own particular special area.” These environmentalists were deliberately trying to mainstream the term Rocky Mountain Front in order to bring attention to conservation concerns in the area. They were attempting to give the area a specific identity, an identity associated with a set of values and a policy agenda they were trying to promote.

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They succeeded in influencing media on a broad scale. A former journalist with a regional newspaper who covered issues in the study site described reporting in the 1980s. He said, “I wasn’t sure what to call it...at some point in the 80’s the Rocky Mountain Front seemed to catch on enough that that was the name that was used to describe the area.”

Residents were not passive participants in this process. Resident environmentalists used the notoriety generated by creation of the Rocky Mountain Front to push for changes in federal land management. They capitalized on the identity of the place in pursuing their own goals.

Other place-names, such as the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem or Crown of the Continent, which represent larger areas that contain the Rocky Mountain Front, used with increasing frequency by environmentalists, biologists, and agency staff, were also brought up by residents as evidence of different political agendas for the area. One rancher pointed out that she was not "ignorant" and knew all about the Continental Divide Ecosystem and the Crown of the Continent. This did not mean she had finally realized her true location. To her these words represented a political agenda for a geographic location, not the geographic location itself. This rancher believed that conflicts over land use in the area were not about conservation practices on the ground, but that "it's all about who controls the land." To her, the political agenda represented by names like the Crown of the Continent was a direct threat to her ability to remain on her ranch, which she believed was coveted by environmentalists and agencies.

In the case of the Rocky Mountain Front, a recently popularized and contested place-name revealed differences in how people defined the area, how they conceptualized other people’s perspectives, and what was or was not desirable for the future. The place-name Rocky Mountain Front was more than a descriptive term for particular geographical space; it was also a political strategy conceived of and deployed by some, and resisted by others. Wilderness advocates realized that the identity of this place, expressed even subtly through a place-name, could influence policy and management, thereby affecting future of the Rocky Mountain Front. Even

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residents who resisted the name recognized how the term was tied to a specific coalition of meanings and a political agenda that could potentially affect their lives and livelihoods.

**Expanding Boundaries and the Public-Private Lands Question**

But exactly what landscape are people referring to when they use the term Rocky Mountain Front? Where is the Rocky Mountain Front situated geographically? Like the name, the precise location of the Rocky Mountain Front is not agreed upon. Different maps locate the area in slightly different places, but generally in the same larger area. There are no official, “correct” boundaries for the Rocky Mountain Front because there is no agency or organization that has sole authority to determine those boundaries. At a public meeting in 1999, Forest Service staff admitted that there was no official Forest Service definition of the Rocky Mountain Front. Instead, there are many different ideas about where the Rocky Mountain Front is located.

Examining where and why people located the boundaries of the Front also reveals different images of the area, and how these are connected to specific conservation agendas. In particular, differences in the inclusion of private lands and the expanding eastward boundary complicate the issue of private property in the context of landscape conservation.

In general, people agreed that the Rocky Mountain Front includes an area in Montana, and possibly Canada, and that it is a north-south “band basically running along the edge of the mountains.” When asked to define the specific boundaries of the Rocky Mountain Front, many people were unsure of the location, often assuming a “correct” answer existed. Several ranchers commented “I’m not sure where the Rocky Mountain Front extends to, to be perfectly truthful with you” and “I don’t really think I have the knowledge to answer that.”

In general, local and regional environmentalists were the most confident that their boundaries were correct or widely agreed upon. Long-term residents and ranchers were somewhat unsure of the location, but were comfortable answering the question, for the most part. National level interviewees were often stumped by this question. Some described areas far larger
than anyone else, areas that included most of Western Montana and Idaho, the Missouri River, or the Colorado Front Range.

People almost always described the northern and southern boundaries first, and I often had to inquire specifically about eastern and western boundaries, which people were more hesitant to define. Most people included some Forest Service and some private lands. Many people used highways as boundaries, and the area between highways 200 and 2 was always included. The following areas were sometimes, but not always, included: Canada (different portions of Canada are included by different people), the Blackfeet Reservation, the Wolf Creek area, all of the private lands to highways 287 and 89, and the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex.
Figure 6-1: Two Visual Representations of the Rocky Mountain Front

MONTANA'S ROCKY MOUNTAIN FRONT

Legend

- National Forest
- National Park
- Wilderness
- Unprotected Roadless Areas
- Wildlife Reserves

Map compiled by Ed Madej.
Community Land Use Survey results indicate that most residents define the Rocky Mountain Front quite broadly (see Table 6-1). The western portion of Teton County, which includes private and public lands, was an answer chosen by 61% of respondents (keep in mind respondents were instructed to check all answers that applied).
Table 6-1: The Location of Rocky Mountain Front (Community Land Use Survey Responses)

Question: In your opinion, which lands make up the "Rocky Mountain Front"? (Check all that apply)

Responses:

- 61% The western portion of Teton County
- 45% Public lands (Forest Service, BLM, state)
- 41% Private ranchlands
- 37% Wilderness lands
- 28% All of Teton County
- 6% Other – included "Ranchland along foothills," "Range 8 west," "All land within 20 miles of the Rockies," "Western third," and "Mountains and foothills."

During interviews, people provided different justifications for the locations they chose. Some selected boundaries based on aesthetics; they chose an area that had common features and distinct topography. Some people viewed the Front as foothills, while others insisted that the area was either plains or mountains only. Several people defined the area in terms of geology, locating the area according to the beginning and end of the overthrust belt.

Many environmentalists and wildlife biologists used ecological definitions. Oftentimes, people said the area went as far east as the wildlife migrated, defining the area "in terms of animal habitat." Environmentalists drew boundaries based on "ecological perspectives," "functioning ecosystems," and "similar vegetative communities." The presence of native prairie was also an important criteria for many environmentalists.

Several environmentalists and newcomers defined the area in terms of wildness, using lack of development as a key criteria. One new large landowner included an area because "that's just as wild as the rest of it." Others located the area based on social and political criteria. Many people explicitly excluded the Blackfeet Reservation and Canada because of different cultural and political institutions. Several people described a point where they had the sense or feeling that they were now on the Front, saying "it starts to get that feeling."
Several key differences in boundaries emerged. Some people had strongly held, but very different, ideas about whether public and/or private lands were part of the area and whether or not designated wilderness was included. According to one rancher, “I never include anything behind the forest boundary, I’d never include wilderness. I think in my mind it’s segregated according to management or ownership. Public versus private.” However, many regional wilderness advocates and some agency staff described the area as a narrow strip of roadless non-Wilderness Forest Service lands. Some were adamant, saying “the Rocky Mountain Front is not a Wilderness.” Other wilderness advocates recognized an area larger than this roadless strip, but said they focused primarily on the “portion of Forest Service land that is unprotected.” Even when wilderness was excluded, it was considered critical to the definition of the area. Wilderness advocates often described the Front as lands that are part of “the whole Bob Marshall ecosystem.”

Some wilderness advocates got quite defensive when I asked if private lands were included, immediately stating that they were not arguing for taking anyone’s lands, that they understood the difference between private and public property. Concern over private property rights seemed to account, in part, for some environmentalists’ exclusive focus on public lands. Several people stated explicitly that they had a say over public lands, they had a right to determine the future of these lands. One local environmentalist who grew up on a ranch said “I’d set the boundaries back a long ways to the boundaries of the Lewis and Clark National Forest so that we weren’t trampling on anybody’s private land. Hardly any of the private land is worth considering as wilderness or anything.”

It was clear that the location of the Rocky Mountain Front was associated with regulation or wilderness designation in the minds of some residents. One resident who was active in the private property movement conveyed his concerns with this connection.

LAURIE: If you were going to locate the Rocky Mountain Front for me, where would you put it? How you would describe where it is?
FRED: Now, what do you mean? I don’t want to move it. I want it to stay right where it is.
This resident associated the boundaries with some kind of change in management or policy, a change he clearly does not support.

There is an important miscommunication between residents and nonresident wilderness advocates that seems to be occurring with regard to location. As noted above, when wilderness advocates in Great Falls write letters suggesting that particular policies or management actions be pursued for the Rocky Mountain Front, they are often referring specifically to non-Wilderness Forest Service lands. However, this is rarely made explicit. Residents who define the area as including private lands all the way out to the towns and highways (which many do) may assume that these policies and management actions are being suggested for their property. A local business owner who grew up on a ranch in the area commented on potential problems with the different locations of the Rocky Mountain Front. She said,

Maybe that's where a lot of the problems come from. Maybe people like me and people like Joe next door and Sam down the street, we're thinking we live on the Rocky Mountain Front and the people in Great Falls, who are members of the Montana Wilderness Association, writing these letters about what can be done on the Rocky Mountain Front, they're writing from the perspective of, when they say Rocky Mountain Front they mean a very specific government chunk, chunk of federal land that is regulated and handled by the government. And people out here read their letters to the editor, read their comments and Forest Service summaries and they think, you know, they read them with a different definition in their minds of that property than what the writer has actually meant... It would certainly change the way the comments from people who are speaking about a very narrow, about a very specific geographic federally owned property. It would change how you would receive those meanings if you understood clearly they are not talking about the Front, they are talking about the Lewis and Clark National Forest.

Interestingly, most residents included private lands in their definitions of the Rocky Mountain Front, and many said the area included lands all the way to highways 89 and 287 and the towns of Dupuyer, Bynum, Choteau, and Augusta.

In many ways, the boundaries of the Rocky Mountain Front also seem to be expanding eastward for those focused on wildlife conservation. Most environmentalists concerned with wildlife, in particular Nature Conservancy staff and agency wildlife biologists, defined the area as extending eastward to the highways. The eastern portion of the study site is low-elevation prairie

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habitat and largely private lands. Many wildlife species use the prairie portion of the area as winter or summer range, and some wildlife populations seem to be expanding eastward. One regional environmentalist said the actual boundaries of the Front are expanding as these populations move eastward.

The Rocky Mountain Front plays an important role for elk and carnivores and is a major winter range for those species. So it has been an expanding territory moving eastward out of the mountains as wildlife move further east as well.

At a public meeting, another regional wilderness advocate said that “wherever the grizzly bears go, that’s the Front.” A rancher also described the eastward tending boundaries, linking the creation of the Rocky Mountain Front to the presence of the wilderness and wildlife. He said Bob Marshall was back there and he did some talking about it, and then it became the Bob, they called it the Bob. And then, after the war it got quite a bit of attention because of tourism. And coming out here, and then they enlarged it, you know, and enlarged it, and then they found that a lot of the animals back there came out here on the front in the wintertime. And then they started calling it the Front, and they wanted the Front involved with it, see? And that was the environmentalists and the conservationists and so forth. But to the people who live along here, we don’t care anything about it. Actually we think that those are our mountains.

Simon indicates that boundaries, like naming, are a way to claim the area for a particular conservation goals. How these boundaries are drawn, or perhaps the vagueness of them, are part of the politics of place, the struggle over the future of the area and who gets to decide.

Nonresident wilderness advocates focused on wilderness designation popularized the place-name, but often located the area exclusively on federal lands. Residents assimilated the name and broadened the boundaries to include human communities. Wildlife biologists and environmentalists concerned with wildlife also expanded the boundaries eastward, following migrating wildlife across the plains. The outside identity established by the place-name Rocky Mountain Front grouped drainages that were previously somewhat distinct under one banner indicating a larger landscape. And, despite differing locations, the creation of the Rocky Mountain Front also strengthened conceptual links between private and public lands, both of which are included in the area by most people (keep in mind that most people interviewed and all
of the people surveyed were residents). These conceptual links may convey a sense of a unified landscape. However, grouping public and private lands under one name may also complicate policy and management proposals for the area.

Comparing how different people name and locate the Rocky Mountain Front provides a window into how people connect image and meaning with political agendas. Even people who contested and resisted the name Rocky Mountain Front recognized the power of this term to shape policy and management in the area. Connections between place meanings and ideas about legitimate use or policy and management extend beyond the place-name and location. More general place meanings also reveal the relationship between image and politics.

The Politics of Image and Meaning

In the remainder of this chapter, I describe the different meanings people associated with this landscape. While people shared a common image of the Rocky Mountain Front as a beautiful place, different people described different visions of the area. Residents described an inhabited, working landscape, while nonresidents, newcomers, and environmentalists focused on wildness and western heritage. In many cases these images were connected to concerns about land ownership change, environmental policy, and the appropriateness of ranching. The two views of the Front described below are distinct discourses, coalitions of meanings promoted by different groups of people and connected to material interests, policy goals, and ideas about who should determine the future of the area. These discourses, the Front as an inhabited, working landscape and the Front as undeveloped and wild, appear to mutually exclusive. However, there is some evidence of a third discourse about the compatibility of wildness, wildlife, and conservation and ranching and rural communities.
Residents and Common Values

Responses to the Community Land Use Survey reveal widespread agreement amongst residents about the features they value in the area (see Table 6-2). Residents rated the natural features of the landscape, such as the mountains, open space, and wildlife as important as well as the social features, such as community, rural lifestyle, and knowing your neighbors. Agriculture was also a very important feature of the area.

Table 6-2: Features of Teton County (Community Land Use Survey Responses)

Responses are listed in order of importance to respondents. Survey instructions to respondents read: *Here are some of the features that people use to describe Teton County. Please tell us how important each feature is to you by circling a number on the scale.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Average (Mean)</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents who Circled Each Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The mountains</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>1% 3% 1% 7% 19% 68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Agriculture</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>1% 1% 5% 12% 19% 62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Rural lifestyle</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>1% 1% 3% 12% 32% 49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Open space</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>1% 1% 5% 14% 29% 45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Sense of community</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>1% 3% 6% 14% 28% 46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Affordable housing</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>2% 2% 9% 18% 25% 42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Wildlife</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>0% 3% 6% 22% 25% 42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Knowing your neighbors</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>0% 4% 10% 22% 25% 37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Wilderness</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>6% 6% 10% 22% 20% 35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Responses to questions about guiding planning efforts also reveal the importance of both agriculture and environment (see Table 6-3).
Table 6-3: What Should Guide Planning Efforts (Community Land Use Survey Responses)

Responses are listed in order of importance to respondents. Survey instructions to respondents read: Please indicate how important the following items are for guiding planning efforts in Teton County.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Average (Mean)</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents who Circled Each Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Containment of noxious weeds</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>0% 1% 4% 10% 18% 66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental quality</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>1% 2% 3% 18% 23% 51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranching heritage</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>1% 3% 8% 15% 26% 44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value-added agricultural products</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>0% 3% 10% 22% 22% 39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The extent of agreement on these items points to some significant common ground on how people define the area and what they value. However, while residents agreed on the importance of agriculture, community, and wildlife, it is impossible to know if they are defining these features similarly, or if variation would exist if respondents could elaborate. In other words, residents may have different ideas about the kind of agriculture they value or how they define sense of community. Furthermore, certain groups of residents, specifically newcomers and environmentalists, make up small proportions of the population, but play critical roles in shaping local debate about natural resource policy and control an increasing number of acres in the study site.

To learn more about the meanings, images, and ideas different people associated with the area known as the Rocky Mountain Front, I asked the people I interviewed how they would describe the area to someone who was not familiar with it. I also asked interviewees what they valued or liked about the area, and why they stayed, returned, or moved to the area. People also

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volunteered this kind of information in the context of other topics they discussed. Interview data confirmed that residents share similar definitions of the area and value similar attributes, including natural features and rural, agricultural lifestyles. However, interview data also pointed to areas where newcomers and environmentalists are both similar to and different from other residents, and provided detail on nonresident perspectives.

The Physical Landscape and Attachment to Place

One of the most salient commonalities amongst the different people I interviewed was an attachment to and admiration of the physical beauty of the area. All different kinds of people described the natural setting and the attachment to the biophysical environment. Within these shared meanings and expressions, there were important differences in the ways different people described the area (newcomers, environmentalists, and nonresidents tended toward hyperbole), the features they focused on (residents focused on the mountains), and the basis for their attachment (residents' attachment stemmed from daily experience).

The Beauty and Drama of the Ecotone

When asked to describe the area, most people talked about the meeting of the plains and the mountains. Ranchers and environmentalists, residents and nonresidents, and newcomers and oldtimers provided a topographic description of the area. According to a nonresident environmentalist, "the first thing you'd talk about is its physical features. You know it is where the Rocky Mountains wash up against the Great Plains like an unbroken wave." Many people talked about how much they valued the presence of both the mountains and the plains. A Forest Service staffperson from Washington D.C. said

I've approached the Front from the prairie side up to the mountains, which is pretty cool. But just coming off the mountains to the prairie is even more stark to me. You're sort of in classic rugged mountain country in the west and then it just drops off. You go from these fairly high elevations, jagged new mountains—\(167\) I mean they're geologically newer
mountains-to just a prairie. We don't have a lot of places in the west where you have such a stark contrast between landscapes.

The mountains to plains transition was considered aesthetically pleasing and beautiful by many people. A regional environmentalist said “I would say that it was magic. It's just like magic. It's like... you think that the prairie should go on forever, and then, all of the sudden the mountains just rise up out of it.” One rancher described first seeing her husband’s ranch. She said “I remember my first impression of coming, driving up Benchmark Road to meet his family, I was just, just, tears starting falling out... it was so beautiful, it was so awesome, it was just something that I had dreamed about my whole life.” Many different people talked about the beauty of the place, but it was primarily newcomers and nonresidents who used superlatives. One newcomer said “I think that it is one of the most spectacular places I've been scenery wise.” A nonresident journalist claimed “it's obviously spectacular country, it's gorgeous and, I mean, there's hardly a prettier place in the west.” Others described the area as “paradise,” “extraordinary,” “stunning,” “dramatic,” “magical,” “jaw-dropping,” “heaven,” “mysterious,” "compelling," "unreal," and “unparalleled,” saying they valued the place for its "scenic splendor," "aesthetic value," and "open spaces.” Many different people, including environmentalists and ranchers described the wildlife present in the area, detailing the diversity of species and the abundance of particular animals as well as opportunities to view wildlife.

Many people also focused on extreme and variable weather as a defining aspect of the Front, in particular the wind. According to one local resident

You have to describe it as superlative. It doesn't matter what you’re talking about. This area seems to get more, or better, or worse or whatever, than most any other area. For a long time this area held the continental United States record for coldest. We have the windiest. We have, sometimes, the hottest.”

Different people described the area as “tough,” “harsh,” and “demanding.”
The Importance of the Mountains

When describing the area, residents often focused on the mountains. Most residents referred to the Forest Service portion of the Rocky Mountain Front as "the mountains." A wide variety of residents talked about their love of the mountains. Many residents who had moved away from the area for a period of time spoke of missing the mountains. One rancher claimed that, whether they admit it or not, "locals" have an "attachment to the mountains." Ranchers, in particular, discussed their attachment to the mountains. This may be due to the fact that ranchers and many residents used the term "mountains" much more than "Front" or "Rocky Mountain Front" during the interviews. However, it was clear that they were referring to a specific part of the landscape, not the area as a whole and not the plains.

According to one rancher, "you never tire of looking at the mountains and ... they look different almost every time, you see something different, I've been here almost 50 years, right in this area, and yet every time I come home up this road, I see a little different perspective on the mountains." Another rancher recalled a commitment she made with her husband. She said

I remember when Joe and I were...I think we were engaged and we went out on - you can’t see it cause I’ve got the shade closed - but there’s kind of a peak out here with the trees on it and stuff and it’s called Scoffin Butte. And we went for a drive one day and went up and just sat in the sunshine on Scoffin Butte and he said, you know, we need to make a deal that whatever we do, we’ll never live more than thirty minutes from the mountains. And, you know, that was, what’s it been? Probably twelve years ago that we sat and had that discussion. But it was something that was important to both of us, to stay close to this area.

Many ranchers connected the mountains with awareness of the weather. According to a rancher and business owner, "when you grow up here, every morning you get up, you look at the mountains, see what the weather is doing. When you move away, there's no mountains to look at." Ranchers often described being able to predict the wind based on the clouds over the mountains. One rancher tried to instruct me in predicting the wind by looking at the clouds over the mountains.

HOLLY: You know how to tell where the wind’s going to blow the hardest?
LAURIE: How?
HOLLY: Okay, you look at your arc, where your arc is and you look at the widest point of the arc.
LAURIE: Right there?
HOLLY: Yeah, so you're looking...probably Choteau's going to get hammered again tonight.
LAURIE: So the way that the clouds kind of arc away from the mountains?
HOLLY: Where the point is, you better be holding onto your socks for the night because that's where she's going to hammer. We live looking at the mountains. You get up in the morning, you look at the mountains, you got to bed, you look at the mountains. Everything in your life is at the mountains.

Residents' actual use of the mountains varied widely, and activities could not be easily categorized according to obvious groups, such as oldtimers and newcomers, or ranchers and nonranchers. Many different people camped, hunted, fished, picnicked, backpacked, picked berries, horsepacked, and snowmobiled on the National Forest. Community Land Use Survey results indicate that 87% of residents recreate on the National Forest. One business owner who grew up in the area described his experience of the mountains.

We love to go up there. We hike, we take drives and we comment every day we're up there how beautiful the area is. Sometimes we sound like a broken record, but we still say it, we often talk about that. The sunset is different, the clouds are different, the animals react in different ways different times of the year. We see bear, deer, elk. We have everything up there.

One rancher described his use of the mountains, saying

This spot, you know, we're very into the mountains and the wilderness and we pack a lot. You can ranch in a lot of places, but those mountains right there are a big, big part. There's a lot better cow country than this in other places. I mean, better AUM type of ranches, easier to make a living on type of ranches. But having those mountains there is a big thing to us.

Ranchers were somewhat unique in that those with Forest Service grazing permits used the mountains for what they described as "livelihood." Also, some ranchers without Forest Service permits were too busy during the summer to recreate in the mountains, or found more solitude on their own property.
Attachment to Place and Property

Residents also expressed a deep attachment to the area as a whole. This attachment to place, a sort of emotional and experiential bond to landscape, appears to be present at many different levels, including individual or family attachments to specific ranches as well as a general attachment to the landscape. It is significant that while people often describe their attachment to the mountains, the human residences and communities on the Front are located on the plains. Clearly, the mountains are conceptually and physically linked to the inhabited areas. Furthermore, while the mountains are entirely on public lands, residents did not say that they looked at, went to, or missed the Lewis and Clark National Forest, but rather named the area by a landscape feature. As described earlier, long-term residents recall said they used to call the area “the mountains.” In some cases, the term “the mountains” appeared to indicate a specific landscape feature and the area as a whole.

Ranchers, in particular, also had important attachments to particular properties. Ranchers often described the area as “home.” According to one woman, the ranch is

Almost a part of who you are...it's knowing every inch of that property and knowing where the soapholes in the pastures are that you don't want to ride your horse in. It's knowing your land as if you knew your home, 'cause your land is your home...if a bad windstorm comes through and knocks down a bunch of cottonwoods you feel bad. Not because those cottonwoods did anything for you, you feel bad because of the damage that was inflicted on the land....Your memories are tied to the land...you have your roots in the land and I don't know anybody who doesn't feel that way about their property.

For ranchers whose families have been in the area multiple generations, family heritage is also significant. According to Irene, "the ranch is very significant to me because it's been in the family since 1889." Sarah said that "six generations of our family have slept in the same bedroom in this old log house." One rancher, discussed her family's decision to establish a conservation easement on their property, saying

I don't know exactly what else to describe it, but it is definitely a feeling. It is like when we were discussing the easement, somebody said, 'well why don't you just sell it?' And that's not an option, because it isn't. It's our very, it is my very soul, and, you know, I came here as a 21-year old bride, so you wouldn't think. But, oh it's so much a part of me.
A few nonresidents did not recognize the attachment that many ranchers have to particular properties. A Washington, D.C.-based private property rights advocate suggested that an easy answer to the economic difficulties of ranching was to sell the ranch and move elsewhere. This suggestion is based on the assumption that the primary motivation for ranching is livelihood (to make a living) or identity (because one is a rancher), but that attachment to place, either one’s property or the larger landscape or local community is not important.

But many residents clearly felt a deep spiritual bond with the landscape. Many residents used the word “love” when describing their relationship with the area. According to a rancher,

I love everything about it, the wide-open space, I love the mountains, the scenery. I love our space on the ranch, I love the clouds, the stars, the wind…and I love the people.

Several people used the phrase “part of my soul.”

Longing for a Lost Past

In contrast to residents, newcomers, environmentalists, and nonresidents often described the landscape in relation to more distant history and heritage, or a lost past. They described the Front as unique and rare in comparison to other places. They related the important history of the area, often drawing on images of the West, Western history, and the frontier. Many of these meanings speak of a longing for a lost past. They evoked a cultural memory or image of what America once was, and, oftentimes, a desire to return to or preserve some part of that. A Washington, D.C.-based environmentalist summed up this perspective when she described the Rocky Mountain Front as “a good example of what’s been lost, but what’s left to save in that region.”

Many newcomers and nonresidents with a focus on conservation argued that the Front is special and unique, “one of the last great places.” Some people described the area as special because of their attachment to and experience of the place. One local environmentalist said
I guess to me it’s just the manifestation of a little bit of heaven. I don’t think there’s anyplace on earth that I like as much and part of that is because I’ve gotten to know it so well. I know that, I’m sure there are other places that are just as spectacular, but I have seen a fair share of the world including the Alps and the Himalayas and New Zealand’s mountains and Mount Fuji and Alaska, a little bit and this right here is my favorite, because I live here and because I’ve been on those peaks and valleys, not just once but many times, you know.

However, most newcomers, nonresidents, and environmentalists argued for the area’s unique based on specific ecological features and cultural heritage that had been lost elsewhere, not their personal experience of the place.

*Wildness and Wildlife: Lost Ecological Conditions*

For most newcomers, environmentalists, and nonresidents the area was special because it is undeveloped in comparison to other places. The area was described as “pristine,” “untouched,” and “unspoiled.” There was a sense that, as other areas in the region and in the world were developed, the Rocky Mountain Front would be even more important. Jack believed that “the increased pace of development throughout the world and throughout the country has given people greater appreciation for the uniqueness of the Front and Montana.” Many people compared the Rocky Mountain Front to the Front Range in Colorado, arguing that the Front in Montana has the qualities that the Front Range in Colorado has lost due to widespread real estate development and population growth.

People also connected images of the area as undeveloped with notions of wildness. Most newcomers, environmentalists, and agency staff focused, in part, on the wildness of the area, describing it as "wild," "raw," "pristine," “the last great wild place,” “wild country, really, really wild country,” and a “huge expanse of wild country.” In most cases the wildness of the area was described by contrasting the Front to other places that were no longer wild. One state wildlife biologist explained the difference between wildlife and wildness.

The wildness of it is really important it seems like when you go to a lot of other places, a lot of other places might have a lot of wildlife too but the wildness has been lost and
that's where I think the Front really stands out as, not just the fact that it is pretty much in tact, but that it's wild.

The ecology or ecological uniqueness was also clearly important to environmentalists and most nonresidents. State and federal agency employees often focused on the wholeness of the landscape. A Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks employee said that they are trying to "hold the country together" and preserve the "connections between the high ground and the low ground."

A former Forest Service employee said the area is "intact, it's parts and pieces intact" and argues that we should treat the area as a whole. One Forest Service employee connected wildness and scale.

There's certainly places on the Sierra Nevada and the Colorado Plateau that are very remote, very isolated, very undeveloped, but there's nowhere with as large a land mass, large an island of undevelopment of wildness than the Rocky Mountain Front. And it's proven once again by the fact that you have the largest predator that's still in coexistence with humans in the grizzly bear.

A Washington, D.C.-based environmentalist also noted the importance of scale.

It's a place, one of the few places left in the country where we could still insure that such a system exists and can operate at a large scale...And as the rest of the world continues to lose more and more functioning systems, it will just get more and more valuable.

One environmentalist described the area as "natural" and as a "wildlife sanctuary." A Nature Conservancy employee in the area said he cares about the place because

Where I grew up all the natural communities are basically gone. They don't exist anymore. And even where I went to school there's some prairie remnants, but for the most part natural communities as they were a hundred years ago don't exist anymore in that part of the world. And they do here to a limited extent. It's just kind of exciting to see a place that is still somewhat intact and has some potential to be a functioning landscape.

For many environmentalists the area was "ecologically important" and "incredibly diverse."

People often focused on wildlife, in particular threatened and endangered species such as the grizzly bear, as evidence of its ecological significance. Note the way the value of wildlife is also framed in terms of what has been lost in other locations, and the uniqueness of the area. One regional environmentalist said this when asked to describe the area to others.
I think I would try to evoke in them a sense of a place that has remained relatively the
same over time, a place where, although we've lost a lot, you don't see herds of bison and
plains grizzly bears often, but you do...still a place where some of the ecological
functions that you associate with the wildest part of the natural west still exist.

Again, there is a sense of continuity here, of a linkage with the past, and valuing a remnant of the
past.

A Symbol of Heritage and the American West

The Front was not just evocative of lost ecological conditions, it was also associated with
a lost cultural past. It was quite common for nonresidents, newcomers, and environmentalists to
claim that the area had not changed much in the past 100 or more years. According to one
newcomer, "a lot of this country's still as it was when Lewis and Clark came through 200 years
ago." A Nature Conservancy employee said that the area is "sort of a window to the past in that,
in a lot of cases, you don't have to stretch your imagination too much to visualize what it may
have been like 200 or 500 or 1000 years ago." People talked about the Old North Trail, Native
American history and archeological sites, and the presence of dinosaur bones.

Many people evoked images of the West, Western history, and the frontier when
describing the area. According to one rancher, a lot of people who visit the area "like to see the
west and the cattle and the horses." One newcomer conveys an image of the West influenced by
popular media. She said "when I think of the Front, I think of The Horse Whisperer, and when
she drove her horse trailer and just stopped and said wow. It's, I guess, the definitive Rockies.
There's nothing like them." Other newcomers also referenced romantic and nostalgic images of
cowboys.

A national journalist said that the Front "takes you back to the way the West was and
that's what's exciting about it." Many nonresidents and environmentalists explicitly brought up
Lewis and Clark and referred to the area as "the gateway to the west." Another national level
journalist said
I think the other thing that sometimes gets coverage on the Front is sort of Lewis and
Clark expedition type stuff, and I think as a sort of gateway to the west and then the west
has all kinds of resonance in people's minds and still it's sort of the area of opportunity
and exploration and all of that. It's a kind of reminder of sort of frontier spirit. I think
that's part of what the front is about, it's just the edge of it, it's the entryway, it's the
gateway to the west, the mountains.

A Washington, D.C.-based Forest Service employee also connected the Front with frontier
history.

One of the things that I think about a lot is that other cultures have their pyramids, and
their great works of art and their dynasties and other things that really shaped cultures.
And what is the thing that is uniquely American? It's this wilderness and I don't mean by
that the technical term of a wilderness, a designated wilderness area, but it's the
wildlands, you know; it's sort of the thing that tested our character as a nation and
developed it as we moved the frontier west. And our heroes are Lewis and Clark and
Davey Crockett and Daniel Boone and many of the mountain men. And much of George
Washington's early years as a surveyor were tested in this kind of landscape and it's our
heritage and people love the land.

People talked about the Front being part of our heritage as Americans. A former Forest Service
employee said "to me it was emblematic of our heritage, in terms of natural resources. It was real
easy to imagine being a pioneer coming across the endless plains and suddenly seeing this
towering range of mountains in front of you. I mean the feeling was very dramatic." A former
elected official connected the Front to our national identity. He said

If America didn't have the Front, didn't have Montana, America would have to invent it.
America needs a West; America needs something to announce the frontier. When
America has awakened each morning it has this romantic notion that it sets a goal for
itself and we think most commonly of that goal as moving west. America had to move
west. America has to find a new frontier. And the Rocky Mountain west, the west in
America is, as I say, is heralded as signified by the Rocky Mountains. And the beginning
of the Rocky Mountains, the Eastern Front of them and the most notable of that is, of
course, the Chinese Wall and the whole of the Rocky Mountain Front. It presents to
America a great, it provides for America the geographic symbol that we love a challenge,
and we love exploration.

A national journalist argued that the area has an important existence value. According to Max,
"people who might never see the Rocky Mountain Front, I think like the idea that there's a big
chunk of country out there that's pretty much the way it was when Lewis & Clark came up the
Missouri." For one local Forest Service employee, "it's entry into the wilderness too is that is
that kind of slice of... you know, you can pretend to jump back in time if you want to. It’s a place where people can still do some of the things that they’ve been doing for a long time. And I think that’s really important too."

Nostalgic references to historical events fit within the same framework as images of the front as ecologically unique because of qualities lost elsewhere. In both cases, environmentalists, agency staff, and newcomers suggested that they value the area because it evokes a longed-for lost past. The area is either symbolic of specific events, such as Lewis and Clark’s expedition, or possesses qualities associated with previous times, such as undeveloped open spaces or native wildlife.

Long-term residents also focused on history, but with an emphasis on family history and heritage, community history, and specific stories of people they knew or particular properties. However, some residents were also interested in Lewis and Clark and Native American history in the area. One rancher described the importance of the Old North Trail and detailed some of the archeological sites in the area, rock fences and buffalo jumps. Other ranchers provided me with photographs of rock formations created by Native Americans prior to Lewis and Clark.

The Social Landscape: Human Communities and Agricultural Production

Nonresidents, newcomers, and environmentalists tended to focus primarily on the natural environment, the ecological features and wildness of the area. The cultural features cited by these groups were historical, related to frontier heritage. Long-term residents, on the other hand, focused on the present day social and biological landscape. Previous studies on sense of place have found that long-term residents tend to focus on the human communities in an area, while newcomers tend to focus on the natural environment (see Cantrill, 1998). However, long-term residents in this study did not neglect the biophysical landscape, although they often discussed the environment in different terms than nonresidents, newcomers, and environmentalists. Instead these residents wove in descriptions of the human communities, focusing on what they valued
about their communities and the working, agricultural character of the area. The social landscape they described was not situated in opposition to the natural features of the area. Rather, the social and biological landscapes were overlaid and inseparable. The biophysical landscape was social, an inhabited, working, agricultural landscape.

Community Character

When describing the area, residents focused on sense of community and neighborliness. They described themselves as stubborn and independent, but trusting and supportive of one another. Residents characterized Choteau as “just a small friendly community” with a lot of “hometown pride,” “volunteering” and “pretty steady type people.” One local business owner described the helpful nature of local communities.

And some of the best and most helpful people are here. We depend upon each other, whether we say so or not, for our lifestyle. If you need help it's always there, if you need help, you just come and say you want help. And it's a nice feeling. And we do it too. If somebody's gotta problem, let us work them out. You don't have to ask, you don't need to be paid, you just go do it.

People viewed resident communities as helpful, safe, honest, and good places to raise kids or grow old. One rancher described the advantages and disadvantages of a small community.

We're a small enough community that you have lots of petty little fights, but those same people that have those petty little fights would be there in an instant if something happened to their neighbor. We take care of each other's kids and, you know, it's just that sense of closeness. I can't imagine living somewhere where you didn't know your neighbors, where they might actually watch your house burn down rather than trying to help save it.

Some people were attracted to the “solitude,” “relative isolation,” “remoteness,” and “lack of people” of the area. One rancher's kid went away to college and missed “the lack of people, it's kind of nice to be by yourself, without thousands of people that you don't know all around you.” However, one rancher commented on the downside of that isolation. She said “I think there's isolation. I think part of my problem is that my neighbors are pretty different than me politically and a lot of them are older. There's very few people my age there...in terms of making other
friends out there, there’s nobody that I socialize with.” While residents acknowledged the challenges of small, rural communities, overall they placed a high value on their sense of community, helpful nature, and rural lifestyle.

Local communities also self-identified as rural areas in written materials. Teton County described itself as

...a slice out of America’s heartland and, in some ways, a slice out of this country’s past. Crime rates are low and violent crime is almost nonexistent. We don’t have gangs in our schools or on our streets, and we still enjoy old-fashioned pleasures like community dances, family picnics and going for a drive in the country. (Teton County Website)

Indeed, there do seem to be differences between resident communities and mainstream America. In the 2002 national election, 72% of registered voters in Choteau voted; weddings are advertised in the local newspaper and everyone is invited to attend; the local grocery store allows goods to be purchased on a running tab; the city of Choteau provides a snowplowing service so shoveling of sidewalks is unnecessary; and the sheriff will jimmy your car door open if you lock your keys inside - no need to call AAA.

A Working, Agricultural Landscape

When long-term residents described the social landscape, they also emphasized the importance of agriculture. One rancher defined the area by saying that "typically and probably the most long lasting is that we're an agricultural area, the agricultural industry, grazing basically, has been a way of life for a century or more." For ranchers as well as nonranchers, ranching culture and lifestyle was an important part of the Front.

Clearly, agricultural production was important to residents. When Community Land Use Survey respondents were asked if loss of agricultural production was a problem, 52% strongly agreed and 82% agreed to some extent. Many ranchers and long-term residents discussed the importance of “keeping land in production.”
One rancher said that “Choteau in general, I guess, would just be a small friendly
community, agriculturally based.” Another rancher described why the area is good for ranching.
She said “it’s cattle range country, and some of the reasons that it makes good ranching country is
because of the Chinook winds that blow the snow off in the winter and they can graze so long in
the winter if there’s good grass, that it cuts down on the feeding.”

Newcomers and nonresidents rarely, but sometimes, referred to the agricultural aspect of
the area. One national environmentalist described the area as a “very rural area dominated by
farming and resource extraction.” One newcomer business owner said “I think it is really
critical, I think a lot of what creates the character of this place are the large ranchers, the ranches
and ranchers. It does keep it open and I like that it’s in production -I mean- that I like that it’s
mostly working cattle ranches, not just vacation, recreational areas.”

It is important to note that while residents focused on the community and agricultural
aspects of the area, many residents were aware that the area was associated with wildness and
naturalness and used these images to market the place to tourists, and to promote certain public
lands policies. For example, the Choteau Chamber of Commerce describes the area as “The
Timeless Treasure” on the cover of the city brochure, evoking similar images to those described
by environmentalists and newcomers longing for a lost past. A local inn locates itself “At the
Wild edge of the Rockies!” Resident environmentalists named a local group, Friends of the
Rocky Mountain Front, and capitalized on national and regional media coverage in their
successful bid to obtain a mineral withdrawl on Forest Service lands. In other words, many
residents focus on rural community and the working aspect of the landscape. But when seeking
tourist dollars or policy change from Washington D.C. some residents utilize images of wildness,
naturalness, and timelessness to “sell” their proposals and businesses.
Two Rocky Mountain Fronts: Wild Country or an Inhabited Working Landscape?

A close examination of the place meanings of residents, newcomers, environmentalists, and others reveals two different Rocky Mountain Fronts. Different people imagined or described the same landscape in very different ways. Long-term residents focused on the physical beauty and wildlife in the area, their attachment to the mountains and to their ranches, and the sense of community they valued, the working agricultural nature of the area. Their descriptions often wove together aspects of the physical and social landscapes, as if the two were inseparable. For long-term residents the landscape was both inhabited and productive, and natural and beautiful, in the same places, at the same time. They described a working landscape.

In contrast to long-term residents, nonresidents, newcomers, and environmentalists focused on the ecological or aesthetic attributes of the area, with rare mention of the present day sociocultural context. They often described a landscape that appeared to be wild and uninhabited, almost a wilderness, even though they were aware of ranching and human communities in the area. They discussed ranching, instead, in the context of environmental issues, tensions, or conservation easements.

Different people were “seeing” different Rocky Mountain Fronts in the same biophysical space. Multiple meanings often exist for contested landscapes. Keep in mind that these different meanings are somewhat complicated by the fact that different people located the Front in different parts of the landscape. However, the vast majority of people interviewed described the area as encompassing both private and public lands.

While there is certainly some variation within various groups of people and within each vision of the Rocky Mountain Front, there is also a remarkable amount of consistency. Certain meanings are linked together in these visions of the Front. Wildness, longing for a lost past, and the value of biological diversity are connected in the minds of most environmentalists. Agriculture, community, and attachment to place are part of the story that residents tell about the area. In this sense, these two views, the wild and the working landscapes, represent two different
discourses, coalitions of meaning, sets of ideas that are interconnected in people's minds. These sets of meanings are also linked to policy goals and material interests. Place meanings are not just about values and beliefs; people often try to create their image of a particular place through policy or land management actions. The ways in which these two discourses are connected to ideas about legitimate use of land and natural resources, to on-the-ground land use change, to policy agendas and political struggle will be examined next.

Meaning and Image Connected with Rural Change and Conservation Agendas

Interview data revealed that the meanings and values that people associated with the area known as the Rocky Mountain Front are much more than senses of place. The people I interviewed often connected ideas and images about the area explicitly to policy goals and material interests. In many cases people recognized the ways in which different images might influence the future of the area. In some cases residents linked meaning and image to rural change and land use transitions. They also saw connections between images of the Front and the kinds of policies different people pursued. Embedded in descriptions of the Rocky Mountain Front, we find statements about what are and are not legitimate land uses, specific conservation goals, and what people want for the future. Because ideas about legitimate use and environmental policy are not agreed upon, and are highly politicized in the context of conservation attention to the area, place meanings about the Rocky Mountain Front are political. In this section I describe some of the ways meaning and image were linked to ideas about the future of the area, different peoples' material interests, and specific policy goals.

Because many residents had mixed or negative feelings about outside attention to the area, and because most residents interviewed did not want to see widespread population growth, responses to my request to describe the area were often tongue-in-cheek references to this sentiment. Many residents responded like these individuals, usually laughing to indicate they were joking, and then proceeding to answer the question more directly.
I'd probably tell them how terrible it was so they wouldn't want to come here and look around.

I'd be tempted to tell them it was a hell hole and to never come, in a sense, because the last thing I sort of want is, you know, a hundred thousand people moving here.

I'd keep it a secret. Probably because I wouldn't want to publicize it or make it seem like it was as beautiful as it really is. I'd start off by saying the wind really blows over there, it's real common, just a lot of wind. It gets really cold in the winter.

Wonderful, stay away!

Oh, I'd say that it's just brutal. The weather's just ghastly. It's windy all the time. The ground won't grow a thing, it's all rocks.

People recognized that rosy, compelling descriptions of the area might draw in newcomers or unwanted outside conservation attention. Furthermore, people often connected their own descriptions of the area with short statements about what threatened what they valued or what they wanted to see happen in the future. In this way, meaning was often explicitly linked on-the-ground land ownership and community change.

Environmentalists, newcomers, and some nonresidents also connected their descriptions of the area to the threats they perceived, their desire to defend the area against development, and the management and policy initiatives they supported. A Washington, D.C.-based environmentalist made a link between what she values in the area and the establishment of reserves and corridors.

LAURIE: What sorts of things do you value about that landscape?
MOLLY: I think its vastness, the wildlife habitat, the fact that it could provide the core reserves and biological corridors that we need to make sure that some real charismatic mega fauna…isn’t that the worst word…hey, that’s the way to catch people’s imagination…but to make sure that animals like the grizzlies and wolf reintroduction can be successful. So I think it holds real future potential.

One newcomer discussed the Old North Trail, saying that if a particular property were developed, archeological sites along the trail would be “totally destroyed.” One new large landowner connected the uniqueness of the area his desire to disallow oil and gas development and timber harvest.
There’s no where else that I’ve seen in this country. I guess I’ve been in a lot places in this country. And it’s just so unique, the size of that big piece of undeveloped land there and the size of these ranches that are adjacent to it and the incredible biodiversity going on here. Every time I see any kind oil and gas, or timber interests getting their hands, or getting excited about any of this country, I think it’s a huge mistake, a huge negative, and that’s one of those areas where it would be nice if the public could come together and rally in force to keep that from occurring in this area. You know only because it’s so unique and once it’s undone, it won’t be unique and it won’t be restorable. I mean, it’s just, that’s the way I feel about oil and gas and that’s the way I feel about timber.

A regional environmentalist conveyed a similar sentiment, saying “when you look at its unique qualities, it becomes almost a no-brainer that it should be managed for protection.” One newcomer connected the unique undeveloped qualities of the area with the threat of development and his desire to defend the area.

It’s just exciting to me to be close to the last significant swathe of undeveloped Front Range between Canada and Mexico and that’s what this is. It’s the last. There isn’t any more. And so the fact that it remains threatened by development is, to me, a good reason to live here to maybe do what little I can to help defend it. If it were totally protected as part of the Bob Marshall, which I hope someday it will be, then I’d figure out other things to do so... I don’t need the issue, believe me, but it’s here and so it’s a good reason to be here to help defend.

Several Forest Service employees suggested that the Front is an area where the pieces are in place to do some large scale restoration, to bring back the ecological attributes of the area that have been lost through human activities, primarily native grasslands and freer wildlife movement.

Many different people talked about restoring different aspects of the area, reintroducing bison, establishing preserves, acquiring public lands for wilderness or other protected area designations, and recreating natural fire regimes (some of these proposals are described in Chapter 8 in the context of public land acquisition in the area).

Some residents explicitly recognized the ways in which meaning and politics were connected. One rancher explicitly described how images of the area are connected to conflicts over different conservation goals and agendas. He said

We all get a perception of what I want something to be like, what I want it to look like, how I think it should be. And, you know, whether it’s, "Oh, I wish I could see this how it was when Lewis & Clark came through here. I wish I could see 10,000 buffalo. I wish there was wheat fields as far as I could see, I like looking at strips, I like seeing cows everywhere. I wish there was no clear cuts here. I wish we could log more." We all have

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this perception of what we want to see and I think that’s...you know it’s greed and it’s selfishness and it’s in every one of us to varying degrees. And I think that was a big reason for a lot of the contention through the ’80’s and the ’90’s over conservation.

This rancher recognized how different images of the area were related to preferences for what the landscape would actually be, on-the-ground, and what activities would be allowed. He argued that different images were a source of conflict and tension.

Given the different meanings and images associated with the area, the role of ranching, the predominant private land use and agricultural activity in the area, was different for different people. Some people argued for the conservation benefits of ranching. A local environmentalist connected the undeveloped qualities of the area with his desire to stabilize local communities and ranchers.

I think it’s just one of the most incredible landscapes on the face of the earth and we’re fortunate that it’s one of the few mountain areas in Montana that’s not been developed already the last ten to fifteen years and that there’s still opportunities to do the conservation that will help maybe stabilize communities and enhance efforts for ranchers.

Some ranchers made statements that linked conservation values directly to livestock production.

One rancher described the area, saying

I’d say we’re in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains and we’re not right in the mountains, but we’re close enough that we have gorgeous sunsets every night. We have...fifteen minutes away and we can be on the Forest Service and in the mountains. The rolling hills. I was trying to think what kind of draws my heart to this country and I guess I can’t really say exactly what it is. I think we’re real fortunate that we have a lot of wildlife here and I think that’s largely due to the ranches here because the ranch owners have made a real conscious effort to be good stewards of the land.

A staff person with a stockgrowers association said

It’s beautiful. I mean, it’s some of the most pristine country in, you know, a lot of the western states. It’s very threatened from development and a loss of traditional land uses, which have worked to preserve a lot of it, contrary to the popular belief of a lot of different national environmental organizations.

He acknowledged different perceptions of ranching, suggesting that many national conservation organizations do not support continued livestock production. Interview results also indicated that local environmentalists are much more supportive of continued ranching than their regional and
national counterparts. Here is one rancher’s response to a question asking how he would describe the area to someone who had never been there.

I would say blue sky, open spaces, clean air, clean water. All of the things that these enviros are suggesting that we aren’t protecting. That makes me see red. ‘Cause most of them are like yourself, come from a populated area. You have seen what people pollution does. And you suddenly come here and thrust yourself on the natives and say "you’re gonna have to do it this way, you’re gonna have to do it that way, because we’ve seen what people pollution does, and we aren’t gonna let you do it to this environment."

The interview question seemed innocuous and apolitical, but, like many other people interviewed, this rancher connects the image of the area with different political agendas.

Many residents specifically recognized that environmentalists connected the Rocky Mountain Front with desirable past conditions, and some described their dismay at potential restoration efforts. One rancher said

They keep saying that everything should be left. You can’t go back in history and there’s going to be more and more of a push with this Lewis & Clark anniversary coming up. We can’t go back to the land looking like that. I mean, that would be impossible. And we have to use what we’ve got to the best advantage for all.

Another rancher described tensions over how far back restoration should be taken.

I guess to me, conservation is keeping the land the way it has been, which, to me means keeping it in agricultural production, you know. I guess there’s some mistakes that maybe we could make up for and others that will never change. I mean, we’re not all going to go back to having big huge grazing herds of buffalo on our property. You know, that’s just not going to happen. Elk and deer we can live with and work with and try to increase those. A lot of ranchers will fight wolves because there’s just some things that you can’t go back to. And so, I guess, conservation to me would be to keep it the way we want it, which is the way it’s been for ten or twenty years, not a hundred years ago.

These ranchers recognized that descriptions of the area as just like it was when Lewis and Clark came through were potentially connected to policy goals that would affect their ability to continue ranching. They questioned whether or not it was possible or desirable to return to past conditions.

Different people connected image and meaning with material interests and policy goals in different ways. What is most striking in these responses is the way that people’s descriptions of the area quickly turned to arguments about threats, statements of conservation goals, justifications for ranching, concerns about the political agendas of others, and fears about on-the-ground land
use change. Interviewees not only connected their visions of the area with ideas about what is and is not legitimate use and what they wanted to see for the future, they also, at times, explicitly recognized the ways in which other kinds of images were linked to different people's conservation agendas.

**Compatibility and the Emerging Third Discourse**

Thus far, when describing the two discourses for the Rocky Mountain Front, one, wild and uninhabited, the other a working, agricultural landscape, I have portrayed them as mutually exclusive and somehow incompatible. The differences in these discourses do often indicate very different policy goals. For instance, some residents may work to preserve ranching in the area, while some nonresident environmentalists may work to take lands out of agricultural production and designate them as preserves or other protected areas. These goals are clearly incompatible. However, there is evidence of an emerging third discourse, one embraced by many local environmentalists and by some ranchers. This third discourse suggests that different images and the activities they imply are compatible, that a working agricultural landscape and wild, biologically intact country can coexist in the same biophysical space. All three of these discourses resurface in later chapters of this dissertation. At this point I will present some of the evidence that certain people embrace a vision of biodiversity, conservation, and ranching.

As described earlier in this chapter, when Community Land Use Survey respondents were asked what features were important in the area, they valued both community and agricultural features of the area and the environment and natural surroundings (see Table 1). In fact, 88% or more respondents rated mountains, open space, wildlife AND agriculture, sense of community, and rural lifestyle as important to some extent. This may indicate that residents see these images and values as compatible.

Survey respondents were also asked several questions about the compatibility of agriculture and conservation (see Table 6-4). When asked if farms and ranchers are a good way
to preserve open space, 53% strongly agreed and 90% agreed to some extent. When asked if ranching and wildlife conservation are compatible, 35% strongly agreed and 78% agreed to some extent.

Table 6-4: Compatibility of Agriculture and Conservation
Community Land Use Survey Responses

Survey instructions to respondents read: Some statements about issues facing Teton County are listed below. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents who Circled Each Answer</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farms and ranches are a good way to preserve open space.</td>
<td>1%  1%  5%  17%  20%  53%  1%</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranching and wildlife conservation are compatible.</td>
<td>4%  3%  10%  15%  28%  35%  3%</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clearly most residents believe that conservation and agriculture can and do coexist.

Some people interviewed at the regional and national level agreed. Nonresidents who argued that sustainable ranching and biodiversity protection were compatible were either Nature Conservancy staff, stockgrowers staff, or other regional environmentalists. One regional environmentalist who grew up on a ranch described a landscape where wildness and ranching coexist.

And I think that it's one of the few that's left where you can be 40 miles away, or 80 miles away, or right up to it and it's still is so wild; and you can look at it for a long ways and not see any sign of civilization. I mean, even on the prairie out in front of it. You don't see big things along there. I mean there are a few things along there, of course, maybe a grain elevator or something every once in a while. But, for the most part there aren't very many large buildings, or ranches, or anything that you see along there.

Stockgrowers' staff also argued that conservation and ranching are compatible. They said "we think you can kind of have your cake and eat it too, you can utilize those resources as I think
we've effectively demonstrated for many, many years as I was mentioning earlier, without destroying what it is that makes it so valuable." One national level Nature Conservancy staff believed that this could be one of the key accomplishments of conservation in the area. He said "we'd have people living in harmony with nature, and meeting their personal objectives, and keeping an intact landscape full of the full glory of nature." However, another national level environmentalist, disagreed, arguing that livestock production compromises biological values. He said

I wrote a thing for the Earth First journal a long time ago suggesting that the Rocky Mountain Front should be set aside as a national ecological reserve. In terms of its potential, and we'll probably get back to this, I don't think it's anywhere near its biological potential because I think it's greatly compromised by the livestock industry.

Many people interviewed indicated that they saw agricultural and environmental preservation as compatible, or potentially compatible. But some regional and national environmentalists, and some ranchers saw the two as mutually exclusive. These environmentalists argued that predators, native grasslands, and bison restoration were incompatible with modern livestock production. The ranchers argued that livestock production could not survive predator restoration and other conservation projects. For these people, the two views of the Front, as a working, inhabited agricultural landscape, or a wild, pristine area for native wildlife, cannot both exist in the same geographical location.

While this third discourse, the discourse of compatibility, may appear to be similar to the rancher and resident definition of place as both a biophysical and social landscape, there is an important difference. Many residents and ranchers defined the area as inhabited and working, and as a natural environment. However, this viewpoint did not necessarily lead to support for environmental policies, programs, and goals, such as sustaining native wildlife and protecting the wild character of the area. Residents appreciate and recognize the natural beauty of the area where they live, but many do not believe that the goals of environmentalists and the goals of
ranchers can both be met in the same area. The third discourse suggests that ranching livelihood and tradition can thrive alongside wildlife and wildness.

**Conclusion**

An increasingly bright conservation spotlight shines on the communities and landscape of the Rocky Mountain Front. The attention of nonresident environmentalists, journalists, and policy-makers must be negotiated by residents within the context of rural change, including new people, new land uses, and new meanings in the area. Different groups of people struggle to enact different futures for the Rocky Mountain Front, and this struggle involves both discourse and material interests.

In this chapter, I primarily explored the discursive side of this struggle, examining different images and meanings associated with this place. Interview data suggests that the Rocky Mountain Front is a recent phenomenon, promoted by nonresident wilderness advocates to further preservation of public lands in the area. Both the name and location of the Front are contested, and hint at tensions about policy-making for public and private properties in the area. Residents and nonresidents alike recognized the influence of different images on policy and management actions.

Different groups of people “see” different Rocky Mountain Fronts; they frame and define the area in different and potentially mutually exclusive ways. Two distinct discourses about the Rocky Mountain Front emerged. Environmentalists, newcomers, and agency staff longed for a lost past, focusing on wildness and ecological attributes. Long-term residents described their attachment to the mountains, the rural communities, and a working, agricultural landscape.

These meanings are political in that they are connected, often explicitly, to different agendas for the area and different material interests. People want to see what they imagine and value preserved for the future. This politics of meaning manifests in a number of ways. Nonresident wilderness advocates created an identity for the Rocky Mountain Front through the
name; wildlife biologists expand the conceptual boundaries of the area to include habitat for migrating species; residents resist compelling descriptions of the area, fearing increasing population growth and outside attention; environmentalists argue that the area is special and unique and should therefore be protected; ranchers describe a working, agricultural landscape where production should continue. For some, these different images and the political agendas they imply are compatible. Others argue that we must choose which future is enacted in the area.

In the following chapter, I begin to explore how neighbors and different landowners interact around community and property boundaries. While this chapter examined the meaning of the Rocky Mountain Front, the next chapter examines the meanings and practices of boundaries and community. In particular, I focus on what newcomer change means for the social landscape of the study site.
Chapter 7:
Newcomers, Community, and Neighbors: The Social and Management Consequences of Land Ownership Change

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated the ways in which the Rocky Mountain Front is being constructed and contested, and the implications of different place meanings for policy and management. The image of the study site is in flux with different people promoting and deploying different visions for the area and its future. This discursive struggle has on-the-ground consequences because people work to create the future they desire, through policy-making or other types of influence over land use and ownership.

Another significant, and perhaps more tangible, transition is occurring in the area. As described earlier, newcomers are quickly changing ownership and land use patterns in the study site. While rural residential subdivision is increasing and has important impacts on wildlife, native flora, local communities, and social customs, most acres transferred out of agricultural production have remained in large holdings, but with new and very different owners, usually wealthy absentee owners. This change raises important questions for land management across boundaries. How does this dramatic shift in land ownership affect how neighbors work together? How does it affect opportunities for cross-boundary conservation and natural resource management?

Newcomer change provides a window into the social relationships between different property owners. These social relationships manifest as management practices and cooperation (or lack of cooperation) around boundaries, the intersection of different properties. New large landowners (people who have purchased between 500 and 20,000 acres in the study site in the last 15 years) control an increasing number of acres in the area, and have very different backgrounds and interests when compared with ranchers. New large landowners often challenge,
and potentially threaten, longstanding community relationships and boundary practices. Cultural
and class differences result in tensions and different management approaches. Gentrification has
important economic consequences for ranchers already struggling to make ends meet financially.
Understanding established local customs for boundary management, and how newcomers alter
these arrangements is essential to recognizing both the barriers and opportunities for cross-
boundary conservation and natural resource management.

Throughout this chapter and this dissertation I differentiate newcomers from other
residents and from ranchers (newcomers are defined here as individuals who have lived in the
study site for 15 years or less). Newcomers influence an increasing number of acres in the study
site. However, of the new large landowners I discuss in this chapter, only two reside in the study
site year round and none are dependent on ranching for their livelihood. In this chapter, I focus,
in part, on rancher perspectives on newcomer change. While I also spoke with newcomers about
their viewpoints and land management practices, many of them were unaware of the tensions
between newer and older landowners and thus newcomer opinions on these topics are somewhat
limited in quantity and scope.

Where longerterm residents discuss newcomer changes it is important to note how they
make implicit and explicit claims to land and livelihood based on their longevity (or their
family’s longevity) in the area. This discursive strategy involves a repeated focus on the “rights”
to land, ranching livelihood, and community because of personal or familial tenure in the area.

The Rapid Pace and Inevitability of Newcomer Change

Residents agreed that an increasing number of newcomers were purchasing large tracts of
land in the study site. These two ranchers commented on increased pace of change.

I think that change is starting to accelerate and the change I’m referring to, I guess, is the
land ownership and the type of land owners that we’re seeing. Growing up and prior to
when I came back, any change of hands and land ownership was probably between
ranchers or families. Now most of the land changes from maybe a four or five generation
rancher to someone from out of the area that generally has a lot of income available to them and they can afford to come in and buy the land at inflated prices.

When I was a boy, this was all a gravel road and you knew every car that drove up and down it. And there was nothing but ranching - full time involved ranching - families that lived up here. Now in the summer, there are days when this road is really amazingly busy with traffic. And they're just...I'll go, 'where are all these people going and what are they?... It's not a thru road. Where are they going? What are they doing?'

Both of these ranchers characterized ownership changes as movement away from “traditional” land uses, especially agriculture.

Many residents believed that outside attention to the Rocky Mountain Front spurred this change in land ownership. Some residents did not want the area considered “special” because they feared and resented the influx of newcomers they believed this label inspired. Others acknowledged the area was special, but wanted to be “left alone.” People agreed that national attention generated interest in the area, and that interest made people want to see it, save it, be a part of it, and own a piece of it.

Many residents expressed a sense that the transition of large privately-owned properties to wealthy, often absentee, newcomers was inevitable. They argued that once land was sold to newcomers it would never be owned by ranchers again. They also argued that rising land prices meant that property that changed hands would necessarily move into newcomer ownership.

**Newcomers and Community**

Most residents were concerned about the changes they associated with newcomers. There was a widespread sense that newcomers either did not participate in or sought to change local communities. One rancher wished that newcomers “wanted to learn from the people around them” and “not start their own culture.” Many residents suggested that newcomers were “changing the culture.” One rancher said that “if they abide by our rules and whatever, I don’t see any problem, any difference to it.” A retired rancher complained that newcomers weren’t “friendly,” describing the differences as follows.
I mean, here you speak and wave and talk to everybody whether you know them or not. Well, you don’t with them. They’re just very...well, they were raised differently. They’re just a different breed of cats. Somebody said, ‘I don’t believe it. Everybody waves at me,’ Well, that’s something we do, whether you know them or whether you don’t know them. And a lot of them go just like, ‘Well what do you think you’re doing?’...I’m just amazed at the difference in the friendliness or closeness or whatever, when they come from other places.

Many residents claimed that newcomers were absentee landowners and, even if they did live in the area year round, did not participate in and contribute to the community. One resident explained how this changes the community,

Many times the new people that move here that want to live here, that want to put their children in school here, or to raise their families here do not become an integral part of the community. They don’t run for boards, they don’t become involved. And we see that in all the little towns in this area. Even if the population hasn’t decreased, the involvement, the shopping, the supporting the churches, supporting the schools as far as being a member of the school board. These type of things we’re losing. And when somebody from out of state buys the big ranch they are not the same as that person that raised his family on that ranch. It’s not the same.

Residents were clearly concerned about taking land out of agricultural production. Beyond this, residents wanted newcomers to participate actively in community life, volunteering, joining community institutions, and embracing local cultural events.

Residents interviewed were also concerned that newcomers would come and go quickly, only remaining in the area a few years before moving on to another location. While recent Montana studies have shown high turnover amongst newcomer landowners, large landowners in the study site have thus far not fit this profile. Properties sold by ranchers to new large landowners have not turned over to another set of owners at this point in time. One real estate agent who has worked with many of these newcomers claimed that the owners he knew “say that they’ll go to the grave still owning that property and pass it on to their kids or whatever. There’s an abiding passion for the Front in that sense.”

Some newcomers acknowledged the need for new people to make an effort to participate in the community. One newcomer who owns a small farm just east of the study site compares Choteau with another small town in which she previously lived, saying
There I felt like we were part of the crew there and I feel the same here. And that’s because we want to contribute and we’re willing to contribute. People that sit back and want people to come to them and ask them all the time and have to put out extra effort rather than meeting halfway or going beyond, I don’t think ever really fit.

Another newcomer suggested that newcomers should at least help maintain the image of the area they were attracted to. He said

I think the worse thing is to just sort of buy something and just not care. And not tune into the values that the people who’ve been there forever have because, indeed, that’s why it looks like it looks. I mean, if people first settled this area and didn’t care about animals, livestock, sheep or cattle or whatever, there’d be a whole different face to this place. So what attracts people to this place is its face to some degree. So as the Lettermans arrive, you’d hope that they would at least want to maintain the face.

Another newcomer who lives in town commented on the new large landowner landowners out of town. He said,

That’s one of the beefs that a lot of people have about absentee owners or out of state rich people that come in. They don’t accept it the way it is. They want to change it to what they think it ought to be, so they impose an outside set of values that are often in conflict with the values that are already there. And that creates resentment.

Overall, there was a sense of animosity based on the perceived lack of acceptance of local customs and culture on the part of newcomers. Some newcomers recognized this tension, but most did not. Most newcomers felt they had been received quite well by the local community. One newcomer said “we’ve been accepted as sort of outsiders.”

There were also concerns about the impact of newcomers on the local economy. Residents worried that newcomers did not shop locally, that they did not purchase agricultural supplies, and that they failed to renew neighbors’ grazing leases. However, some residents believed that newcomers contributed to the local economy. One newcomer business owner described the pros and cons of newcomers, saying “generally they don’t live here year around they aren’t part of the fabric of the community in the same way. But they can provide jobs; they use services in the area and things.” One celebrity maintained a low profile, but donated money to needy community projects. For instance, a local meat packing plant burned down and had no...
insurance. This celebrity donated money to pay the staff for a few months while they looked for other work. Residents acknowledged and appreciated this gift.

It was clear that different newcomers had different impacts on the local economy. Some newcomers purchased many ranches and hired only seasonal help who migrated in and out of the community. This was not considered particularly beneficial to local economies. Other newcomers supported a family or two year-round in ranch operations, which was regarded as beneficial for the community.

Many residents also voiced concerns that newcomers would increase demands on local services and infrastructure. These residents believed that newcomers’ needs for fire protection, road maintenance, postal service, cell phone towers, and other amenities were different from other residents. They argued that newcomers came from places where county services were better developed and wanted the same types of services in the study site. One resident described newcomer friends, saying, “a lot of my friends that have moved here have wanted, they loved Augusta, but immediately wanted to change it. They wanted their postal service 20 miles out, or whatever. What they had in amenities from other places, they wanted here.” Many residents argued that additional demands would increase their property taxes. One rancher said

I don’t know how many times I’ve heard well, ‘when I was living in Los Angeles they delivered the mail to my door and they picked up my garbage and they did all that.’ Well if that’s what you want, stay in Los Angeles. I mean that isn’t what we have here, and we probably can’t afford it. Our counties are strapped for money. We’re taxed about as far as we can afford and we all drive to town to get the mail and whatever else we want and it’s kind of nice to have to go to town once in a while.

Another rancher described the paradox of newcomers wanting to get away from their normal lives in other places, but wanting the same amenities they could access in those other places. She said

For one thing it, they want all the goods and services that they left behind for the most part. They come and want to escape the life-this is an escape for them, the life they left. And they want all this beautiful land on the Front. But it costs all the taxpayers more for one thing, to provide them with the goods and services that they demand. Like in the all years we’ve lived here, I don’t think we ever called for a snowplow, you just kind of dug yourself out. Well, the minute they move up there, they think they have to have a way to get out, no matter what. And they really don’t, always, just little things like that.
This rancher suggested that newcomers want to escape the urban environments they usually live in, but try to recreate the same services and amenities in the study site.

These sentiments were neither confirmed nor denied by the new large landowners that I interviewed. Many newcomers commented that the Internet and Federal Express made many things available to them in an otherwise remote area. And a few newcomers argued against increasing services, on the grounds that these amenities might bring more people in to the area. One new landowner could easily afford to improve the local airport and land a short drive from his property. He chose, instead, to fly into Great Falls because increased airport facilities might not be “a good thing” for the area.

Class and Livelihood Differences

Tensions around new landowners and ranchers, and local communities as a whole, revolved around much more than cultural differences or social norms. These tensions were also based on the recognition of real differences in material resources. Newcomer landowners had far greater financial resources than ranchers and other residents. In short, they were very wealthy by comparison. According to one rancher, “we’re not in the same league” as the newcomers. One ranch manager described residents calling his employers “rich bastards.”

One rancher described the “separation” between newcomers and ranchers, calling it a “class distinction” between those “that have college education versus the ones that don’t.” (This is an interesting distinction because most ranchers in the study site have college degrees.) Another rancher wondered if ranchers felt “inferior to some of the people that come here” because of being labeled “hicks.” She argued that newcomers looked down on ranchers in a way that could be described as “patronizing.”

Several wealthy families actually purchased ranches in the study site in the 1950s and were thus considered newcomers at an earlier point in time. However, while these ranchers came into the area with financial resources from nonagricultural sources, they lived on their ranches
fulltime, integrated into the local community, and, in most cases, lived and managed their lands in similar ways to other ranchers. One rancher described why the new round of new large landowners were viewed so differently.

It's hard, it's hard, I guess, here in this area. And as I was growing up, I guess I didn't realize when I was a kid that we were poor. Because I didn't know the difference. I don't know when I finally realized there was a difference between poor people and rich people. I mean maybe when I got to college, and, no I take that back, I knew before then. But, around here, you see wealthy ranchers that have made their money, I mean they've been here forever, but maybe they made a pot of money someplace else too. And they're more wealthy than the next one. They've never, there's never been any class distinction. But these new people that move in lots of times, they're not a part of the community, for example, like when one of our kids gets married, everybody's invited to the wedding, the party. It's a class type thing. The one wealthy neighbor of ours, when their daughter got married, they hired a catering company from clear down at Billings because they didn't want anybody local, and nobody local was invited. It makes you feel a little like you're, they're making you think you're less then.

This more recent round of wealthy newcomers were believed to have different social customs and to shun residents in some situations as a result of their different financial resources.

Interestingly, a few newcomers argued that ranchers were the local economic and social “elite,” perceived as “extremely wealthy.” However, other newcomers recognized and acknowledged the different financial positions of the two groups. One ranch manager described this difference in the context of his employers wanting wolves on their property.

It is kind of a catch twenty-two for us, because we like seeing it, yet at the same time we don't want to see our neighbors hurt. Because we don't have to grow a cow. Where the neighbors do. They've got kids. They have children they have to send to school. They have to feed them. They have to clothe them. They have to feed and clothe themselves.

Overall, ranchers described their own economic situation as modest and sometimes marginal.

According to a local business owner,

There's more people with money, we don't have any, we have no idea in this area what money is I want you to know. Because you go some place else and you find out what money really is and it's just one of those things where the local people, the people who have been here for a period of time, don't have a lot of money.

During interviews, ranchers focused, in part, on these economic hardships, outlining the many financial challenges to making a living ranching, including the price of beef, the alleged meatpacking monopoly, competition from foreign beef, and the burden of regulations. One
rancher told me she could qualify for food stamps based on her actual income, but because of the land she owned, her daughter could get no assistance for college.

Ranchers and other residents often argued that newcomer landowners were different because they did not have to make a living from their property. Newcomer property was often referred to as a "plaything," "hobby," "get away," and "toy." Newcomers not depending on ranches for their livelihood was said to result in changes in land management and local culture.

One outfitter described how new large landowners change the area. He said

I think it changes the culture because often times the people who buy the land aren't living on the land, they aren't dependent upon the land for their sustenance. And if they're not, they're different. They're going to have an entirely different relationship with that piece of land than someone who has to make their living off that land.

A rancher suggested that not making a living from the land means a different relationship with the community.

It affects the area. When somebody doesn't have to make a living on the land they have a different feeling towards it. They have a different feeling towards the people that work for them on the ranches. They have a different feeling towards the community. Augusta was a lot different town when there were a lot of family owned ranches, because every, every, every family had a real stake in a community.

Another rancher argued that newcomers manage land differently because they are not making a living from it. She said

Well they would be managing it different because they're not making a living off of it. I mean there's a world of difference. When you're using it just as a, as a something to, just to be there, to get away from the hubbub from wherever you're from. I mean it's entirely different. You don't do things the same way, if you are depending on that to make a living. You'd be doing a lot of things different, because you have to.

Making a living from the land is associated with particular kinds of management approaches that are valued by ranchers. Also, ranchers connected livelihood and conservation, arguing in many different contexts that making a living from a piece of land motivates and even requires good stewardship.

Two newcomers actually did work part-time to manage their livestock, although they were not dependent on their herds for income. Both indicated that ranchers would see them
outside working and had respect for them because of their hard work. According to one of these newcomers,

The fact is I work here half time and I’m out there building fence the other half of the time. I work my butt off. The guys who see me, my neighbors, see me work. They place a great value on how hard a person works. They think a man is measured by how much fence he can get done in one day or how much he can lift or whatever. I rank right there with the best of them.

A rancher described the other newcomer who worked on his property, saying

He is nice. One thing I liked, when I first met Correy, he come up here to...I think they had some cattle in our field and we told them about it, told we’d get them out. He offered to come with his hired help, to come up and he was young and inexperienced but he was pretty gutsy. He’d go through the timber like anyone and that’s hard to do that. You know, it’s rough, tears at you. I was impressed. He’s willing to get out and work at it.

But even these newcomers were considered separate and different from other residents, primarily because they did not depend on the land for their livelihood, and could stop working on their ranches at any time.

Most newcomers talked about not needing to make their property “cash flow.” One newcomer said that his family does not need to “make use of every available acre” and “that, in turn, allows wildlife to make use of those acres that we don’t utilize. And we derive a measure of satisfaction from that.” Newcomers told me their land was free and clear of debt, that they could invest in their properties without “too much concern for cost,” and that they had flexibility because of outside sources of money.

Ranchers and other residents often resented what they described as “conspicuous consumption” on the part of newcomers. Newcomers built new homes, riding arenas, and new roads, and frequently replaced fences. Ranchers and other residents called for humility, especially in the case of “trophy homes.” One rancher said

Just, it’d be really nice if…and be modest in their home building...the fellow down there in the Dearborn building a 30,000 square foot home for a temporary residence...I can see guys wanting to accumulate land. Land’s a neat thing and hopefully do good things with it, but to make this a house like that, you know, I wish they’d fix up the house that’s on there. If you buy a ranch, what’s the matter with modesty, humility, fix the house up that’s there or build a modest structure in the right place, those are the things I wish for.

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These "building sprees" were regarded by many residents as "excessive" and as "memorials to someone's ego." New structures were often situated on ridges or out in the open for better views, while ranch houses were usually nestled in draws to protect them from the wind. Because of location, newcomer houses were more noticeable and had a bigger impact on the "viewscape." Overall, these differences in consumption and lifestyle were believed to "alienate" newcomers from the rest of the community and made ranchers "uncomfortable.

Gentrification

The ways that class differences affected ranchers most directly and obviously was through driving up land prices. Rural gentrification was widely resented and will likely alter land use and land ownership in the area for the foreseeable future. One rancher explained that "it affects our land prices. It's tremendous now, because what the neighbors pay for recreation land, they view as recreation, and we view as agriculture."

Land prices are increasing rapidly in the study site. Ranchlands adjacent to the mountains are increasing in value at a faster pace than those further east. Sellers have begun to ask for more money per acre because of the big-name celebrities who have moved to the area. Many ranchers talked about being approached, in person or by telephone, to sell all or part of their property. One rancher took out an ad in the Great Falls Tribune stating that his ranch was not for sale so that people would stop inquiring. Another rancher argued that, given current beef prices, land would need to sell for $65-75/acre for a family to make a living ranching. He argued that ranch land had not sold for "agricultural prices" since the late 1970s. One newcomer purchased his property in 1997, when it seemed expensive to him. By 2001 it was "dirt cheap" in comparison to the prices that nearby properties were fetching.

Very few ranchers could afford to expand their operations through the purchase of additional lands. One rancher described this situation, saying "it gets so that if you want to add to your place, it's almost impossible because you've got to remember the bottom line and if it
doesn’t pencil out the bottom line, you’re not going to be in business. Where they could care less.” Another rancher described her inability to compete with newcomers for available land.

We can’t compete with these people that come in and buy the land and pay these exorbitant prices, which I’m sure you’ve heard, over and over. We cannot compete with it as grazing land. We can’t afford it, cattle simply won’t pay for it that way. So, the best thing that we can do is try to work with them, maybe they will buy it up, and maybe they will still lease it as grazing.

Many ranchers were concerned with the seemingly permanent turnover of lands to nonranchers, and the prospect of decreasing access to grass for their own operations. Some ranchers also suggested that remaining competitive in the current livestock market depending on expanding the scale of their operations, which they were unable to do because they could not afford to purchase nearby properties.

In a few cases, lands were sold cheaply enough that adjacent ranchers could and did purchase them. One rancher explained that prices are still high, but that ranchers were sometimes willing to stretch themselves to expand.

Well, what I say are inflated, meaning that they’re significantly higher prices than what you can pay for if you were going to raise cattle on it or try to pay for it from agriculture. And even the land that still is being bought and sold by agricultural people...more is being paid for that land than what the rancher can...if he had to just take that piece of ground and make it work, make it pay for itself, it’s still selling for probably twice, 2-3 times. It’s just that ranchers know that if they don’t buy it now, they probably won’t ever get an opportunity to buy it again so they’re willing to sacrifice maybe a place that’s paid for, they’re willing to use the income off the place that’s paid for to help supplement to, you know, maybe buy the neighbor’s place.

Several longtime landowners appear to have sold ranchlands at prices much lower than the market could bear specifically so that land would remain in local hands and in ranching.

However, in most cases, ranchlands were not affordable for ranchers. Even the Hutterites, with their legendary efficiency and low labor costs, were increasingly struggling to purchase lands in the study site.

Ranchers were also concerned about their ability to pass property on to the next generation. One rancher argued that increasing land values were “squeezing” ranchers out, and making it more difficult to pass ranches along to their children. Increasing land prices meant
expansion to accommodate several siblings was nearly impossible. Furthermore, siblings who did not want to ranch had to be “bought out” of family corporations at current land values. If children who wanted to ranch were unable to come up with the cash to purchase sibling shares, they would not be able to continue ranching. One rancher explained this situation, saying

It’s frustrating because we know that we can probably never increase the acreage of this place, which means that if more than one of our children want to come back to the ranch, they’re not going to be able to. So it’s frustrating to us because the prices that land goes for here aren’t anywhere close to what you could make a living at. It’s also a concern for people when they’re doing estate planning because those land values inflate the inheritance tax and for us, when we look at buying out my brother’s and sister’s shares of this ranch corporation, those shares have to be valued at what the value of the land and everything is which isn’t necessarily representative of what the ranch can produce, what you can make a living at. So it affects you a lot of different ways.

Ranches were also unavailable for young couples who wanted to go into agriculture. While some ranchers complained about property taxes, increasing land values do not increase property taxes unless a ranch is sold. Ranchers continue to pay agricultural taxes that are unaffected by nearby recreational land values. However, as the ranch turns over from one generation to another, inheritance taxes are owed on the current market value of the land, and could be prohibitive.

While ranchers and other residents often expressed frustration and even despair over this seemingly unstoppable transition to new types of owners and land uses, they also argued that the rancher’s right to sell and the newcomers right to purchase at “exorbitant” prices was a property right they supported. All of these ranchers made strong statements about the right to buy and sell these lands, but contextualized them in statements of disappointment, loss, and inevitability.

It’s their right to sell to them and their right to buy, I guess. If they’ve got the change and they seem to have it. But it’s a damn shame to see the land go from productive, family supporting unit to somebody for a summer home.

Our heritage, they’re taking it away. But on the other hand everybody has the right, private property rights, to do what they want and if a rancher has been in business for thirty or forty years and he could make more selling his property than he has in all that time…It’s sad that we have come to that as a nation, but he has got the right to do it. I don’t like it, and growing up, we want wide-open spaces, but they have the right. So, it’s tough.

I’ll be honest. I’m not happy to see the David Lettermans come in. People have every right to sell their land to whoever they want to, but I’m not happy to see it.
It’s really frustrating to me and at the same time, I guess, if you’ve got the money and it’s what you want to do, you have the right to do that. I mean, I’m not one that believes that if you’re not a second or third or fourth generation rancher you don’t have any right being there.

While ranchers and other residents were saddened and even angry when ranches were sold to newcomers, they acknowledged that the economic conditions of ranching usually required the rancher to sell to the highest bidder, to pay off operating loans, members of the family corporation, and to deal with inheritance taxes.

If land prices remain high and beef prices low (which appears likely), the shift toward wealthy, often absentee, newcomer landowners is likely to become permanent. While rural gentrification presents an economic hardship for ranchers, they support private landowners’ rights to sell to the highest bidder. Ranchers and many other residents do not want to see large properties move out of ranching and multigenerational ownership, but their support of private property rights supercedes their desire to regulate these sales.

**Newcomers and Land Management**

The many differences between newcomers and ranchers manifest in different kinds of land management. Ranchers and other residents argued that newcomers’ distance from community, access to financial resources, and different values meant changes in land management that affected nearby ranchers. According to one rancher,

The straight answer is, it’s always sort of disappointing to me. It doesn’t seem like a good thing and a lot of it is because the people don’t often try to become part of the community. They hold themselves aloof and so management issues...we’re not all islands, we have management issues in common and they tend not to integrate their management issues as easily. They tend to think that they can do whatever they want and how they manage their elk herd affects us or how they manage their fencing affects us.

Newcomers not being part of the social fabric of the area meant that they were not familiar with and integrating themselves into land management issues that crossed property boundaries. These changes in land management were described as “part of the culture clash.”
New large landowners in the study site vary with regard to land management practices. A few have livestock, but most do not. Some do not own livestock but lease their pastures to neighboring ranches. Some do not want cattle on their property under any circumstances. Others are “not crazy about” cattle, but want to see their property grazed every once in a while for grassland health. Others plan to acquire bison at some point in the future. Some graze cattle for a hobby or for the health of the range, but a few graze specifically to make money. The two newcomers who have actually worked with cattle on their ranches both implemented specific livestock grazing practices they studied in college. Ranchers and other residents often argued that when newcomers continued grazing cattle, changes to community and land management because of new ownership were less significant.

However, in many cases, newcomers prioritized wildlife and wildlife habitat over livestock production on their properties. Many newcomers talked about wanting to enhance wildlife habitat. One newcomer described feeding pheasants. Others described their properties as “refuges,” saying they wanted to see elk and wolves on their land. Newcomer wildlife management practices will be discussed further in chapter 9.

Newcomers as Stewards

There were mixed opinions about whether new large landowners were good for the land or not. Many ranchers felt that newcomers were not good stewards. They cited multiple reasons for this claim. Some argued that newcomers who wanted to make ranching a profitable business did so at the expense of local ecology. According to one rancher, “you have other people who’ve moved in, and done a more intensive farming, I mean and bought companies and farm equipment and just went for it. And tore up more land, trying to make it more of a business.” Other ranchers argued that newcomers did not understand ranching or the area, and thus overgrazed or mismanaged their property. One rancher described this in the context of not needing to make a living off the land.
HOLLY: Well, they're the ones that bring down the image of the farmer and rancher because they don't do a very good job. If you look at most of those places, they're overgrazed, they're not taken care of.
LAURIE: Why do you think that is?
HOLLY: Because they don't understand it. And it doesn't... unless something hits you in the pocket, economically affects you, you aren't going to make a decision that's correct on it. Anything we do in our life, it has to affect us and until it does that, they just do whatever they get a wild hair to do.

Another rancher described the “dramatic physical changes, dramatic management changes” when a neighboring ranch was purchased. While the previous owner “always had grass left, even in drought years,” the newcomer’s “place looks now much more like the rest of us who have had to use our ranches a little bit harder.” She described another newcomer’s overgrazing in this excerpt.

Then we have another neighbor who came in, sold a house or something for a million dollars and bought the neighbor's ranch and was a developer and brought some money to bear to this place... everybody runs everybody else's ranch from the highway. But what we've noticed from him is that he's been overstocked from the minute he set foot. So he is somebody, again, who, I'm not quite sure how he learned to quote unquote ranch, sort of by the seat of his pants, but his place is always... I mean it's perpetually overgrazed. And he's one of those, 'don't tell me what to do,' real friendly, but really property rights kind of guys. And he's the kind of people that, to me, are equally, if you want to call it dangerous to the landscape and to what's going on along the Front because he's doing extensive long-term damage to that place the way he's managing it.

This rancher connected this newcomers' lack of knowledge of ranching, his background, and his perspective on property rights to his overgrazing of his land.

In contrast, some environmentalists and newcomers believed that new large landowners were going to “save” the area from subdivision and overgrazing by livestock. Some environmentalists argued that new large landowners were in a position to invest in the restoration of their properties. One national level environmentalist told me his ideal vision for the area was that all properties be owned by wealthy newcomers with no cattle. Newcomers were considered “good environmental sort of people,” and often called “conservation buyers.” According to one newcomer,

The only thing that is actually going to save this is money. And there is no money here, I mean there's not enough money to save that from what its potential foes are. And money
and just a blind interest and love of wolves and bears, and all the things that get into the
hot seat here, that bring the interest here.

A ranch manager described his employers’ purchase of their property, saying “they bought it to
quote unquote save the east Front.” One newcomer described people like himself as “buying
these places and paying more money for them and keeping them whole.”

Ranchers were aware of this perspective. One rancher described newcomer friends,
saying “we’ve had new friends move in, who’ve had a lot of money, who’ve been friends with
Nature Conservancy, and some of their attitudes were, let’s just lock the whole Rocky Mountain
Front up, let rich people buy it and shut everyone else out.” One rancher who worked for the
Nature Conservancy described the guests and the contradiction between wanting to “save” the
area and purchasing property.

And then you got some guests that came in and then they were going to save the area.
And I guess part of the problem I have with some guests or some people from wherever, I
mean, they come in and see this area, they want to save it, so what do they do? They buy
land and build a house. Okay, that doesn’t make sense to me.

A few ranchers acknowledged that newcomers might be able to use the land lighter and not
overstock during drought years. One rancher described newcomers this way,

Basically, I think they take pretty good care of the land because they have a tendency, if
anything, to under use it. Yeah, I don’t think they’re going to hurt the land. If you’re
making a livin’ off it and that’s your sole living, there’s a fine line between over using it
and not using it enough. There is. There’s a fine line there.

Another rancher described newcomers, saying “they can do a lot of good on the place with money
and not have to worry about whether they can pay for it.”

Other local and regional environmentalists were dismayed by the purchase of large
properties by new large landowners. One regional environmentalist said she “despised” a certain
newcomer who had recently purchased land in the study site. Another environmentalist argued
that not all newcomers were Ted Turners and were not necessarily interested in restoring bison,
but rather wanted a ranch to “hide from people and keep people out.” In general, resident
environmentalists were very supportive of ranching in the area. Regional environmentalists were

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usually supportive, but they varied more. At the national level there was a real diversity, including some strong opposition to ranching. People who supported ranching were generally displeased about newcomer ownership. People who did not support ranching were usually in favor of newcomer ownership.

In comparison to rural subdivision, however, both environmentalists and ranchers often saw new large landowner landowners as preferable, despite mixed feelings about their impact on resident communities and local ecology. A few environmentalists described this perspective.

I have mixed feelings I guess. I would rather see a wealthy person come in and buy a big chunk of land than to see a place sell to someone who is going to turn a profit on that land by chunking it up and subdividing it. But I do see new large landowners coming in and driving land prices up, because they’re willing to pay more. And I feel bad for local people who would like to ranch, but can no longer afford to add land to their existing property or to buy into the business to lead that kind of life. So I have mixed feelings.

I realize that David Letterman symbolizes a sort of a red herring in the minds of many Montanans because he represents big outside money coming in and imposing perhaps a different set of values, especially when the “no trespassing” signs come up and all of a sudden we have a gated community where we always had open space before and those things are happening. But I would rather have David Letterman here than some fast buck artist that’s decided that they can take those same…what is it, about 3,000 acres or 2,500 acres whatever it is…take those same and put 100 lots in there. I’ll take David Letterman any day over that.

A newcomer concurred.

That’s the interesting thing. Those people will not sell subdivision. They will not subdivide. …The reason they buy the ranches, just like us, is not to make money. The reason we buy it is we like to look out our window and not see our neighbor’s bathroom. So why would they subdivide something like that? They won’t. And one of the benefits and it really is an environmental benefit of wealthy people buying property in pristine areas, you can pretty much guarantee the land is not going to be developed beyond what that wealthy person wants. Which is not that much development.

Newcomers were very clear about their intentions not to subdivide. In most cases newcomers planned to donate a conservation easement at some point. They described a moral obligation to keep their properties whole and to protect wildlife. In fact, several newcomers had purchased nearby properties to keep them from being developed. Other newcomers expressed their intent to prevent development in the study site, either through purchase of additional properties or through using their money and power to generate political attention to the area. Most of the newcomer
landowners in the study site had some connection to the Nature Conservancy (they were longtime members, had visited the preserve, or worked with a “conservation” real estate agent closely associated with the Nature Conservancy) and had likely been motivated, in part, by conservation goals in the purchase of their properties.

Interestingly, local and regional Nature Conservancy staff took a relatively strong position in support of multigenerational family ranchers, arguing that these ranchers were good for the land. This Nature Conservancy employee compared newcomers with ranchers.

Well, probably in general, they’re [newcomers] going to be less compatible with conservation. Because I think they probably have less connection to the land. Some of them are going to be better than your average rancher or whatever, but some of them are going to be a lot worse cause they’re not going to really care about the land as far as what it is and how it fits into the rest of the thing. They’re going to just care about it as far as what they get out of it, which is the way a lot of producers are too. But I think that by sort of divorcing yourself from needing to take care of the land in order to have an income, you run the risk of doing a lot of things that aren’t good cause there’s no sort of negative impacts for certain things that you might do.

He also described ranchers as making “for a more cohesive community for sure,” but concluded that “the ultimate impact on the ecology of the area” is “hard to say.” Another Nature Conservancy employee said,

There are those that feel the most highly leveraged way of doing conservation would be to allow new conservation buyers to come in and buy land and then donate a conservation easement on it. I’ve argued that if you’re truly doing community-based conservation then you have to be looking at trying to help stabilize the communities you’re working in and I think that long-term stewardship is going to be far better with those traditional ranch families that have been there three, four, or five generations who really have an understanding of what the land can do and can’t do. And I don’t think a blend is a bad thing. I think we’re evolving towards a blend.

These Nature Conservancy staff did not suggest that newcomers are bad stewards or that ranchers are necessarily better, but they provided a series of arguments in favor of supporting ranchers. They argued that ranchers had long-term knowledge of ecological conditions and management approaches, that they had a connection to the land, that depending on the land for livelihood meant feeling the repercussions of mismanagement firsthand, and that ranchers increased community stability which benefited conservation in the area. These environmentalists clearly
see livelihood and conservation as compatible and potentially mutually reinforcing. (In fact, because these environmentalists support natural resource use, they might better be labeled conservationists.) Instead of livelihood as a disincentive to conservation, livelihood is conceptualized as motivating conservation.

The Social Landscape Expanded: Meanings and Practices of Neighbors

Earlier I argued that newcomer relationships with local communities affected land management across boundaries. Newcomer land management also affects community relationships. In the last chapter, I described how residents conceptualized the landscape as simultaneously social and biological, with community characteristics overlaid and inseparable from ecological features. This connection, this social landscape, was also described in the context of land ownership change. Many ranchers and other residents made statements indicating that various properties were defined, in part, through memory, heritage, and social relationships with neighbors and community.

One woman claimed that as ranchers were replaced by new large landowners, “the natural areas are not part of the social community.” In other words, these properties were removed from the social landscape. One rancher articulated what this change means to ranchers.

The state land, other blocks of land. We live here. We operate within barbed wire. We say that’s mine and this is what I’ve got to have to make work and on and on and on. But you couldn’t take this ranch and put it as an island in the ocean. It wouldn’t be the same. I’d still have the same amount of property to work with but the entire landscape here is what makes...I wouldn’t want to not have my neighbors. I wouldn’t want to not have a lot of what goes on here. The openness, the larger...if you cut this out and set it somewhere, you would probably feel like you just moved into a studio apartment somewhere. Even though you have the same amount of real estate, it wouldn’t...We’re a part of this whole big geographic area. And that’s, I think, where people get...when someone-and I hate to pick on Dave but he’s the only one here- Letterman buys that and then surrounds it in a cloak of mystery. Even though we may never set foot on there, it’s this chunk that’s in there that we see that being in the middle there pushes the other pieces out. And then all of a sudden it’s got a different meaning to it. It’s got a different color to it and it’s noticeable. You can feel it. It’s different. It’s not as pleasant either. You’re never going to get any economic benefit from the way that was. But it’s changed the entire feeling of the area. And you don’t lose sleep over it, but it’s not the way it was. (Emphasis added)

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In comparing subdivision and new large landowners purchasing large property, this rancher also said,

I'm more concerned about just whole ranches being purchased and just removing that traditional, putting an iron curtain up and taking away that traditional use, no more sportsman access, no hunting, no grazing. It's like you took and lifted it off and it's gone. It's not part of the fabric. All these ranches with neighbors, it's a big quilt. And my cattle get on you, no big deal, we'll get them out, yours get on mine...it's people work together to varying degrees and this thing, it's like you put a big fence in there and you've taken, eliminated this piece. You might not economically benefit from that rancher that's there but his being there and being a friend and neighbor and ally is part of your...it's part of the system and then it's removed.

Aaron described how ranchers define their property as private, yet see their property as part of a larger landscape, both social and biophysical. Consequently, when a piece of property is purchased by a newcomer who is not part of the community, it is removed from that social landscape. Neighbors and neighbor relationships are part of this social landscape. Boundaries must be somewhat permeable, according to local customs and norms, for community to develop and be maintained. Fixed, immutable, uncrossable boundaries do not lend themselves to neighbors working together.

**Neighbors**

Ideas about neighbors and appropriate neighbors relations revolve in large part around boundaries - what crosses them and who decides. While a cursory examination of the private property concepts often articulated by the ranching community might lead us to believe that private property boundaries are impermeable, fixed, and nonnegotiable, closer exploration of how neighbors actually interact provides a much different picture. In fact, local custom and culture dictates that certain “trespasses” are appropriate, while others are not. Property boundaries, then, are permeable according to established social customs more so than legally defined uses.

Many ranchers repeated the old axiom “good fences make good neighbors,” indicating that maintenance of property boundaries was critical to positive neighborly relations. But these
boundaries were often crossed when neighbors were in need of assistance. Neighboring ranchers assist each other with the branding and shipping of calves. These activities are short in duration (a couple of days) but intense enough to require significant labor. Ranchers in a particular drainage will coordinate their branding dates in order to ensure that neighbors can assist them. In addition to these planned annual events, ranchers also assist each other with broken vehicles, animals that get through fences, and other kinds of emergencies. They trade labor for fencing and coordinate use of pastures so that bulls and cows are not adjacent to one another.

In particular, ranchers described the ways neighbors assisted during grassland fires. When a particular ranch caught fire, neighbors near and far dropped everything and arrived at the scene, with water trucks and dozers if possible, to fight the fire themselves. One resident described such an episode.

It was interesting, last summer we had a neighbor had a field catch on fire, a piece of equipment struck a spark, and you really got a sense of community when you go up there. As soon as that plume raises, of course, everyone jumps and goes to see if they can help. When we arrived, and we weren't that late, there were already over 100 people fighting that fire and farmers with their big equipment and what have you. The actual fire fighters, volunteer fire departments, their equipment was dwarfed by local ranchers’.

The Hutterites, in particular, were known for helping in such emergencies. While ranchers fighting fires caused some consternation for local fire officials and often resulted in a certain amount of chaos (and thus danger) regarding who was where doing what, ranchers commented that this sort of helping was an essential component of community. In some cases these fires may have spread onto neighboring properties and thus provided an incentive for neighbors to participate in the fire fighting efforts. However, most of the time those providing assistance were unlikely to be personally impacted by the fire.

The willingness of neighbors to help one another in times of need was believed to be a result, in part, of the remote and harsh nature of the area. According to Bart,

Really, that can all be summed up as part of the community. For 100 years, there was no electricity. There was darn few roads. We had winters. The climate itself has been mild here now for about 25 years, but at least three times in the first 12 years of my life, we had snow drifts up to the top of the roof of this house. There were lots of times when a
four-wheel drive wouldn’t get you anywhere. And it’s harsh country, or it can be. And in order to survive in that kind of harsh country, you depend on neighbors. Everybody knew everybody and we were all friends. You didn’t have to do more than walk to the nearest next neighbor and you had help.

However, some ranchers argued that neighbors helping neighbors was on the decline. According to one rancher, “here, years ago, all the neighbors helped neighbors. They got away from that anymore. They don’t do it as much.” One rancher explained why this might be the case,

And it’s slowly fading away as to ranchers helping each other. Probably for the reason mainly, again, as to government intervention, as to OSHA, lawsuits, liabilities. If you have somebody that’s at your operation helping you, say they’re helping you brand and they have a horse wreck and they get hurt. You’re responsible because they’re at your place. So things like that have slowly deteriorated to that the people want to have…they want to have the help, but they don’t want to be responsible and be set up for getting sued or having liability. So that trading labor back and forth is slowly deteriorating, doesn’t happen anymore. It’s a sad thing to see. So that part of it has deteriorated but yet ranchers still get along. They share fence lines, they’ll have a division fence, you take this half, I’ll take this half. There’s cooperation between them.

Neighborly help may be on the decline, but it remains an important component of social relationships and livestock operations.

Coordination between neighboring ranches did not extend into grazing or livestock management, for the most part. These decisions – how many cattle to graze, when to move the cattle, and how riparian areas are managed – were considered to be the domain of the individual rancher, not the community at large.

When ranching neighbors did not cooperate or see eye to eye on land management this often caused conflict. Most of these conflicts surrounded actual boundary lines, such as fences, or what passes from one property to another. One rancher explained the range of issues that can cause tensions between neighbors.

On the issues that neighbors quarrel over - Sometimes there’s issues about land usage like whether it’s okay to trail your cows through the neighbors without asking or some of those types of things. Whether your neighbor is spraying their weeds or are you spending thousands of dollars to spray your weeds and they’re not spraying there’s so you’re being cross-contaminated. Sometimes there’s issues with certain landowners don’t let people hunt so then you end up with more elk and more deer who forage on everybody’s pastures and everybody’s haystacks and everybody’s hay meadows.
Conflict over water rights sometimes resulted in long-term animosity between neighboring families. There were also problems with maintenance of fences and some neighbors failing to repair their sections of fence.

Newcomers and Neighbors

While ranchers described some neighborly conflicts with one another, a more pressing concern were changes brought by new large landowners. Frequently, these conflicts resulted from different approaches to management of private lands and different ideas about boundaries.

Because few of the newcomers worked at ranching they were unable to provide meaningful assistance during branding and shipping, thus limiting the local labor pool available to area ranchers. However, some ranch managers whose employers had cattle made a point of assisting at these neighborhood events.

We do a lot of neighborly help. I don’t know if a lot of ranchers are still doing that. We decided that when we first came here to go out and help the neighbors do their branding and their shipping and fencing and whatever it is and then we get them to come and help us and we go help them. This guy up the creek and then I have another guy on the hill that we trade help all the time. You don’t see a lot of that around, but there’s still quite a bit of that in this country. And it saves us a couple hired men a year.

Note the economic benefit from these helping activities. Increasing numbers of new large landowners who cannot assist in these activities mean rising costs of production for ranchers. However, as noted above, these activities may also be on the decline within the ranching community.

Ranchers often accused newcomers of not being tolerant of cattle getting out now and again (clearly there were limits as to how much of this was tolerated between ranchers, but it was generally agreed that it happened to everyone now and again). In one case, a newcomer supposedly charged a neighboring rancher per cow per day if cattle got through the fence. This was not considered “neighborly.”
In other cases, established trailing routes were closed to ranchers when newcomers purchased properties. These are routes ranchers use to move cattle by horseback or ATV from one piece of property to another. They often cross private property owned by other ranchers who have agreed to allow a fellow rancher to "trail" cattle through a few times a year. Closing these customary routes caused a lot of animosity and was considered a violation of good neighborly behavior. It also resulted in considerable hardship moving animals from one place to another. In one case a rancher had so many trailing routes closed that he had to resort to trucking cattle to and from particular pastures, increasing his expenses because he had to purchase a semi-truck. In many cases, ranchers acknowledged that they might be able to win legal battles because the use extended back for decades. They seemed hesitant, however, to invest considerable time and money in litigation.

In some cases newcomers were described as hostile to neighborly help. Several people told a story about a fire breaking out on a large property recently purchased by a very wealthy newcomer. Hutterites from a nearby colony immediately rushed over with their water trucks to assist in extinguishing the flames. However, much to their surprise, they were stopped at the gate by security guards who insisted that they not enter the property despite the clear emergency. Ranchers told this story with a sense of shock and dismay, and real surprise that someone's need for privacy would result in turning away such assistance.

Overall, ranchers had a variety of relationships and mixed experiences with their newcomer neighbors, ranging from very positive to highly conflicted. In some cases, animosity was so extreme that neighbors did not speak to one another. One couple described such as situation with a small landowner.

TONY: They are not your neighbors. They become your enemies because they don't want anything to do with you or me. And now I resent it when I go down to the end of our pasture to check fences, pick up horses, to do anything, just walk down there for something to do and this dog gone guy with the trophy home down there is looking out his window and staring at us.
STEPHANIE: He does. He comes out on the deck and he built that over the winter and he built it right on our fence line. He has twenty acres so every time we fix fence or take...
a walk down there he stares out of his window or stands on the deck. We don’t wave at each other.

TONY: No. He’s never offered friendship and yet he’s just a jerk that works for some one of these chemical companies up the line here. And one of our friends said “Oh they are decent people,” but they’ve never made any attempt at decency, of course I haven’t either.

Many of the conflicts and tensions, as stated above, revolve around boundaries – what crosses them and when – and different ideas about property, privacy, and livelihood. One rancher explained the changes to neighbors brought by newcomers.

Personally, physically, the changes that come to pass, the things that scare me, if you will, are neighbors who don’t understand the physical landscape that you’re trying to manage so their dogs are chasing your cattle. They’re shooting across the fence at your gophers. They’re riding their four-wheeler across your pasture. There’s all that intrusion, both physically and psychologically, I guess.

This rancher expressed a similar feeling to her peers, arguing that newcomers lacked knowledge of what ranchers were trying to accomplish, and did not understand how their management decisions affected their neighbors.

Conclusion

Residents, including ranchers, were concerned about the rapid and seemingly inevitable transfer of large properties to wealthy newcomers. Ranchers saw neighbor relationships as key to management of boundary issues. They argued that newcomers’ lack of integration into local communities meant problems around boundaries. Real differences in access to material resources, class differences, also divided newcomers from their neighbors and the larger community. There was much resentment and concern amongst ranchers about gentrification, because rising land values have consequences for passing on properties and sustaining operations.

Newcomers often removed cattle from the properties they purchased and there were substantial differences of opinion as to their ability to properly manage their land. Ranchers argued that the absence of a livelihood connection to property meant poor stewardship, while some environmentalists suggested newcomers had the financial resources to restore the area. Claims that newcomers would “save” the lands they purchased were based on the argument that
conservation requires little or no use of natural resources. The rancher position, that making a living from the land motivated good stewardship, was based, in part, on their claims to knowledge of local conditions and management practices.

Ranchers regarded landownership change as altering a social landscape overlaying and inseparable from the biological landscape. They envisioned their private property as part of a community, connected to neighbors in a way that implied mutual obligations. These obligations, or social relationships, were maintained in part through the permeability of property boundaries. Permeability was determined in large part by what facilitated and constrained livelihood, and encoded in local custom and culture. Changes in this social landscape meant changes in the ways neighbors worked together, particularly around boundaries. Well-understood customs and "rules" about property boundaries were increasingly being violated as landownership changed. Newcomers were often unaware of these norms and did not recognize the animosity generated by their violation of established boundary practices.

Ranchers and other residents argue, implicitly and explicitly, that their tenure in the area (either their individual longevity or their family's longevity) gives them the right to define community, determine appropriate land uses, and sustain particular livelihoods, such as ranching. This is a discursive strategy employed throughout the West, wherever communities and natural resource politics are changing in the face of in-migration. Ranchers on the Rocky Mountain Front claim a right to land and livelihood based on their multigenerational history in the area and management of particular properties.

Tensions over boundary practices point to different ideas about the meanings of property. In the next chapter, I explore how different people conceptualize public and private property and property rights, and the implications for environmental policy. In the following chapter, I return to specific boundary conflicts, wildlife and weeds, to illustrate how newcomer change and different concepts of property manifest in cross-boundary natural resource problems. In the final
results chapter, I provide examples of cross-boundary work, landowner driven efforts that both capitalize on and challenge established rancher customs of cooperation with neighbors.
Chapter 8:
Understanding Property: Approaches to Private Rights and Public Goods

Introduction

One of the recurring assertions in this dissertation is that cross-boundary conservation, whether in the form of ecosystem management or some other program, must incorporate private lands. In the West, private property is often the most productive land, the biodiversity hot spots in valley bottoms that harbor source populations for some species. According to Naughton-Treves and Sanderson (1995), "today, much of the dispute over wildlife conservation involves property and property rights" (p. 1265). Despite the obvious need for inclusion of private lands in landscape-level efforts, most policy-makers, environmentalists, and biologists do not really understand how private landowners and other community residents conceptualize property and act on those conceptions.

Understanding property, in particular the negotiation of private rights and public goods, is essential to recognizing the barriers and opportunities for cross-boundary conservation efforts, such as ecosystem management. Nuanced and detailed knowledge of how different landowners and policy-makers regard property rights helps us to understand why private landowners respond in certain ways to policies and programs designed to conserve landscapes. For example, ranchers on the Rocky Mountain Front do not want to see lands taken out of agricultural production and divided up for rural residential development. They recognize the negative affects such subdivision has on ranching, local communities, and area ecology. However, for ranchers, regulating or restricting subdivision is antithetical to the preservation of private property rights. Are incentive programs the answer? Conservation easements have been successful with certain landowners, but some ranchers resist easements because their model of property rights prohibits separation of one right without compromising control of their whole property. This is just one
example, covered in detail below, of how understanding the meaning of property and property
erights provides a window into landowner responses to policy initiatives.

In the context of environmental policy, the tension between private rights and public
goods is pervasive and ongoing. On the Rocky Mountain Front, ranchers consider potential
trade-offs between the public interest and individual landowners in the context of low beef prices,
rural gentrification, continuing drought, and a gradual, but dramatic shift in land ownership.
Concepts of property affect policy and on-the-ground management, because landowners,
environmentalists, and policy-makers act on those concepts. Property is defined here as a social
process based on social relationships and renegotiated formally and informally. But property has
a material component, because management and policy inevitably affect biology and livelihood.

In this chapter, I describe the ways different people defined public and private property.
Not surprisingly, the distinctions between public and private lands was not entirely clear, with
various private rights and claims to public lands and numerous public goods on private lands.
Many environmentalists, newcomers, and others viewed the state as the keeper of the public
interest and regarded environmental regulation and public acquisition of private lands as critical
to their conservation goals. In contrast, ranchers saw private property, livelihood, and
conservation as inseparable and mutually reinforcing, arguing that ranchers had a practical and
moral obligation to be good stewards irrespective of state policies. Creative solutions that
untangle the bundle of property rights, such as conservation easements, were a viable way for
some ranchers to preserve livelihood options and protect open space. Other ranchers resisted
easements, largely because their model of exclusive ownership did not leave room for dividing
rights between different owners. As in previous chapters, questions about the role of the state, the
relationship between conservation and livelihood, and who the public in public interest is are
critical to the results described below.
Public Lands: Questions about Meaning, Use, and Ownership

Below I describe the different ways people define public lands and the meanings they associate with those lands, including their ideas about appropriate use. I then describe some of the local claims that are made for public properties, including the quasi-private nature of grazing permits and resident assertions of entitlement to “the mountains.” I conclude with an exploration of the difference between public (of the people) and government land, and which public (local or national) should have power in decision-making.

Two distinct discourses emerged from interviews with regard to public lands. Ranchers and many residents described a sense of local entitlement to public lands, emphasizing natural resource use, access for and rights to livelihood, and arguments for increased local influence over decision-making. These claims were expressed as a counterbalance to government lands, run by bureaucrats in far away places. In contrast, environmentalists and newcomers tended to view public lands as belonging to all Americas, focusing on their rights to participate in decision-making and their rights to recreational access. They defined public lands as the location of conservation and wilderness, with the state as the keeper of public interest, and conservation defined largely as nonuse of natural resources.

Mixed Local Views on Development of Public Lands

Residents supported development of natural resources in general, but they were divided on the appropriateness of development on public lands. Community Land Use Survey results indicated mixed local sentiments about appropriate use of public lands. In response to the statement, “public lands on the Rocky Mountain Front should be maintained in their current roadless, undeveloped condition,” 34% strongly agreed and 52% agreed to some extent, while 20% strongly disagreed and 43% disagreed to some extent. More general questions (not specific to public lands) about natural resource use and development showed that most residents view natural resource development as positive and beneficial. A total of 43% strongly agreed and 78%
agreed to some extent that "natural resources should be used to fuel economic growth," and 48% strongly agreed and 72% agreed to some extent that "oil and gas development would be good for local communities." While a huge majority of residents supported use and development of natural resources in general (which may include ranching), many of these individuals did not support development on public lands. This indicates that some people think about the purpose of public lands differently than the purpose of private lands. The fact that general sentiments about natural resource use and development are not applied consistently to public and private lands indicates that residents see these categories of property as serving somewhat different purposes.

Questions of Appropriate Use and the Location of Conservation

Interview data provided detail on the meaning of public lands and different ideas about the purpose of and appropriate uses on these lands. Different people's ideas about the appropriate uses of public lands in many ways mirror the differences described in chapter 6, with some people imagining these lands as the refuge of wildlife and wildness and others arguing for economic use of natural resources. Smutny and Takahashi (1999) argue that newcomers in the rural West envision federal lands as national resources for environmental protection and restoration, while other users, such as livestock grazers, tend to see their use as an established right, and the lands they graze as a sort of possession. Each group feels a sense of ownership and entitlement to federal lands, and believes their claim is morally correct.

In this study, environmentalists, newcomers, and some Forest Service staff regarded public lands as the location of wilderness and conservation. (Please note the definitions of newcomer and environmentalist used in this dissertation. Newcomers are people who have lived in the study site less than 20 years, and new large landowners are those newcomers who have purchased large ranches. Environmentalists are people who are paid staff or active volunteers with non-profit environmental groups.) While most people understood that only a portion of National Forests lands are designated Wilderness, many people closely associated wilderness and
federal lands. Federal lands were regarded as the primary location of conservation, the lands where conservation was practiced. These individuals often recognized the importance of private lands to the ecology of the area, but they defined federal lands as a sort of refuge for species and processes, such as fire and grizzlies, that could not as easily exist on private lands. According to a D.C.-based Forest Service employee, “we’re a refuge, public lands are a refuge for these species because other landscapes have been developed.”

In contrast, some residents viewed public lands as poorly managed, the location of bad stewardship practices that did not promote conservation goals. One business owner said “the worst manager, the worst manager that I have ever observed in my entire life is the federal government. They are the worst managers in terms of people and resources, whether it's money, land, or use of good people.” Many residents (although not all) felt that public lands should provide commodities and economic resources. One rancher describes wanting oil and gas development on federal lands in the area.

I'm not afraid of a mine. I'm not afraid of oil wells, gas wells, if they're done right. And I think we're to the point where we can, where we can do it right and this country was made, was settled by people that were using the natural resources to make a living. That's what made the country what it is, and I just hate to see us go completely away from that and get dependent on Third World countries for our resources. And I would say again, but do it right. Don't make a mess of it. When you do it, do it right.

This rancher cites the history of the area, saying people historically settled here to make a living from natural resources. A retired rancher wonders why natural resources would be left unused. She said “well, what good is land that isn’t used? It’s such a poor idea. Do you fence it off and then it sits? Is that saving it? Maybe saving it, but for what? I don’t know.” Other people argued that it was “wasteful on our part as a nation not to harvest our resources” and that “renewable resource(s) should be used.” These sentiments surprised some environmentalists and newcomers. One newcomer said “I’m amazed to still go to meetings and hear people say that they want to develop the natural (resources).” Some agency officials claimed that Americans had moved beyond thinking of National Forests as a “warehouse of commodities to be taken to market.”
Contrary to this assumption, some residents clearly saw commodity production as a legitimate use of federal lands.

Not surprisingly, the meaning and purpose of public lands is different for different people. In some ways these differences parallel different views of the Rocky Mountain Front, with environmentalists, newcomers, and Forest Service staff viewing the area as a wild place where conservation goals should be prominent, and ranchers and many residents viewing the area as important for livelihood and the local economy.

**Private Rights to Public Lands**

The category of “public” is complicated by the practice of leasing state and federal lands to numerous commercial interests, including but not limited to, livestock producers and outfitters. These practices can be characterized as usufruct, customary property rights because they are recognized by resident communities as longstanding use rights to resources that are not actually owned by lessees (Fortmann, 1990). Grazing and outfitting leases might also be construed as private rights on public property (Geisler, 2000).

Ranchers in the study site clearly considered grazing permits as property rights. Especially in the case of state lands, proprietary statements were made by landowners, such as “we have one parcel of state land,” “we’ve got a 40-acre piece of state school land,” “on our state land,” and “his state land.” When landowners provided information about the size of their ranch, they usually included deeded acres and public lands leases in total acreage without differentiating one from the other. There were also clear, agreed upon local practices that regard specific state land parcels as belonging to particular ranchers. According to one rancher,

There's state land and there's federal land that the ranchers lease. There's almost a code up here that when your state land—every ten years, I think it's ten—your state land is up for bid again, rebidding. You would never, ever bid up one of your neighbor's pieces of state land. Never. That was understood...it's almost a code that you would not do, or a oath, I guess, that you would not do that...Most state land goes with a ranch because you have water that you can access and they don't realize that. We've gone through that, somebody will say, “ooh, there's 80 acres, or there's 160 acres of state land.” Well, it's been fenced
and so if they bid it up, we say, ‘okay then you pay for the fence,’ and all these things come to light.

This rancher pointed out that newcomers were not necessarily aware of this widely accepted but informal “code.” She also pointed out that physical improvements to the property, such as fences, are considered private property and must be purchased by a new lessee. Another rancher described the same phenomenon and the economic hardships incurred by different notions of who these state parcels belong to. She said

Years ago there was an unwritten law of the West that you didn't bid your neighbor up on state land. And the old time ranchers just didn't do it. You have the new people coming in, there's no loyalty at all there. So then they'll bid you up. So that's been hard to, to keep your operation going.

Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service leases were also identified as belonging to certain individuals, and, barring agency reorganization of grazing allotments, these leases had been in most families for several generations. It is probably more accurate to describe these private rights to public lands as associated with a particular parcel of private property, since these leases are not kept by individual ranchers upon the sale of the ranch. Rather, they are considered part of the ranch’s economic value and are “sold” with the ranch as a private right. In other words, the purchase price of the ranch increases according to the monetary value of the attached grazing permits.

Clearly these ranchers understood that this property, the public lands they lease for grazing, could change hands, and is not “private” in the same manner as their deeded land. At the same time, there is a clear sense of individual ownership regarding these leased properties.

Ranchers’ history of customary use is the basis for this sense of entitlement. Entitlement was expressed in general terms of ownership, however, and not specifically in terms of access or use rights. This sense of ownership, a claim endorsed and upheld by the local community, is in many ways viewed as a private right to public land.
"Our Mountains": Local Claims to Federal Lands

In the context of public lands, additional differences in the ways people conceptualized ownership emerged. Specifically with regard to federal lands, people were not in complete agreement about who these lands belonged to. The notion that federal lands belonged to all U.S. citizens did not sit well with all residents. While everyone recognized that officially and legally federal lands are national lands, informal claims were made on behalf of resident communities, claims to a general sense of ownership and decision-making power.

Environmentalists and Forest Service staff described federal lands as "owned by everyone," "belong(ing) to all the people," "a place that anybody can go," and a place of "national interests" and "national heritage." In addition to the notion that anyone had physical access to use these areas for recreation, environmentalists also described the importance of having access to the decision-making process. One regional environmentalist discussed "the fact that everyone owns it" saying "it does belong to everyone in the United States. And, so they should have say in it as well. In the management of it." A local environmentalist described his decision to focus on public lands.

I had made up my mind a long time back that I was going to let somebody else work on the private land. I knew the Nature Conservancy was coming in at the time and I figured as long as I focused on the public land, nobody could fault me with trying to... I mean, I figured I had as much right to say something about public land policy as anybody else.

These individuals saw clear connections between the category of ownership, traditionally construed as public, and their individual rights to access the area and have input into the decision-making process.

In contrast, some residents described a general sense of local ownership over federal lands, the area residents commonly refer to as "the mountains." One woman who grew up on a ranch in the area described National Forest lands, saying "that used to be my territory. In fact, they even called a mountain Emma's mountain. Nobody knows that anymore because all the old people are gone." One rancher described his sense of local entitlement,
When it comes to passing laws governing the use of these mountains, here, it aggravates us to think that the mountains belong to everyone. They're federal, national, and so forth, and because of that reason, these people assume a right, you know, that they have to'em. But to us, because they're immediate and because they affect our life, to us, we're stingy about it. We're stingy, we think they're our mountains, and our forefathers came here and fought the elements and so forth, opened the area. And I guess that's what makes us have that selfishness about us, for thinking that way.

The local right described by this rancher is predicated on the notion that residents earned ownership in the area through their history and hard work. He also suggested that both proximity and material connection to this area legitimated this claim. Another rancher said

I guess the land is supposed to belong to everybody and I suppose we would have the attitude that we want it to belong to us, you know, and all these tourists or whatever that come in, to heck with them... I mean, we're the ones who live here, we're the ones who've protected it. The people who are coming from New York City have already ruined their land, you know, so what makes them able to come in and say what we should do with ours?

Even some regional environmentalists who spent substantial time in the area invested public lands with a sense of personal ownership.

Well, because, we always think that we, we who use it own it. And so, when there’s lots of other people who come out and they also own it, and so they start using it and it’s, like, oh no, all those other people are here. I think that, that we guard it very jealously and...and then when we feel that other people are coming into it. It’s like they are coming into our back yard and, and we are not so happy to have them. But I think all of us realize that, that’s just the way it’s going to be. That in time there’s going to be more and more and more people that will be coming to the Front and to the Bob Marshall. It’s just, it’s just what’s happening and, and as life goes on, it’s going to happen more and more and more.

References to “our mountains” and statements that indicate a sense of local entitlement to federal lands hint at larger tensions around who should decide how these lands are managed.

Federal Lands: The People’s Land or Government Land?

Important differences also emerged regarding whether people define these lands as national, federal, or public. For some, Forest Service lands belonged to the people of the United States. For others, this land belonged to the government. One local business owner who grew up on a ranch in the area explained a common perception about federal lands.
I never used Forest Service lands. I guess as a child growing up I always thought of it as land belonging to the government, because I didn't have a child's grasp that the government is supposed to be the people. And then as an adult who only uses federal land for the purposes of camping, it is easy to think 'yeah, this is our land' and the government is just a steward of it, in parentis, in local parentis for the land. When I was a kid growing up I thought that the government owned all of the forests. If it's a forest, it's government. I had no concept growing up along the Rocky Mountain Front that when you drove across the mountains, that was one of the big culture shocks when I went to college in Missoula, 'you mean private land owners own mountainous land with trees?'

Another resident described her experience educating local children about ownership of federal lands.

I think it's just a matter of your conception and your idea of who owns the land. I mean, there are many times I've got kids that say, 'Who owns that land?' 'Who owns public land?' 'Oh, the government.' 'Well, who's the government?' And then they finally realize that they are the government, that they own that land. And I think it's not just the ownership, but it's the fact of being able to go somewhere.

According to this resident, the right of members of the public to access this land is a key component of that land belonging to "the people."

Anita argued that people who conceptualize federal land as government land tend to be politically conservative. Interview results indicated that anti-government sentiment, not uncommon in the rural West, influenced the ways people think about federal lands. A staffperson at a stockgrowers group said that "ranchers are typically folks who, they are very independent. They don't like the government creeping into their back pockets and basically coming around and telling them how they have to do something or this idea of the greater public good type things."

A regional environmentalist who does some work with ranchers echoed this idea. He said

Well, I think there's a general animosity toward the government at all levels in the west. It's just part of our culture. Most rural people resent it as a major intrusion on their lives. And I think ranchers and farmers in particular resent it fiercely because of their self-image as being individualists.

A local business owner connected these anti-government sentiments to the notion that federal lands are government lands.

WILLIAM: I think that there has been a real split since, I'd say the '60's till now, where the people used to think that the government was for the people. But now they think, in terms of regulation, that the government is against the people. And so they don't consider
federal land managers as being their friends, most of them...So I think a lot of the agricultural community considers it federal land, being almost an anti, instead of part of.

LAURIE: Anti public?
WILLIAM: Yeah, being more against us then for us or with us.

William suggested that people’s sense that the government is not of or for the people influences ideas about federal lands. One rancher pointed out that “all ranchers are independent... I think that’s why the rancher resents any interference from the government. I think that’s why they resent the Forest Service to an extent.” For some residents, Forest Service lands are neither owned by nor managed for the people. Instead they are owned and managed by the government, a nonlocal, bureaucratic entity that may or may not have local interests in mind.

Questions of Who Decides

Questions about the ownership of federal lands bring up important issues about who has the right to decide how these lands are managed. The debate over the respective influence of local and national interests in federal land management has been covered extensively in other texts, and will likely remain a relevant and important topic in the context of proposals for devolution of decision-making. I cover this debate briefly here as it relates to claims that federal lands are national or local, and to ideas about these lands as public or government property. A D.C.-based Forest Service employee described the importance of local input in response to a question about anti-government sentiment in the West.

Well, I think it does need to be addressed and I think balancing the national interests and local needs has been an incredibly challenging issue all along. It was an issue when Gifford Pinchot was Chief of the Forest Service a hundred years ago. It's an issue today, although I think we're getting a lot better at it. And I think we also have to realize that these lands do belong to all of the people, but the local people are those the most affected and they have a local stake, a family stake in that issue.

While he argued for balance, he echoed the claim that local people are more affected by federal land management and that might give them a special position in decision-making processes. A stockgrowers association staffperson said
I think the distrust for federal agencies stems from a feeling that they are too far removed from the issues on the land to be making the types of decisions that they are making. That they don’t have the connection with the land that the local people do. I think there’s a general feeling that it is impossible to dictate policy from a state office in Billings or Helena or even less so from Washington DC. And I think we all recognize that, given the amount of federal land that we have in this state and given the fact that some of these federal agencies are by Congress charged with management of those lands, the federal government is going to be involved in the utilization of federal lands. But I think we have to be careful that setting national policy doesn’t in some way infringe on the private property rights again. Things like the endangered species act and other acts like that do run the risk of having the type of impacts that I was speaking of. There’s a hesitation, a fear, a resentment toward the federal government.

He suggested that infringements on private property rights affect landowner’s perspectives on federal land management, because both sets of policies are associated with the federal government.

People’s challenges to national level federal land management decision-making were often accompanied by discussion of different types of knowledge. In the excerpt above, Eric brought up the issue of who has the knowledge and experience necessary to effectively manage federal lands. Many residents discussed concerns that public land policies developed and adopted in Washington D.C. were too far removed from the area to work well. They argued that D.C.-based policy-makers created “one-size-fits all” policies that did not acknowledge local ecological conditions or land use practices. Many people made the claim that local people had first hand, “on-the-ground” knowledge and experience of the area and the issues, and better understood how to effectively manage federal lands. They claimed that Washington, D.C.-based politicians and federal employees were formally educated and considered themselves experts in their respective fields, but had rarely applied their learning to actual land management.

Public Lands Conclusion

With regard to public lands, ranchers and many residents tended to define these lands as “their lands,” basing proprietary claims on rights to livelihood and to local decision-making power. Environmentalists and newcomers usually saw public lands as belong to “the people,”
claiming rights to access these lands for recreation and to participate in decision-making processes. Below I briefly summarize these discourses.

Different perspectives on the use and purpose of public lands mirror, in many ways, the different Rocky Mountain Fronts described in the chapter 6 – either as a place of wildness and wildlife, or a place of livelihood. But some people regard private and public lands differently. Community Land Use Survey results indicate that, while residents favor natural resource use and development in general, not all prefer these activities on public lands. Furthermore, during interviews people who did not support oil and gas development often restricted their opinions to public lands to avoid private property rights issues. These results indicate that the appropriateness or desirability of certain activities may be influenced by whether or not the land is public or private.

At the same time, the categories of public and private are blurred in a number of ways. Grazing permits are treated as private rights by area ranchers. Residents make proprietary claims to the mountains, officially National Forest lands. Even the category of federal is disputed, with some people suggesting these lands are of and by the people, and others arguing that the land belongs to the government.

The idea that federal lands belong to the government appears to contradict the notion of private rights on public lands described above. Also, residents’ “love” of the mountains (detailed in Chapter 6) may seem at odds with animosity towards the federal government, the legal owner of those mountains. However, these seeming contradictions stem from the idea that particular parcels of land fit into only one category. In practice, there are overlapping meanings and claims on particular parcels of land. Properties can have both public and private connotations, the place can be loved while the manager or ownership category is resisted.

These results bring up important questions about notions of the public and the state. Environmentalists argued that public lands are the primary location of conservation, entrusting the state with preservation of these lands in the public interest. In the next section private
landowners assert that private lands are the primary location of conservation, disputing the state as the keeper of the public good. This debate is echoed again in discussion of the role of environmental regulation and public lands acquisition. Within these discussions we find challenges to the idea that the state represents the public, and that the public interest is best conceptualized at a national level. Questions about the appropriate level of decision-making, local or national, imply that different publics or collectives exist, and are more or less represented in different decision-making processes.

Private Lands and Private Rights

In the following section I describe the different meanings that private property and private rights have to different groups of people. Ranchers and many residents were strong supporters of private property rights and expressed concerns about infringement upon those rights. Foremost among these rights was the right to control access to one’s property. Furthermore, ranchers regarded private property as inextricably connected to livelihood. Livelihood activities, such as ranching, legitimated the rights of the private property owner.

Resident and Rancher Perspectives on Private Property Rights

Community Land Use Survey results show that private property rights are very important to study site residents. A total of 58% agreed that private property rights were extremely important and 87% agreed they were important to some extent. However, there was less agreement that these rights were being compromised. In response to the statement “infringement on private property rights is a problem” 29% strongly agreed and 61% agreed to some extent. Looking just at responses from ranchers on the same item, we find that 56% strongly agreed and 86% agreed to some extent. We also find differences between ranchers and residents in general with regard to hunting access to private lands. In response to the statement “hunting access to
private property is important” 27% strongly agreed and 59% agreed to some extent. When ranchers alone were examined, only 7% strongly agreed and 36% agreed to some extent.

In general, residents in the study site agree that private property rights are important. However, ranchers are more likely to see their rights as being infringed upon. Ranchers are also less likely to agree that hunting access to private lands is important. Keep in mind that while survey results indicate the importance of private property rights to residents, we cannot know how respondents were defining these rights.

Livelihood, Food, and America

Ranchers and many residents identified private lands closely with livelihood. They saw private lands as part of the local economy, a place for family ranchers to “make a living,” arguing that people needed to “keep in mind who makes a living off of all of this.” Ranchers did not have illusions of riches; they wanted to make a reasonable living. One rancher said “I don't hope to ever get rich. And I don't need to. I would just hope to be able to continue on. You know, if you had a child, you'd have something to give them.”

Many ranchers and residents argued that livestock production was the best use of these lands. According to one rancher, “that ridge right there, we own some of that over there. It’s all like this. You know, really what value is it to anybody unless you graze it because unless you graze it and keep it growing, there’s not even enough stuff here for the wildlife to live off of.” In many senses, ranchers and residents saw private lands as providing an important opportunity for regular, middle-class people to make a decent living.

Ranchers also described the important role their private lands play in feeding America. They said they were “feeding the country,” that “we have a nation to feed,” and that “people need food and it’s up to us to get it to them.” There was a sense of patriotism in these statements, a feeling that their ranches were serving their country through the production of food. Many ranchers also equated private property more broadly with being American, saying that private
landowners “are the basis of the nation” and arguing that private property is the foundation of American freedom and part of our national heritage. Discussion of federal government land acquisition and environmental regulation was often accompanied by charges that our country was becoming “socialist.”

**Legitimate Owners**

While ranchers and other private landowners acknowledged that anyone had the right to purchase private property, family ranchers were clearly more legitimate owners than newcomers or environmental groups in the eyes of some residents. Residents argued that multi-generational ranchers provide a “sense of community” and a “sense of authenticity.” They believed ranchers were “unique” and “rooted to the land.” Ranchers made claims to property based on being descended from original homesteaders and based on their family history and heritage on that property. Length of family residence was important in the ranching community, with ranchers who came to the area in the 1950s regarded by some as somewhat suspect and still newcomers. Family connection with property over time was respected and regarded as legitimating ownership in some way.

In contrast, nonprofit, newcomer, and corporate landowners could not claim the same legitimacy, and their rights as private property owners were treated somewhat differently by ranchers and many residents. These owners were viewed differently in large part because they did not need to make a living from their properties. One rancher described this difference in terms of land management practices.

They're not making a living off of it. I mean there's a world of difference. I mean when you're using it just as a something to, just to be there, to get away from the hubbub from wherever you're from. I mean it's entirely different, you don't do things the same way. If you are depending on that to make a living, you'd be doing a lot of things different, because you have to.

Another rancher explains that a nearby newcomer landowner is very wealthy and their ranch is paid for. Unlike her family, they can afford hired help year round and when they get tired of
running the ranch they can move on to other types of work. According to this rancher, “it's in no way, shape or form their livelihood.”

Some newcomer landowners recognized that livelihood or class differences created a divide between them and family ranchers. According to a ranch manager for a new large landowner, “we don't have to grow a cow. Where, you know, the neighbors do. They've got kids, they have children they have to send to school. They have to feed them, they have to clothe them, they have to feed and clothe themselves.” Nature Conservancy staff also recognized this difference. According to this Nature Conservancy staffperson,

There's a certain gap that none of that can bridge; all of them are trying to make a living on the land and we are not. I mean, we would like for that preserve to do as well as it can financially and bear as much of it's own cost as it can. But in the end, we have another source of income.

These differences were more than just conceptual; they manifested in different kinds of on-the-ground treatment of private property, depending on the owner. The two examples below illustrate how the private rights of newcomer or environmental group landowners were treated differently.

A new large landowner purchased several thousand acres of ranch land in the late 1990s. A road through this property had historically provided access to a public reservoir where many residents recreated. This was not the only point of access, but other access routes made the trip prohibitively lengthy from some communities. The previous owner denied granting official permission for such use; public traffic on the road appears to have been tolerated, but not formally legitimated, for many years, if not decades. The new owner shut and locked the gate upon arrival, sparking a controversy that involved litigation, property damage, letters to the editor, and much public debate. According to one newcomer business owner,

There was just a huge hoopla about it. But it would be the same people who, if you try to tell them that they can't do something on their property, they'll just jump and scream, jump up and down all day and scream and yell about it...So I was surprised how people just got vehement over, ‘oh, it is some outsider coming in and throwing up another gate and closing us off.’ Well these are the same people that if it had been their place they would have been the first ones to say I have a right to do anything I want to on my land.
She sees a difference, even a hypocrisy, in residents' expectations that this newcomer's land be accessible to the community, despite his wishes as a private property owner. Rancher's rights to exclude the public from private property would have been supported by local communities.

Nature Conservancy staff also suggested that their nature preserve was not afforded the same respect as private lands owned by family ranchers in the area. One staffperson described this situation, saying that residents did not consider the preserve as being private land in the sense of, you know, their standard ranch or owning land, but they don't see it as public land either. And they don't have near the respect for it as private land that they have for other private lands. A lot of people don't. That's pretty clear. But they do understand that it's private land, but they just don't respect that in a lot of cases. It was manifested on this fire. There were dozer lines put in on a neighboring family ranch and they managed to get those one blade wide, but they made it eight blades wide on us. I mean, there's just sort of a lack of respect for us as a landowner and, you know, people don't like the idea that we have private property rights. It's oftentimes manifested in hunting season. People aren't as concerned about trespassing on our private lands as they would on some other private lands and maybe that comes from, you know, some people don't recognize us as a legitimate landholder or we're not the same kind of private landholder as Joe Regular Rancher or whatever. I mean we're not the government, but we're getting there, sort of.

Clearly the identity of the private landowner affected resident conceptions of which rights are afforded to that owner by the local community. Ranchers were viewed as more legitimate landowners when compared with nonprofit, newcomer, and corporate owners. Family ranchers had different rights because of their history on a piece of land and the fact that they used that parcel for livelihood. The private property rights of new landowners were contested through local discourse about and practices around access, and through the differential treatment of these lands compared to family ranches.

**The Assertion of Rights and the Threat of Infringement**

All ranchers interviewed were strong supporters of private property rights and concerned about infringement on these rights. All different kinds of ranchers - ranchers who disagreed on easements, wilderness, the Nature Conservancy, and grizzly bears - even those in agreement...
about the importance of private property rights. It was probably the most salient and striking
commonality amongst the ranchers I interviewed.

During the mid-1990s a group was formed in the study site to focus on and advocate for
private property rights. This group, Montanans for Private Property Rights, was created in
response to a perceived threat to landowner rights emerging from a collaborative group known as
the Frontlanders (this story is detailed in 10). Ranchers and some residents who were widely
considered to be staunch, and even extreme, advocates of private property rights coordinated this
group, inviting speakers and conducting forums on issues related to property rights. Not all
ranchers participated, and some regarded the group as not very constructive or proactive.
However, many ranchers who did not participate in this group expressed deep concerns about
property rights.

A rancher whose family has a conservation easement and works closely with
environmental groups said “I’m zealous about private property rights.” One farmer/rancher who
was a "strong supporter of wilderness" said that he was "all for maintaining private landowner
rights and letting them do what they would like to do with their private land." A rancher who
worked with environmental groups described changes in thinking about property rights.

It comes down to your concept of personal property… We felt, as land owners, that all the
rights were ours. We owned the ground. There wasn’t anything we couldn’t do to it that
we ourselves weren’t wholly responsible for and nobody else could say anything else
about it. And now we know that that’s not all true.

Another rancher described her sense that property rights were increasingly threatened. She said
“I think the thing that we've got to guard more than anything else is private property rights
because we're losing them. And we've got to be able to say, ‘hey, this has got to stop at this fence
line’.” Some ranchers believed that environmentalists' "main goal is control of private property."

One rancher said

I’m a strong supporter of private property rights and it would seem there are takings all the
time, whether it’s the oil and gas business and how the closure up there has impacted
private lands, or whether it’s the propagation of grizzly bears that come down here and
eat my sheep, or the increasing of the elk herd that come down and tromp your grain.
Ideas about private property rights influenced ranchers’ responses to a number of interview questions about issues in the area. According to Michelle, “All the things we’ve talked about already pertain to private property rights, like the wolves coming in and eating your livestock and, that’s a private property right that they’re taking away... And their fires that come in and burn us out, I mean everything we’ve talked about it all pertains to private property rights.” In other words, most natural resources issues and conservation policies were viewed through the lens of private property rights.

Private property rights were usually conceptualized by ranchers in terms of exclusive ownership, defined broadly as a property owner’s ability to manage and control their land. Dillon said “What I am trying to say is if something is yours or something is mine, I don’t have any right to say what you are going to do with it, or vice versa.” Ranchers expressed a sense that their rights would be increasingly restricted and that threats to their rights were looming and large.

When I asked ranchers if they were concerned about private property rights, they immediately exclaimed “yes” or “very much.” New large landowners and environmentalists usually had much different reactions. Some were either confused about the meaning of the question or seemed unconcerned about private property rights. The following two exchanges with new large landowners are typical and show a very different reaction to the question when compared with ranchers. In both cases these newcomers are unsure what kind of infringement might be of concern.

LAURIE: As landowners out there are you concerned about infringement on private property rights?
IAN: What do you mean?
LAURIE: Are you concerned that there will be some kind of infringement on your private property rights as landowners?
JENNIFER: From the government you mean?
LAURIE: Yeah or anybody.
IAN: Uh well I don’t know, I mean I don’t worry about it.

LAURIE: As landowners, are you concerned about infringement on private property rights?
HANK: In what sense?
LAURIE: In any sense.
HANK: Well, I think the answer's yes in sort of any sense. I can't sort of imagine that
that's going to happen.
JODI: That that will happen, that we'll be told what to... What do you mean property
rights? Somebody's telling us what to do with our land?

Similarly, most environmentalists did not see the looming threat of private property rights
infringement that ranchers were concerned about. This regional environmentalist believed these
concerns were used as fear tactics by national wise use groups.

LAURIE: Are you concerned about infringement on private property rights?
JORDON: No. I think that's such a bunch of crap, really. I mean, I just think that's, again,
that's a fear tactic that certain groups of people, the Blue Ribbon Coalition and the like,
pull out and parade around when they're trying to keep people in line, to their basic
ideology.

A resident environmentalist expressed a widely held opinion that private property rights
advocates are fringe extremists.

LAURIE: Are you concerned about infringement on private property rights? Infringement on private
property rights?
SALLY: You mean those assholes that are... Those wise use assholes. Yeah, they want to
control everything and they're ridiculous.

While ranchers saw property rights concerns as legitimate and serious, many environmentalists
either wrote them off as "ridiculous" or acknowledged that they had to deal with this perspective
or political force while disagreeing that concerns were legitimate.

While there was widespread agreement within the conservation and ranching
communities respectively, there were some important exceptions. One rancher answered "no"
and said that she did not subscribe to the conservative political agenda she connected with private
property rights, but then admitted that she was concerned about some of her rights as a
landowner. This rancher married into a ranching family and works for a environmental group,
which may explain her holding a different perspective.

Also the exception, several environmentalists supported private property rights. One in
particular, who grew up on a ranch in Montana, came down strongly in favor of property rights,
saying "I'm pretty strong about private property rights. I think if it's your land, you should be
able to do about anything you want to do with it as long as it's not going to harm anything else around there."

A person’s background and occupation appear to have a strong influence on perspectives on private property rights. However, many nonrancher residents were also strong advocates of property rights, although, as indicated by Community Land Use survey results above, they were not always as concerned about infringements when compared with their rancher counterparts.

**The Fundamental Property Right: The Right to Control Access**

The right to exclude or the right to control access was commonly cited by ranchers as an example of the property rights they claimed. In fact, reference to this right was so pervasive, it almost served as a symbol for property rights as a whole. Ranchers provided the same example again and again. They argued that they could not legally go into someone’s home in a city or have a picnic in someone’s backyard; therefore, why should people assume they can trespass on private ranchlands. One rancher told this story.

I once met a guy in Helena who's a lawyer. He said to me, ‘I grew up in Montana and I have a right to go on anyone's private property whenever I want to’. And I said, ‘you know I agree with you, you're welcome.’ He said, ‘I can come up on your ranch anytime.’ I said, ‘well, if you feel that way, and when I come to Helena I'll come to your house anytime.’ And he was livid, he said, ‘that is different than private property.’ I said, ‘what is private property? It's what you pay for, what your taxes, whether it's 10,000 acres or 1 acre.’ And he was just upset.

This rancher explained the effort to establish public access to private property based on ownership of wildlife. Wildlife is owned by the state and therefore is legally considered a public resource.

And, you know, I've talked to people that... usually on like sportsmen access hunting issues, that's a real bone of contention in this state... This was an actual example, that there was an organization that was querying their membership, ‘would you support legislation that says wildlife is a public entity, therefore it belongs to the general public and no one can deny access to pursue that wildlife.’ And the gist was it's not your deer, it's not your elk, so therefore you cannot deny me the right to pursue that animal to hunt. And there's certainly a lot of people that would say, yeah, you know, about time we could go hunting where wanted to and those jerks wouldn't tell us to get lost and on and on.
Another rancher explains that landowners do not necessarily want to exclude people from their property, they want the right to exclude.

I think that we should have the right to let whoever we want on our place or deny it if we want to because ultimately we’re the ones that deal with it if they leave the gate open and all the cows get out or if they start a fire or if they tear up our meadows or if they leave their garbage or whatever. I always think of the analogy of if I went to town, I wouldn’t presume to think that I should have the right to camp out in your yard because I didn’t want to buy a hotel and I don’t think you should presume that you can camp out on our hay meadow without asking. I think that a lot of landowners, at least in this area, and it probably depends on where you are, but they’re very happy to let people on, if they ask and they’re respectful. At the same time we have people that sneak on all the time in the spring. People will come from the Dupuyer Creek Road and sneak onto us and take horns.

Many ranchers expressed similar sentiments, arguing that they wanted to control access to their property and if people asked nicely and were respectful of any stipulations regarding use, they were happy to provide access. A few ranchers argued that private landowners had an obligation to the public to share private lands. Justin said, “And, you know, private property rights, you can lock it up if you want to, but I think as landowners you have a certain obligation to share a little bit. I really believe that.” This rancher wanted to retain the right to control access, but also believed that he had an obligation to share his property with others.

New large landowners often felt just as strongly about their right to exclude, but not their obligation to share. Recall the newcomer who purchased a ranch that had previously provided access to state lands and a reservoir where residents’ recreated. According to this newcomer, “it’s a private road, there’s no ifs, ands, or buts.” Another new large landowner said, “I think you should be able to say no when somebody wants to come onto your private land. You should be able to say no. I mean I just feel that, it’s a basic law, like gravity, you know.” New large landowners were frequently accused by residents of cutting off public access, usually hunting access, to previously accessible private lands. Differences between newcomers and ranchers with regard to hunting access will be explored in more detail in the following chapter on boundaries.
Livelihood, Identity, and Exclusive Ownership

In summary, ranchers and many residents associated private property with livelihood and America. They viewed private property as a fundamental American institution and growing food as a patriotic act, and believed private lands provided economic opportunities for regular people. However, not all private landowners were afforded the same rights. Ranchers' rights appear to be respected above those of newcomer and nonprofit owners, such as the Nature Conservancy. To some extent, the identity of the owner legitimates (or does not legitimate) property rights.

Survey results indicate that private property rights were very important to residents, with ranchers most concerned about infringements. Interview results show that many ranchers conceptualized property rights as exclusive ownership, or total rights to control what happens on a given parcel of land. Interviews also indicate that ranchers believed their property rights are threatened where environmentalists and newcomers are either unaware of such concerns or regard them as extremist. The right to exclude, or to control access, was used as a litmus test or an example to illustrate the kind of rights ranchers claimed.

The Public Interest on Private Lands

The notion that private ranchlands provided important public goods and services, even beyond public access for hunting and recreation, was widely agreed upon by different groups of people. How to best preserve the public interest in private lands, and how to balance public goods and private rights was hotly contested. The tension between landowner rights and the public interest was expressed, in part, through the example of subdivision in the study site.

People had also very different ideas about motivations for conservation and the role of the state in protecting the public interest. Ranchers, residents, and environmentalists had different perspectives on whether or not private lands should be acquired for public ownership. There were also different views on the role of different kinds of policies, regulations and incentive-based programs.
Private Ranchlands as the Location of Conservation

In contrast to many environmentalists, who conceptualized public lands as the location of conservation, ranchers saw a connection between private lands and conservation. Many ranchers discussed “taking care” of their land. One rancher expressed this view, saying “we were brought up...my father always said, and I think most people in agriculture feel this way, you take care of the land you’re given because you want to pass it on to future generations. And I think that's a philosophy that most of us in agriculture do use.” One outfitter who grew up in the area said, "I would very much like to see the cattle ranchers still having control of the land, private family ranches. And to me that would be the best protection this country would have."

Ranchers described themselves as “good stewards” and argued that poor land management would result in declining profits and economic hardship. According to one rancher,

If you have a ranch, you can't rape it of its capacity to be verdant, because that catches the energy of the sun that verdance, and that energy is transposed to your cattle and the things that eat that. And so, you can't raid this ground 'til it's bare and expect to get any income from it.

Another rancher described this connection, saying “as I said, this is our livelihood. So we have to take care of it.”

Ranchers also argued that they should be credited with the wildlife populations in the area. One rancher said, “I think we're real fortunate that we have a lot of wildlife here and I think that's largely due to the ranches here, because the ranch owners have made a real conscious effort to be good stewards of the land.” In their annual advertisement in the Rocky Mountain Front visitors guide, the Farm Bureau asks tourists to thank farmers and ranchers for the abundant wildlife seen along Montana roads, arguing that “because they take good care of the land, air, and water, our wildlife has an abundance of healthy habitat.” A stockgrower staffperson described their focus on ranchers as stewards.
They used the lands, but the lands still, they’ve taken care of the lands. They’ve been good stewards of the land. And so the lands are still there to enjoy today, even though they have played such a productive role and an important role in establishing our economy.

In many cases ranchers were offended that people extolling the open space, wildlife, and intact nature of the area did not explicitly credit their practices.

Some ranchers compared their property to nearby public lands, arguing that ranchers are better land managers than federal agency staff. One rancher said:

And I also think it's important because we do protect this Front region. You know, most of us along the Front spray our weeds, provide wildlife habitat whether willingly or not. And I look at the public land up at Swift Dam, which the BLM owns. The whole, where it was washed out and it was just all the rocks, that's nothing but spotted knapweed. So what happens when we get another flood and all of that spotted knapweed seed washes from that publicly held land onto our privately held land. So I guess I think as far as stewardship and as far as protecting wide open spaces that agriculture is vital to keeping this part of the Front what it is.

Ranchers also claimed to be the “true” or “first” “environmentalists” or “conservationists.” One rancher argued that ranchers were the “best” conservationists because they understood the land.

Yes, the best conservationist in the world is a rancher who’s building on his land for three generations because he knows how the land operates and how much it’ll support, how that, even the wild animals, not the ones he’s raising. But he’s raising wild animals and he watches over them. He’s a husband, he does husbandry on the mule deer and stuff and the whitetails on his property. He knows how many can be there, how many can survive there. He knows all this.

Amanda suggests that ranchers were “environmentalists before there was such a word.” Similar to the Farm Bureau, the local cattlewomen’s group runs an annual advertisement in the Rocky Mountain Front visitors guide proclaiming ranchers as the “first environmentalists.” These ranchers, defending themselves against a public critique of their practices, are positioning themselves strategically in relation to debates about protecting the environment. They are appropriating and redefining the term “environmentalist” to include themselves and their ranching practices.

While ranchers and many residents viewed private lands as the location of conservation, they also acknowledged that some landowners mismanaged their property. Many ranchers
referred disparagingly to "sodbusting," the plowing up of native grasslands for cultivation of nonnative crops. This practice was widely considered to be unsuccessful and incredibly damaging in an area where conditions generally do not support cultivation and wind often blows topsoil away. Several ranchers showed me the deleterious effects of past "sodbusting" on their properties.

Some ranchers also admitted that other ranchers overgrazed their property. In some cases, ranchers pointed out the overgrazing of previous owners or neighbors. One rancher describes the state of her ranch upon purchase.

Because if we don't take care of the grass we can't raise cattle and when we came to this place it was terrible. He had completely overgrazed it and we figure it's going to take us at least five years to have it come back. Already neighbors have said they have seen more grass on this place than they had seen from the ten previous years.

Another rancher described her neighbor, saying "We have a neighbor that doesn't know how to graze her place. You can see the fence. She has grazed it down, if anybody could get her bought out, it would have to stay idle for at least twenty years to come back. It's so depressing it just makes you cry." One ranch manager described the different approaches of ranches he had worked for.

And I worked for some other places that, I don't know if they were necessarily wrong, but that were wanting to make money and wanting to run as many cattle as they could care less if a deer was on the place. Didn't actually want them around because they eat too much grass and didn't really matter if it was a dry year, they still ran probably more cattle than they should've. And things like that. Actually there's quite a few people up here that do a really good job. I've got neighbors to the north that their place is...they really take care of it.

Some residents told me that ranchers would not admit to overgrazing on their own property, but some ranchers did allow that they overgrazed certain pastures during drought year. Melissa confessed "well, even with us, some of the stuff that we use the hardest like where the cows spend all winter, is just grazed down to nothing. But the bulk of our pastures aren't, we take very good care of them." Amanda described the difficult position ranchers are put in during drought.

And like I say, most of us ranchers, or the ones I'm involved with, we want clean streams, we don't want degradation, we don't want a mess of things. You know we want to protect,
and if we overgraze, which all of us do at times, and we sure try not to, but if we do it's because you're between a rock and a hard spot. You know this year and with this drought, we have seen some of our neighbors really overgraze, and we've got one neighbor down here, his cattle look just terrible.

Overgrazing was often associated with drought years or certain ranchers. Overgrazing was seen as problematic, but was motivated in large part by the need to make a living in the context of low beef prices and rising production costs.

Ranchers claim to “take care of the land,” but admit to overgrazing certain pastures during drought times due to economic pressures. They locate conservation on private lands and view livelihood and conservation as compatible, if not mutually reinforcing. However, they also admit that these goals are not always achievable.

Public Goods and Private Rights

When environmentalists discussed the stewardship obligations of ranchers, they talked about them in terms of the “greater good,” “common good,” “public interest,” and “public trust.” Rather than conceptualizing these responsibilities as emanating from the individual rancher and as connected with staying in business, they saw good land management as an obligation to the larger society.

One national environmentalist argued for “active stewardship” on private lands” saying some ongoing continuing reinforcement of the public trust dimension of private lands seems to me to be essential for the long-term. I want to make it in the interest of private landholders to sustain the biodiversity rather than make it a burden for them. And I don't think our society's come to the point yet where we've picked up that public responsibility enough.

When he referred to the public trust he meant “the global public” and said, “these are global resources as far as I'm concerned” and humans have “a deep and moral responsibility to sustain other species.” A regional environmentalist couched conservation values in the context of broader societal rights.
OWEN: I think that what is being fought over is not erosion of private property rights but the assertion of community rights which have always been there but which are being drawn more sharply into focus by increased populations and changing land use patterns.

LAURIE: What do you mean when you say “community rights?”

OWEN: Well, I think by that, protection of the environment, protection of natural resources, protection of wildlife. When those community rights come into conflict with the perceived property rights of land owners who don't think the government has any role in our land and that issue's been fought over for two hundred years in this country and it's pretty well clear in our laws that the government has a right to tell property owners how to manage their lands under certain circumstances. Ranchers like to ignore that and think they're somehow privileged above all else.

Ranchers and many residents did not necessarily agree. One rancher argued against “the greatest good for the greatest number all the time,” preferring regulations that are “fair” do the “right thing.” Many ranchers and residents suggested that private rights only be limited when you are affecting your neighbor. One rancher described the limits of regulation in this context.

I suppose your position on property rights depends on your background and what your upbringing was. Having been raised on a ranch, I'm a very strong supporter of personal property rights and I think the government is getting into areas where they really shouldn't be. I mean, granted, I think there's people that are abusing their property. I don't know quite how to put this. I guess if what they're doing on their property doesn't affect anyone else, I'm not sure the government should be coming in there and saying, you know, you can't do this. It's their property. However, if their practices or whatever they're utilizing their property for has an adverse affect on their neighbors and other people, then I think there has to be some ability for some governing agency to say no, out of just moral and ethical, and respect for your neighbors, you can't do this or that.

Another resident suggested similar limits on regulation of private rights.

The environmentalists, the Forest Service people, ...they're gonna have to straighten it out to get back to where the private property is private property and you can run your land as you see fit as long as you don't interfere with somebody else's space or somebody else's health.

However, many ranchers and residents recognized and explicitly acknowledged the tension inherent in pursuing both public goods and private rights. One ranch manager who grew up on a ranch explores his own confusion over this issue.

I think once you own something, whether it's you or me or anyone, if you own that thing, you ought to be able to do what you want with it...And I think some of the stuff that goes on, you sit back and think, geez, somebody ought to put a stop to that. But then you think, well, Christ, if he owns that thing, he can do anything he wants to with it. But it's not right. I mean, so, yes and no. I think that, I feel if I owned a piece of property, I'd want to be able to do what I wanted to on it. But then when you think about it, maybe you
shouldn't do some of those things and maybe somebody should be able to tell you that you can't do that.

Another rancher explained this difficulty, saying

JEREMY: Telling you what you can do and what you can't do. How you can use your land. It's a tough thing. It's a tough thing to make the laws in this country to protect one person without hurting another one. I'd be pretty upset if someone with a mink farm moved right up north or west of me or something like that, hog farm. But you hate to tell them they can't.
LAURIE: What do you do about that?
JEREMY: I don't know.

Many ranchers recognized this dilemma, but few had specific recommendations about how to resolve it.

**The Subdivision Conundrum**

Tensions over public goods and private rights were most frequently expressed during interviews in the context of the subdivision conundrum. Before examining interview results, a look at the Community Land Use Survey provides some information on general perspectives regarding subdivision (see Table 1). Residents were almost evenly split on whether or not “subdivision of rural areas, including agricultural lands, in Teton County is a problem” and whether or not “subdivision is a viable economic option for landowners.” Note the number of people who answered “don’t know.” However, when ranchers alone are examined 27% strongly agreed and 61% agreed to some extent with the first statement.

At the same time, a clear majority of respondents wanted subdivision regulated. In response to the statement “people should be able to subdivide where and when they want,” 28% strongly disagreed and 57% disagreed to some extent (see Table 8-1). In response to “subdivision should be regulated,” 47% strongly agreed and 76% agreed to some extent. Ranchers answered this question similarly to respondents as a whole. While respondents tended to agree that “subdivision of rural areas, including agricultural lands, can be regulated without infringing on private property rights” (20% strongly agreed and 49% agreed to some extent), 18% answered
"don't know." Contrary to what might be expected, ranchers 29% strongly agreed and 58% agreed to some extent with the above statement.

Table 8-1: Perspectives on Subdivision (Community Land Use Survey Responses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents who Circled Each Answer</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subdivision of rural areas, including agricultural lands, in Teton County is a problem.</td>
<td>14% 19% 15% 15% 13% 18% 13% 3.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subdivision is a viable economic option for landowners.</td>
<td>14% 6% 13% 19% 17% 17% 12% 3.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People should be able to subdivide where and when they want.</td>
<td>28% 15% 14% 14% 10% 12% 6% 3.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subdivision should be regulated.</td>
<td>3% 5% 7% 12% 17% 47% 6% 5.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subdivision of rural areas, including agricultural lands, can be regulated without infringing on private property rights.</td>
<td>8% 9% 10% 10% 19% 20% 18% 4.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ranchers and most residents interviewed preferred that ranchlands not be subdivided for small rural homesites. They did not want land taken out of agricultural production, they did not want added demands on county services, and they were concerned about the ecological impacts of rural residential development. While there was widespread agreement that ranching and large holdings were the preferred land use and land ownership pattern, strong commitments to private property rights meant that solutions to this problem were not forthcoming in resident communities.

Ranchers explained the dilemma of regulating subdivision and protecting private property rights.
They conflict. You can't have them both. To keep it the way it is, you're going to have to pass laws that you don't want. You're going to have to take away the right of anyone being able to see his land for development if that's what you don't want or whatever. And we don't want that either. We don't want someone telling us we can't sell our land.

HOLLY: Yeah, it's a Catch-22.
LAURIE: Is there a solution to that?
HOLLY: No, there isn't. You can either stand by your values that said, no, everybody has a right to do with their land as they want, or you can become a socialist country and tell them no, they can't do anything. So you are caught.

You got to take your good with your bad and you can't say boy, I support private property rights and, man, you can do anything you want with your land, but you can't subdivide it. Other than that, you can do anything you want. That's the trade off that's in a lot of things. And I think everybody, myself included or a lot of people, we just hope no one will want to do that. And either sell it to someone who wants to keep it whole, either put an easement on it yourself or sell it to someone who will put an easement on it that will keep it from being...just keep the ground whole, try not to fracture it any further with building, I think that's just what everyone hopes for.

Several ranchers who were active in the private property rights movement explicitly stated that private rights superceded their desire not to see subdivision. According to one rancher, "it's not a dilemma. We don't want to see it, but we do believe that our neighbor has the right to sell his land to whoever he wants to. We'd rather not see it be divided up into acre plots or whatever, but we think he has that right. It's his land."

However, newcomers from other parts of the country, both new large landowners and those who lived in town, were much more amenable to development regulations and even some sort of zoning. According to one new large landowner, "there's an easy solution and it's just conscious development. We need to talk about it. You get together as a group and you plan and you look at it and you go, well, here's the town or here's the city or here's the county and what makes sense?" This landowner argued that people needed to "give up a little" for the "common good." Even one rancher suggested that if it were a "fair" restriction applied to all landowners with enough public input, she might support some sort of regulations. However, this perspective was the exception to the rule amongst ranchers and most residents.

The economic context was a prominent part of this dilemma for some people. Because of current difficulties making a living ranching, many people believed that restricting subdivision...
might eliminate the last economic option ranchers had available. People might be forced to sell the entire ranch, because they were not allowed to sell part of it and continue ranching on the rest. One business owner who grew up on a ranch connected the livelihood issue to the possibility of community consensus on potential restrictions.

I don't think you can limit subdivision without limiting property rights, because to limit subdivision is to say to a landowner, this use is off limits for you. So no, but if the majority of the people in this county want to come to a consensus and say we so value production agriculture that we are willing to put this limitation on ourselves, then so be it. That's a majority consensus kind of decision. Can that actually happen? I don't know because it's the same people, the ranchers and farmers who don't want to see that loss of production agriculture are also the people who are struggling for a livelihood right now. And if selling off that corner of the place to development means they can stay in business for five more years, what viable alternative do they have if we take that away from them? If we take that away from them and the farm fails, we're still having a net loss of people involved in agriculture. So I don't know. I mean it's a terrible conundrum because those same people that want production agriculture to stay strong also are property owners who have such a dedication to the concept of private property rights that to make that mental leap from I can do what I wish with my property as long as I am not hurting anyone else, to I'm going to self limit and not do this with my property that is a big leap of the mind. That is a big philosophical step to take. I think it'd be tough to do, just from the economic perspective. I know from the heart perspective probably lots of them would rather do anything than sell to development scenario, but if it means sustaining the rest of the operation. I don't see any easy answer to that other than people would have to come to a consensus that they value the one thing so much more than the other that they could make a sacrifice.

The work of the Teton County Growth Policy Committee also revealed the challenges of the subdivision conundrum. While survey results indicate residents support some regulations on development in the area, to date Committee members are reluctant to infringe on landowner rights despite concerns about the financial, social, and ecological impacts of rural subdivision.

**The Role of Government and Regulation**

There were some important differences in how people regarded the role of regulation and government in general in relation to private lands. Most environmentalists were in favor of some regulation of private property rights to protect the public interest. One regional environmentalist argued for regulation, even if it decreased property values.
Ultimately, it is going to rest in how people feel about the common good. And generally we've been less inclined to support the common good in recent years and more inclined to support the needs of the individual rather than society. There's a really strong trend in the West that says the individual is the most valuable thing and if you take care of the individual then society's fine. And I guess my perspective has long been to look out for the common good. And in that case I would support regulation even though it would mean infringing on property values of someone's property.

A new large landowner supported regulations, saying "I'm not worried about federal government or the state government infringing on my property rights. I guess I am more the other way. It is like people sometimes need regulations, because otherwise you do hurtful things to your property, to the land." Pro-regulation perspectives are predicated on several assumptions. One, that ranchers currently fail to adequately protect the public interest in their lands. Two, that the state knows what is best for these lands and is the logical protector of the public good. Three, that there is an absence of nonregulatory incentives for ranchers to provide the values environmentalists want to preserve.

While most environmentalists supported regulation of private lands, public lands activists often suggested that they had no authority over private lands management. One regional wilderness advocate explained that she had no right to determine whether or not private lands are drilled for oil and gas, saying "not on private lands, because I think that they're going to do whatever they're going to do. And like I said, there's really nothing we can do." Earlier in this chapter I described a local environmentalist's decision to focus on public lands, because "nobody could fault" him and he had a "right to say" what happened on public lands. These statements revealed that some environmentalists essentially forgo a claim to regulate for public goods on private lands.

Ranchers and many residents clearly stated that regulations infringed on their private property rights. A Washington, D.C.-based stockgrowers organization staffperson summed up this perspective.

Well, I think again there has been a real serious erosion of our property rights, either through regulatory agencies who don't necessarily have the resources to be buying land for habitat or buying land for other public purposes. So anyways, 'we'll just regulate it.'
And so I think that they really push their authority to be able to regulate, number one, it leaves the landowner uncertain what they can do, which is very frustrating. And they're the ones that still pay taxes on it and they're the ones who still do own the property. Yet, they're being told they can't do it for, sometimes a very questionable purpose.

A local business owner who grew up on a ranch provided some examples of how regulations impact property management and property values.

The prairie pothole issue, where if you've got a hay field from an irrigation seep. We haven't had any lately, but heavy rain showers or whatever, it develops and maintains itself for a certain portion of a season. Those prairie potholes are great for migratory birds to stop in. If the federal government comes in and says you can't drain that, you can't do something so that irrigation seep doesn't occur so that you can effectively grow grass in this pasture, which is what your designs are, then that is a management issue that affects their property value. It devalues the property. That corner of the pasture then becomes great for the nation's wildlife, the birds. But as far as generating grass to feed my cows, it's no longer useful and yet I pay the same pasture tax on it as I do on the rest of the productive pasture. So that would be an example of the sort of thing that I think comes to mind when I think of that. The whole issue of accommodating predators and not being able to protect the property, whether it's coyotes, or wolves, or bears, or eagles for that matter, comes to mind.

When asked what the appropriate federal government role was with regard to private lands, ranchers and many residents responded “no role” or to protect private property rights.

Regulations from Washington D.C. were regarded as ineffective and intrusive. Similar to perspectives on public lands management, there was a sense that policy-makers were too far away and far removed from both ranching and the area to know what kinds of policies would work for private lands. Regulations were consider to be “one-size-fits-all” and therefore not adaptable to local conditions and individual livestock operations. Regulations were believed to be pursued by “environmentalists” and described as taking “power out of the hands of the individual.”

Regulations were considered quite burdensome for family ranchers and described as “enormous” and “hardships.” Even ranchers who felt they had escaped most of the burden to date feared “the continual threat of ever and greater restrictions, tighter regulations, more hoops, more work.” Some of the regulatory burden is specific to grazing on public lands. According to one resident,

The rules are getting untenable. It's a nightmare to try to know what is allowed. I don't know how a lot of the ranchers even keep track of the land because I know several land
owners that have leases with four or five different agencies or groups and each one of
them has a different set of rules and regs and you can have this many cows here on this
day, but not on this day.

Interestingly, some environmentalists who supported regulation of private property acknowledged
the burden of government regulations in other arenas of public land management, such as
outfitting. According to one local environmentalist,

The Forest Service goes out of its way in its management frenzy to manage use and since
they can't manage use of ordinary people, they love to take it all out on the outfitters. We
don't get hammered too much. They just go batshit theoretically trying to regulate the
horse outfitters, although then they close their eyes to some incredible, like, overuse
problems that the horse outfitters generate.

Environmentalists who located conservation with the state often described the inept or inefficient
management of public lands. In other words, they argued that state regulation was the best means
of assuring protection of the public interest, but were also very critical of the management of
public lands.

Regulations also affected private land management practices. A retired rancher told a
story of delays in bridge repair due to a potentially endangered species.

We needed our big bridge fixed across the river and the men came out to pour the cement
and move the gravel and they found one damn flower that they never seen before and
shut that whole project down. Now, come off it. Take a picture of it...This guy came
down and just raised hell and they couldn't do a thing till they got it settled. Well, this is
what I'm upset about is the rabble-rousers. Not common sense people and if you want it,
dig the damn thing up, take it home.

A stockgrowers staffperson suggested that attention to regulations meant less time for important
management activities.

In a lot of these family operations from the time your feet hit the floor in the morning
until they come off the floor at night when you get back into your comfortable bed you're
working. And what you do through that work day, like any other job, drives how
profitable your operation is. If you start putting a lot of regulatory effects on a lot of these
family livestock operations, they spend more and more time dealing with those, dealing
with paperwork, going to meetings, doing those things. It takes away from the things they
should be doing, that keep them profitable.

Impacts of regulations on livelihood were considered the most problematic. One rancher
described the “regulations” “that all the different agencies are trying to put on us” as “affecting
the way that we make a living.” As in the case of subdivision restrictions, regulations were believed to be even more burdensome because of the challenge of making a living ranching.

An oft-cited example of how regulations impact livelihood was livestock depredation. Many ranchers described losing animals to predators in the area, saying they felt “helpless” in the face of these “losses.” Lack of control over predators was believed to take a bite out of a rancher’s bottom line. One resident described the situation.

I don't want ranchers indiscriminately shooting bears and shooting wolves. But I also don't want wolves and bears to be able to come in and indiscriminately kill their livelihood. That's like stealing $20,000 out of your pocket and you have to bear the consequences? It's idiocy. And so they have to eat the entire loss for this massive public that just loves wolves and grizzly bears, you see. Most of the ranchers say, “I love grizzly bears but treat me fair. And I love wolves but treat me fair. Don't impose upon me regulations that destroy my livelihood and expect me to give up my entire lifestyle and what I've worked for for generations so that somebody in New York can say ‘oh, that's a pretty animal.’” You see what I mean? That's where we lost the balance. Finally coming around. I've been preaching this for 15 years, you know, look, be fair to the people whose property is being imposed upon by these endangered species - whatever you want to call them. That's where we've had the big, big fall down and hostility develop as a result of environmental regulation.

He pointed to these sorts of regulations as increasing animosity towards the government within the ranching community.

Ranchers also talked about wanting to be trusted to do the right thing with regard to land management and wildlife. The problem, they acknowledged, was that not all ranchers could be trusted to be good stewards, and therefore, the public felt a need for heavy-handed regulations. One rancher described this challenge in the context of riparian conservation.

Another example, I think, is riparian area. I think it's a matter of time before ranchers are going to be forced to do some riparian area management, fencing them off, restricting livestock use, whatever. And I don't think that's a bad thing necessarily, but I would prefer that come from the individual management decision of the rancher rather than Uncle Sam stepping in and saying, ‘Hey guys, I don't care what you think. I know it's your land but you got to fence off your creek.’ That leaves a real bad taste in my mouth. And unfortunately, there's some, there's irresponsible landowners that won't take management steps.
Another ranch family discussed the dilemma of grizzly management, pointing out that a particular rancher, who was well-known for publicly announcing he would shoot bears that appeared on his property, spoiled it for everyone.

**Public Land Acquisition and the Role of the State**

Different perspectives on the location of conservation and the role of the state also emerged in the context of further public land acquisition in the study site. Ranchers and many residents resisted and, in some cases, feared additional public land acquisitions in the area. These people often discussed these acquisitions as “land grabs.” They articulated concerns about the establishment of big parks or preserves in the area, the removal of productive ranchlands from the county tax base, and the threat of eminent domain. One resident summed up this perspective, saying “local people don’t want more government land.”

Landowners were fearful that special features on their property would be identified by environmentalists or agency staff and their ranches would be targeted for acquisition. One landowner kept the discovery of dinosaur bones secret for fear her land would be confiscated or heavily regulated. Some landowners had researched conservation projects, such as the Wildlands Project, and realized their ranches were situated in the buffer zones outlined on maps produced by environmentalists. These individuals were alarmed and fearful they would lose their ranches in the near future.

Some people argued that financial resources to purchase private lands were unavailable, or should be used for other purposes. Some ranchers were frustrated about competing with federal agencies to purchase lands in the area. Others argued that the notion that public ownership was better for the land was misguided. According to one rancher,

> It’s a real frustration when I hear people talk about the environment and taking care of the land and the perception that somehow the land would be better of in public hands than in private hands. I think that the reason we have so much wildlife…I know that the reason we have so much wildlife along the Front is because of the private land. I know that
there are far more weeds on the public land than there are on the majority of private places.

Her assertion about weed management differences is supported by recent research comparing protected areas and ranchlands (Maestas, Knight, and Gilgert, 2001).

One Washington D.C.-based private property rights advocate, Lenny, had strong opinions about “expansion of the federal estate.” While his perspective was more extreme and accusatory than most ranchers I interviewed, he is in a powerful position to influence discourse and policy-making around private lands. He described efforts to expand public land ownership as power plays by the environmental community. He said

The environmental community. Their primary objective is power, they want power and they want people off the land outside of the cities..... Now that they’ve managed to grab and lock up control of the federal government lands, now they want to lock up and gain control over private property. It’s a continuing of the power grab. They’ve grabbed most of the power over most of the public lands. Now they want to grab power and control over the private lands. It’s the same thing, the same fundamental point. This is not about protecting the environment. It’s about power. It’s about making yourself feel good at other people’s expense. They believe that they know how to manage the land better, they believe they're just smarter than the little people in the small towns. And so they want the power, they want the small towns basically cleaned out, cleaned out meaning eliminating economic viability of a community. And eventually causing it to be disbanded, literally disbanded by devaluing the land and eliminating areas of opportunities for employment.

Lenny asserted that environmentalists believe they have the knowledge to appropriately manage these lands, and believe themselves to be more intelligent than residents and landowners. He also concludes that efforts at public land acquisition will result — in fact, are intended to result — in the elimination of rural communities. He argued that the “Wildlands Project literally wants to force people to live inside of certain urbanized corridors” and that this amounts to cultural “genocide” because it would destroy rural America. Lenny suggested that key members of Congress are attempting to move the term “wildlands” into the mainstream vocabulary in an effort to limit opposition to public land acquisition. He said

You hear the members of congress who are tied in with the environmental movement, no longer talking using the word ‘wilderness.’ They now use the term ‘wildlands.’ Think about George Miller. Listen to George Miller. George Miller doesn’t use the term ‘wilderness’ anymore, he now uses the term ‘wildlands.’ So they’re working to turn wildlands into the language to make it sound more palatable.

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According to Lenny, environmental groups consider people to be “the enemy” and that “people cannot work with the environment.” Again Lenny’s language is somewhat more extreme when compared with most ranchers in the study site. However, ranchers who are staunch private property rights advocates also described government, U.N., or environmentalist plots to forcibly remove them from their lands.

In contrast, many environmentalists, but not all, were interested in additional public land acquisitions in the study site. Very few condoned the use of eminent domain (the power of the state to forcibly acquire or condemn private lands for public purposes, provided market value is paid to the owner), instead preferring purchase of land from willing sellers. However, a few environmentalists suggested that, provided it was in the public interest, they would support condemnation of private lands. One resident environmentalist was “damn concerned” about “public property rights.” He said

If it’s a conflict between private gain over exploitation of private land versus a broader public interest, be it in wildlife, open space, whatever, then I will go with the broader public interest. And if that means condemnation of public land, fair market value, acquisition, however it may be, then great. We should be able to do that. In other words, private property rights are constitutionally protected and that’s fine. But there is a line that they can’t step over. And if they step over the line and begin adversely impacting the surrounding neighbors, so to speak, which may happen to be you and I as owners of the public land, then we should have some recourse. And that recourse may be to basically just try to come up with enough money, land and water conservation money, to buy them out.

This resident argued that when private lands impact adjacent public lands, private rights can be violated in the interest of public goods. A national level environmentalist concurred, saying “I am not opposed to the eventual condemnation of lands. I would want to do it sparingly and carefully but it does seem to me that the public weight is what has to bear for the benefit of the common good.”

In particular, environmentalists argued for purchase of parcels adjacent to federal lands – parcels at risk of development or parcels with high biological value. They wanted these lands
then managed for nonmotorized recreation, ecosystem management, wildlife restoration, and wilderness. According to a former elected official,

Eventually I would like to see the public purchase - under agreed upon buy-sell - purchase many of the lands on the apron of the Front and create special management areas in them that have as their primary purpose not recreation, not hard recreation, wheeled recreation, but rather scenic view, protection of the habitat.

A national level environmentalist argued that ecosystem management required more public ownership. He said

I would like to see a greater effort to acquire adjacent private parcels as they come up for sale using the land and water fund...[the more landowners] the more difficult it is to get any kind of coordinated ecosystem management and that's one of the reasons why I'm such an advocate of public lands.

A D.C.-based Forest Service employee would like to see public and private lands along “the interface areas along the Front be brought into wilderness.” He said “I think they’re so unique and there's so much there that it's probably already been lost that it would be worth adding them to our wilderness portfolio.” Earlier in this dissertation I described similar sentiments expressed by environmentalists and newcomers about the uniqueness of the area and what has been lost elsewhere. Other environmentalists argued for “wildlife refuges” and “keeping the wild character of the area.” People argued for “bison restoration and major animal herds and grizzlies and wolves back on the plains.”

Some environmentalists suggested that the entire study site be publicly owned, all the way to the highways on the eastern edge. A nonresident environmentalist described plans to put a fence around the entire area and reintroduce bison.

[It] would give you everything you ever had there, short of the dinosaurs...I think it’s value, even if you had to keep people out of it, not use the Front anymore, because it’s so valuable as wildlife habitat that it exceeds recreational value. That’d be great... Just for people to come and look through the fence, it would be more of an economical boom to Choteau and Bynum and Dupuyer than ranching is.

One newcomer’s ideal future for the Rocky Mountain Front is a program for federal acquisition of all of the private lands that would eventually come up for sale.
I would like to see the entire Front form Glacier clear down to Lincoln be extended. First of all it would, I'd like to see a decent wilderness bill passed, which would bring the wilderness out to where the current FS line is. Beyond that there should be this gigantic buffer zone that comes down, where all of these lands are managed for wildlife, clear out in some cases 20, 25 miles out from the Front. All of those lands could be acquired for peanuts. For what it costs for an F-16 fighter plane you can buy the whole damn Front in Montana, it's just crazy. ..you acquire all the private land, you amalgamate it with the BLM lands and the Forest Service lands along the front, you have a gigantic buffer zone, varying from you know say 12 to 25 miles in depth, all along that front and that land is managed exclusively without any hunting, without any trapping, without any encroachment of motors of any kind. That is wildlife country for endangered species, you buy out the cattle... You buy all that land, you acquire it, and you make it, not a park, but you make it true wildlife habitat. Join it to the Bob Marshall Wilderness and you've got 150 miles thick, 100 to 150 miles of actual pristine sanctuary for the animals that you're trying to sustain.

These environmentalists did not explicitly argue for the elimination of the communities along the highways, but they clearly did not mind or actually sought the elimination of ranching in the area.

Environmentalist arguments for expansion of federal lands in the study site imply that public lands acquisition would best accomplish their conservation goals—protecting biological diversity, wildness, and wildlife restoration. The assumption is that public ownership is more effective for achieving these goals as compared with private land ownership. They assume here that the state is the location of conservation and the protector of public interest. Or, at minimum, they see that state as having that potential and believe that, as citizens, they have more influence over public lands than private lands.

However, claims that conservation is situated with the state are complicated by an examination of recent public lands management in the study site. Different agencies have different priorities, even within federal and state government. Public agencies are not monolithic and priorities can change within particular agencies. For example, within a few years of a Forest Service decision to prohibit oil and gas development in the study site, both the Bureau of Land Management and the Montana State Department of Natural Resources and Conservation were pursuing plans for oil and gas development. The Montana proposal flew in the face of Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks efforts to protect wildlife winter range on Wildlife Management Areas in the study site. A 2002 travel plan proposal for Forest Service lands emphasizing motorized
recreation seems to contradict the conservation priorities characterizing the oil and gas decision. Furthermore, President Bush is pursuing reversal of the oil and gas decision, demonstrating that public land management is not consistent over time and is very much subject to political shifts.

Resident opposition to public lands acquisition is not surprising, and these findings compliment recent research on property and ecosystem management. Hurley, Ginger, and Capen (2002) found that many critics of a Vermont ecosystem management project believed that equating public acquisition with conservation was erroneous. Some of these critics felt that public land acquisition threatened residents' autonomy. In the Vermont study, public land acquisition did not skirt private property rights issues, as intended by policy-makers. In fact, it triggered concerns about private rights. On the Rocky Mountain Front and elsewhere, public land acquisition takes lands out of private enterprise and out of agricultural production, uses that many residents value. In this sense, transfer of lands from private to public hands, even by willing seller, may be viewed as a threat to already vulnerable livelihood options in the area.

**The Role of Incentives**

Some people argued for financial incentives as opposed to, or in addition to, punitive regulations and public land acquisition. These kinds of ideas emerged primarily from stockgrowers' staff and private property rights advocates, and environmentalists who supported ranching in the area. All of these individuals were working at the regional and national levels in the policy-making arena. They saw regulations as unfair and ineffective. Incentives, on the other hand, were believed to provide just compensation for the public goods and services that private landowners provided to society as a whole.

Some people argued that the benefits that ranchers provide society, through preservation of open space and wildlife habitat, should be quantified and the landowners should be paid that figure by the government. One Washington, D.C.-based private property rights advocate suggested that private lands provide habitat for game that hunters later shoot on public lands. She
believed that value should be calculated and paid to ranchers by the government, state or federal. A regional stockgrowers staffperson justified this approach, saying that “societal benefits” come “at the expense of a private property owner's ability to make his decisions,” “narrow the options and alternatives for the private property owner,” take away “private property rights,” and therefore “compensation” should be provided. This argument takes on an urgent tone in the context of the economic challenge of ranching today.

A regional environmentalist who grew up on a ranch suggested annual tax breaks for ranchers who did not subdivide their property - a subsidy to keep the land in one piece. Another regional environmentalist argued that incentives work because people make decisions based largely on economics.

A Washington, D.C.-based stockgrowers staff compared incentives and regulations.

I think it all comes back to incentives. If there are economic incentives for people to be able to basically do the right thing, they are more apt to kind of do the right thing, than if you’re standing over them with a stick saying, ‘if you don’t do this, I’m going to keep hitting you with this stick until you do it.’ And they keep getting a bigger and bigger stick and it’s like trying to win a fight with a 1200 pound horse. I mean, you can convince a horse to do something and out smart the horse to make it easy for the horse to make the right choice, or you can just forget all the other choices and try to beat the horse into making the choice that you want it to make. And a lot of the ranchers learn lessons that way and they don’t like when someone takes a stick to them.

Derek suggested that regulations make ranchers feel hostility toward the government. This could increase resistance to conservation efforts. Another D.C.-based stockgrowers staffperson talked about changing the Endangered Species Act.

JUNE: You've got to provide the guidelines and standards and the objectives. This is what we want to accomplish. "You, private landowner, have a particular species or the, or the possibility of providing habitat for a particular species and we see you as a critical player in all of this. So, instead of regulating you and, and threatening you, we're going to provide you with some incentives to help us, to be our partner in this." This is why I get optimistic, because I think we're moving in that direction; there's been a huge recognition just in the last five years. That's where we need to be going. Can't really quite figure out what those incentives might be or how to best come up with what it might be for a particular species but you gotta make them want to do it. Forcing them, I don't think accomplishes anything. I would love to see some incentives and I think that's where we are in complete agreement with the environmental community. I think that they've come around and they would like to see some incentives in places, and that this heavy-handed regulation ain't accomplishing that.
Laurie: Do you think that some of those incentives will be financial?
June: Yeah, I think they're gonna have to be, because you get money that's going to have to be spent and asking a landowner to do it isn't - you're not going to accomplish as much. So, they may not have the money to do it. So yeah, I think it's going to have to.

Like fellow stockgrowers staff, June characterized regulations as coercive and almost abusive.

She acknowledged that she does not have specific proposals for what kinds of incentives might work, only a general sense that this is the direction to move in. She did specify that these incentives would be financial in nature.

A national level environmentalist agreed, saying

I want to do that through incentives rather than regulations. If I'm a rancher in the Rocky Mountain Front of Montana, I don't want to be told I have to live with grizzly bears who aren't friendly to my children every day of the year. I want to find other ways to be able to participate in the stewardship role that I may want to play and I want incentives to do it. And you begin to edge into that with Defenders of Wildlife providing compensation to cattle ranchers for wolf kills. And I think therein lies a sort of deal, if you will. If you suffer at the loss of the public wheel, which is preserving species, then you as an individual ought to be compensated for that in some way. I don't say that's a perfect formula but it's moving in the direction of recognizing a public responsibility to compensate private landowners for losses that they suffer because of our public goals.

He argued further that it is a public responsibility to fund these programs through taxes and federal appropriations.

These individuals, working at the regional or national level on policy-making related to ranching, resolved tensions around public goods and private rights through compensation. They acknowledged the inherent trade-offs that exist when protecting the public interest in private lands, but were unwilling to require landowners to bear the entire burden. Instead, they sought to provide financial incentives, compensation, and subsidies to individual landowners to accomplish conservation goals.

Ranchers rarely mentioned such initiatives. Ranchers were widely considered, by themselves and others, as independent and anti-government, and most ranchers argued that they did not enjoy nearly the federal subsidies that farmers did. Perhaps suggesting further government funding was antithetical to their sense of independence.
**Divided on the Role of the State**

In summary, ranchers argued that livestock producers must take care of the land in order to remain in business, that private lands are the location of conservation, that the individual or family is motivated to be good stewards, either because of ethical principles or practical business sense. In contrast, environmentalists located motivation for good stewardship with the state, suggesting the regulation and public land acquisition were necessary to secure public goods, such as protection of wildlife. Ranchers resisted increased government intervention, in the form of regulation or public land acquisition. One rancher explained that "a lot of people think the government wants to control, maybe control all of the land," arguing that this attitude was very prevalent in the area.

Government incentives resolved some tensions between private rights and public goods, but challenged the dichotomy outlined above. If good stewardship is inherent to ranching, incentives are unnecessary. However, we know that drought and difficult market conditions result in overgrazing at times, and may increase the likelihood of selling the ranch for the economic windfall of subdivision.

**Creative Solutions that Untangle the Bundle of Rights**

Increasingly, creative solutions to the dilemma of protecting the public interest on private lands rely on pulling apart particular rights from a landowner’s bundle and purchasing those rights. The state may or may not be involved in these efforts, such as conservation easements. Easements respond to both livelihood and conservation concerns, allowing ranchers to continue agricultural production while protecting open space values. Despite the advantages of easements, some rancher perspectives outlined above indicate that many landowners subscribe to an exclusive ownership model of property which may conflict with the notion that certain rights can be separated from the entire bundle.
The Bundle of Rights: How Tightly Woven?

Many scholars argue that property rights are, in practice, a bundle of rights or sticks, with one owner rarely holding the entire bundle. In America, we often conceptualize private property in terms of exclusive or comprehensive ownership, with the full bundle retained. However, this is an illusion that is not supported by close analysis of legal and customary property systems. In the American West, a rancher may own the land, but not the mineral rights, the water in the creek, the airspace, or the wildlife. The sale of conservation easements, recreational access rights, and outfitting rights rely on separating particular sticks from the entire bundle of property rights.

These approaches rely on a bundle of sticks that is not glued together, a bundle where one stick or property right is not necessarily attached to another. However, interview results indicate that different landowners see this bundle as more or less loosely woven together, and may see some sticks as very much attached to others. The success of creative approaches such as conservation easements may depend on understanding these differences.

Many ranchers suggested a slippery slope, arguing that actions affecting one property right necessarily or eventually affect others. One rancher asked “when you restrict someone’s right, where does it stop?” In many cases gun control was conceptually linked to infringements on private property for conservation purposes, suggesting that the bundle may include more sticks than anticipated. A rancher who is an active private property rights advocate said

What’s the next thing they’re trying to do to us? They’re going to strip our private property rights and they’re going to take away our guns so we can't contest it at all. I mean, it sounds like somebody’s really paranoid, but when you start putting pieces in the puzzle, you start going, ‘hmm, am I sick?’ There are so many people that are watching what's happening and they're afraid. Our veterans in this country should be furious with what is happening. The basic rights that they have fought for they're taking away.

One rancher explained how the sticks in the bundle are connected.

You can't take a glass window, draw a circle on it, and make a pie. Now, let's write subdivision in this one and hunting rights in this one and water rights in this one and whatever you want in there. Now take a hammer and just knock out one of those pies. You can't do it. It's all tied together and there's people that want to do that. And it shows up in our national politics with the gun argument. We don't need guns, we don't and I'm not even going to go off on that tangent. But that's one area where this property rights,
personal rights thing, that's my take on it. You can't knock out one section and say we want everything but this one. Subdivision is part of that. It's a lawful...I can't knock...I'd like to, in some instances, but I can't and I wouldn't even try.

This rancher recognized that there are different property rights, but argued that they are essentially inseparable. How ranchers think about the bundle of rights may affect their thinking on conservation easements.

Conservation Easements and Control of Property

For some environmentalists, conservation easements were believed to be as effective, or more effective, than public land acquisition. These environmentalists tended to see ranching as potentially compatible with conservation goals. Or, in some cases, they preferred public ownership, but recognized that a limited amount of funding could positively impact more acres through easement purchase when compared with outright acquisition.

According to a Nature Conservancy employee, easements are voluntary and therefore do not infringe upon private property rights.

I also think that easements, which are our primary tool, are a part of the whole bundle of rights that somebody has that they can sell on their land...If we were holding a gun to somebody’s head and saying you have to do this, you could make an argument that we were infringing on their property rights. But I think since they have choice, I think, that a lot of landowners, after a certain point, shift from thinking this is something the Conservancy is buying from me to thinking this is how I can control this piece of property into the future and my vision to see what I want to see happen a hundred years from now. Because they often realize their family may not own it a hundred years from now and they don’t want to see somebody go and subdivide it.

He suggested that selling an easement provides landowners with increased control over their property because they can determine future practices.

However, many ranchers had concerns about conservation easements. Some ranchers were concerned about easements being in perpetuity and therefore foreclosing future options. One rancher said, “I would hate to forego or restrain my children’s ability to do what they would want to do with that property.” Others were concerned that the missions of the easement holders
would shift and affect the terms of the easement. Some ranchers associated easements with the
government and voiced concerns about changing terms in this context.

And then they got this easement, that everybody’s giving this easement out now, and they
haven’t approached me yet. And I’ve been thinking about it, and I thought, I talked to this
lawyer friend of mine and he says, if you’re smart, you stay out of it, stay away from the
government. Which I’ve always said, get away from government. You can’t do with them
breathing down your neck, and you can’t trust it. You get an agreement and they’ll horse
around it and change it on you.

The primary critique leveled was that ranchers who sold easements had “lost control” of their
property. Ranchers who opposed conservation easements argued that those who sold them were
shored up financially, at least in the near future, but gave “up a lot of rights.” Another rancher
and business owner described landowners who had conservation easements, saying “they sold
their ranch and they just don’t know it.” Ranchers were clear that it was not the conservation
they were opposed to, but rather the control given over to another organization. One resident
explained that “there’s a lot of local ranchers that absolutely hate them. But they hate them not
because of conservation easements as such. I think they hate them because it’s taking away from
their freedoms, from their independence. And I understand that.”

One rancher described the sense that the easement owner would be constantly calling the
shots for ranch management.

Well we had talked about putting one through for part of this place and we looked at it
very seriously, but there are so many tail ends when you start having the officials telling
you what you can and can’t do because they’re not there all the time and they can’t see
the conditions, it’s one reason why we decided not to. Because you want to control your
own destiny as much as you can. With the weather that you can’t control. But, I mean,
you like to do what you feel is best and not have somebody looking over your shoulder
all the time.

Several ranchers described the situation of a nearby rancher who sold an easement to the Nature
Conservancy. They recounted that he was not allowed to drill additional wells for water for
livestock during drought years because the easement prohibited such action.

Many ranchers argued that, in the absence of an easement on their property, they had
“full control” and that selling an easement meant they would have little or no control of their
land. These ranchers may subscribe to a model of exclusive ownership that defines the bundle of rights as tightly woven together. Thus, separating out one right, such as their right to subdivide, as many easements do, may, in their minds, be impossible without compromising the entire bundle. One national level environmentalist concurred, in a way, saying “if you acquire [an easement], then you’re acquiring private land -- you’re just not acquiring the fee.”

Ranchers who opposed easements were also concerned with the cumulative effect of easements in the area, and with the intentions of the easement buyers. One retired rancher said, “I just don’t think it’s a good thing to shut down the whole country.” Another rancher was fearful of “a movement to take this over to return it back to as it was” which he connected to conservation easements. Some ranchers believed that the Nature Conservancy wanted to control the entire area. This rancher believed easements were intended to control water resources for places like California.

I don’t like easements. I know Nature Conservancy likes them, but to me they want control of this Front and it’s not for the wolf and the bear. Somebody, somewhere wants the water. And we’ve got this one world government. He who have water. And California would love to have more water, and we know that the talk, even at one time, it’s been quite a while ago, about bringing water down out of Alaska. And so this water thing is what I think it’s about. And I guess what I don’t like about Nature Conservancy is I don’t trust them.

According to a Washington, D.C.-based private property rights advocate, easements are a “polite way of forcing people off their lands.”

Despite critiques leveled by those who opposed easements, they were generally regarded as “a private business matter, totally unto that operator, between that operator and the person offering to purchase the easement.” One rancher said, “I would never do them. No, no, no. But as far as telling someone else, that’s up to him.” Preventing private landowners from selling easements was viewed as an infringement on private property rights.

While many ranchers argued that selling an easement meant giving up control, ranchers who had sold easements felt differently. In general ranchers with easements argued that they were simply being compensated for land management practices that they intended to implement.
anyway, and that they had not given up property rights. As one rancher put it, an easement with the Nature Conservancy “complements what we are trying to do” (TNC Chapter News, 2002). Easements were said to assist families financially, allow children to retain the ranch in the future, and prevent land from being subdivided. Ranchers with easements saw them as providing, rather than taking away, options. They viewed easements as a way to encourage a particular future for their family and their land. In this sense, they felt they had more control over their land and livestock operation with an easement, than without.

One ranch family was able to purchase additional lands with the payment they received for their easement, ensuring that their ranch was large enough to generate income for their entire family. (Under current tax law only property owners with substantial incomes can take full advantage of the benefits of a donated easement. Most ranch families sell easements, usually for a one time cash payment equal to the market value of the rights they give up.) Another rancher who sold an easement to the Nature Conservancy explained that he did not give up property rights.

LAURIE: Do you feel like you gave up any rights by selling the easement?
AARON: No. It was written just the way...no, we didn't. There was a couple things I had to think about for a minute because it is forever, basically forever. There was in there, they don't want grizzly conflict so they don't want run sheep. And I thought, well, I had no desire to, I haven't ever had any desire to run sheep, don't want to run sheep, but I thought, well, we thought about it, we talked about it a minute. Are we really eliminating an important option in our business? Well, maybe, but I don't think so. So, no, and there's so many varieties to easements, different people underwriting them and stuff that I think it's real important...there's a lot of ignorance out there on easements and a lot of fear of easements and that there's a conspiracy to make another type of quilt of the landscape with easements on it and then voila, there'll be some fine print that nobody read and now we're in control of all this and you're going to be peasants. I don't think that's in the cards, but there are a lot of different types and I think you can't be too careful in writing the kind that you want.

For this rancher the flexibility and variation in easements provided additional insurance that landowner could be sure to retain the property rights they valued. The different organizations who purchase easements in the study site, including state and federal wildlife agencies, and non-profit groups, such as the Nature Conservancy, make different stipulations in their easements.

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Furthermore, the Nature Conservancy and other non-profit organizations usually negotiate easements on a case-by-case basis, and each individual easement is tailored to the specific property and desires of the landowner.

New property arrangements, such as conservation easements may be changing the way we think about property, changing both the meaning and management of private property. Property is dynamic and continuously changing, based in part on the changing demands of society. Ranchers with conservation easements have altered their conceptions of property, moving from a traditional exclusive ownership model, to the point where some rights can be removed from the bundle without jeopardizing their management control.

The Apparent Mineral Rights Exception

While many ranchers were concerned about the erosion of their property rights at the hands of government regulators and, in some cases, easement purchasers, there was little concern about potential oil and gas development on their own lands. Very few landowners in the area own their own mineral rights. In the cases were landowners retain mineral rights, they often lease those rights to oil and gas companies. Where landowners do not own their mineral rights, they may be owned by the federal government (retained during the homesteading era), oil and gas companies (likely sold during the depression to generate additional income), or previous landowners (who retained the mineral rights when selling the ranch). In many cases, mineral rights on one property are divided amongst numerous parties.

This division of mineral rights is perhaps the most pervasive and obvious pulling apart of the bundle of rights attached to particular parcels of land. However, there seems to be little explicit concern that other landowner rights and the ability of ranchers to pursue certain management practices may come into conflict with mineral rights owned by other parties. One resident described this lack of concern.
I think a lot of times these guys in the private property rights group in some ways don't realize what could happen to them on oil and gas. For example, what if the government has an oil and gas lease under their private property surface and they're not getting a thing out of that other than surface damage reparations or whatever.

Ranchers and other landowners had a general sense that they would be allowed to make some stipulations regarding surface occupancy, but realized they would have little control over the terms of development. One resident offered an explanation of why ranchers do not appear to be concerned about mineral rights, despite little control over development practices.

Well, I think because the mineral rights do not have an ever-present use restriction. Many of these mineral rights have been here for a hundred years or fifty years and nothing has been done. There's been no surface development, there's been nobody contacting them saying you can't do this or we've got a right to go in. And so it's not a big issue. It's going to become a big issue with this oil and gas development. There are going to be more and more people who are going to find that these big oil companies are going to come on their property and say you don't have a thing to say about it. You sold off the mineral rights, we're going to build a road in there. And if you don't like it, we'll get a judge to order that we build a road in there. And then they're going to be real happy about the fact that some predecessor sold off a mineral right which is scarring up their land and they're not getting anything from it.

One new large landowner described how most of the mineral rights on his property were sold to a Canadian Company two owners ago. The BLM still owns some rights, as do previous landowners. He said potential oil and gas development on his land “worries him.”

**Conclusion**

Looking closely at property on the Rocky Mountain Front, we find the traditional categories of public and private not nearly as distinct as most Americans may envision. Grazing permits are treated as private rights on public lands. Hunting access to private property is, for some, a public good provided out of a sense of moral obligation. Conservation is viewed by both ranchers and environmentalists as an important part of private land management, although they locate the motivation in different arenas. There are clearly private claims to public lands and public claims to private lands. How those claims are regarded by different groups, and put into practice and policy varies widely.
While acknowledgement that the private and public estates overlap more than previously expected, may, in some ways, legitimate a public interest in private lands, this new understanding does not negate ongoing tensions around the trade-offs between private rights and the public interest. Ranchers, in particular, viewed institutionalization of the public interest through regulation as infringing on private property rights. This seemingly irresolvable conundrum appears to force a choice between the public and private realms. Many people involved in policy-making advocated monetary incentives for conservation practices as a way out of this dilemma.

But questions remain about the location of the public interest. Ranchers and environmentalists differed remarkably on the respective conservation roles of public and private lands, and government. Many environmentalists located the public interest, conservation in this case, with the state, arguing for state land acquisition and regulation to protect public goods such as wildlife. Ranchers invested themselves with a moral responsibility to practice good stewardship, but located the motivation for such practice within the family unit or livestock operation.

Furthermore, conflicting *publics* may be vying to influence decision-making, on both public and private lands. The national versus local debate emerges in the context of who makes policy for different properties in the area. This debate revolves, in part, around claims about who knows what is best for the land and who has the knowledge and experience to manage effectively. At another level, local claims to decision-making power question the assumption that the *public* is a national public, and imply that a different collective, the local community, might be more relevant. Conceptualizing federal lands as *government* lands calls into question the state's claim to represent *the people*.

For ranchers and many residents, thinking about property, both public and private, was inseparable from livelihood. The meaning and purpose of these lands, particularly in the case of private lands, were infused with claims about the right to "make a living," and infringement on property rights conceptualized as threats to livelihood. Livelihood practices, such as ranching, in
many ways legitimated the ownership of private property. Landowners such as newcomers and conservation organizations, who were not engaged in similar practices, were often not afforded the same status or rights by ranchers.

How different people saw the relationship between livelihood and conservation influences where they located the motivation for conservation. If livelihood is defined solely as greed and profit at the expense of other values, there is little room for conservation practices within a market system. However, if livelihood is conceptualized as a means by which real people in real places generate material goods for their families, perhaps it is compatible with conservation values. This is only the case if ranchers are envisioned as engaging in livestock production for multiple reasons, including family heritage, identity, attachment to place, and the acquisition of material goods. Interview results support such an assertion.

Incentives acknowledge the livelihood component of conservation on private lands. They rely on the market and assume that private landowners should be compensated for providing public goods. But incentives do not necessarily rely directly on state programs or policies. Creative solutions emerge in many cases from untangling the bundle of rights associated with particular properties. Easements, for instance, separate out development rights and nonprofit or public organizations purchase those rights for market value. Recreational rights are also purchased by private parties. These efforts further blur distinctions between the binary categories of public and private property. Despite the apparent success and promise of such initiatives, some ranchers may envision their bundle of rights so tightly bound together that they are wary of selling particular rights.

Furthermore, private property rights may be discursive short-hand for opposition to government. Ranchers resist government intervention through claims of exclusive ownership and the right to control what happens on their land. The idea of private property rights triggers the entire discourse, or story, about ranching as American, food producing, hard working, family
oriented, and ruggedly individual. Ranching identity is then intimately tied to both the legitimacy and the preservation of private property rights.

Different ideas about the role of the state, the landowner, and the market loom large in the discussion of public goods and private rights. Understanding these differences provides a window into the opportunities and barriers to address both conservation and livelihood concerns. However, in the context of landscape conservation, we need to know more than just how people conceptualize and act on ideas about property. We need to consider the boundaries between people and properties, how people negotiate these boundaries. In the following chapter, I explore cooperation and conflict across boundaries, specifically focusing on wildlife and weeds.
Chapter 9:  
*Where Properties Meet: Boundary Meaning, Practice, and Permeability*

**Introduction**

Conservation biology is providing an increasingly sophisticated understanding that species and ecological processes do not abide by property boundaries drawn across the landscape. National, state, and county boundaries rarely follow watersheds, ecosystem boundaries, or other topographical features. Looking at a map of the Rocky Mountain Front we see how this lack of dialogue between ecology and property plays out on the ground. Most of the lines on the map are straight, in contrast to the winding and crooked nature of streams and ridges. While allocating "squares" of property may have seemed practical at the turn of the 20th century, property owners and biologists are now aware of the consequences of such an approach for biodiversity conservation and natural resource management.

Numerous species, ecological processes, and natural resource issues cut across these property boundaries, often criss-crossing public and private lands. For example, snow accumulates in the mountains, melting into streams that traverse the prairies. Wildlife, especially ungulates and predators, migrate between lower and higher elevation habitat. Fire sparks in the forest and eastward tending winds push it out onto the plains. Weeds are spread by vehicles and animals and move easily across fencelines. One landowner's water usage affects availability for downstream neighbors.

On the Rocky Mountain Front, wildlife and weeds are particularly contentious cross-boundary issues. Wildlife crosses property boundaries with ease, at times damaging ranchers' haystacks, fences, and meadows - impacts that take on new meaning in the context of current economic hardships. Public hunting access to private lands affects wildlife populations and migration; when newcomers restrict hunting access, ranchers become resentful because they bear...
the economic burden of increasing populations. Weeds also cross property boundaries at will, and no single landowner can control noxious weeds without the assistance of neighbors. Newcomers and ranchers also have different approaches to weeds, which causes conflict around boundary management.

While landowners and public land managers recognize the many ways their management strategies affect one another, meaningful cooperation across property boundaries has yet to materialize in most landscapes, despite talk about ecosystem management policy. Calls for the elimination of property boundaries abound amongst advocates of landscape-level conservation, but numerous boundaries, social and physical, still exist between people and property. Proponents of landscape-level conservation often see boundaries as barriers or constraints. I argue here that boundaries are points of opportunity for cooperation amongst different landowners. Working at a landscape-level for conservation and livelihood requires an appreciation of how different groups of people see and understand these boundaries and how the meaning of boundaries translates into management practices.

As noted in chapter 2, boundaries are symbols, social constructs that indicate distinctions or differences. In the context of property, boundaries indicate a division of rights. Boundaries also imply spatial and, therefore, social relationships. Because boundaries are a point of intersection, the edges where two categories meet, they are the location of property practices. In other words, interactions around boundaries provide a unique window into definitions of property and property rights, as well as how ideas relate to on-the-ground management practices. Because boundaries are symbols, they are not fixed and immutable; they are constantly changing, being renegotiated, and have different and meanings to different people. Examining the meaning, permeability, and negotiation of boundaries can help us understand the social and spatial relationships that govern cross-boundary management practices. In other words, we can better understand conflicts over issues such as wildlife and weeds, and identify opportunities for cooperation and coordination amongst landowners.
Wildlife, Hunting, and Newcomers

Certain natural resource issues provide a particularly good window into how cross-boundary issues are regarded by different landowners. Wildlife management and hunting access to private property was a particularly contentious issue in the study site. Examining how private landowners manage wildlife species that easily and frequently cross property boundaries illuminates the meaning of and practices around these boundaries. In particular, hunting access brings up questions of public goods to private lands, private property rights, and the permeability of boundaries. This case study illustrates how social differences between ranchers and wealthy newcomers – different ideas about boundaries, wildlife, and hunting - are inextricably linked to management actions that affect area ecology and rancher livelihoods.

Ranching, Wildlife, and Boundaries

Ranchers described many different ways that wildlife crossed boundaries and affected ranching practices in the area. Antelope and elk broke through and damaged fences. Deer and elk fed on haystacks or on hay distributed for cattle, at times eating ranchers “out of house and home.” Many ranchers described this as a major economic impact, especially during drought years when hay is in short supply and very expensive. One rancher described this impact.

You talk about game...after hunting season about December, end of December, the deer start coming down the mountains. All right, we didn’t leave very much grass this year, needless to say, between cows and grasshoppers. Well, now we’ve got 3 to 400 head of mule deer. They’re magnificent, but when they start coming into the haystacks then you get into another conflict there. And they get, and the bad thing is, they talk about rotational grazing and everything, they get the first spring grass that comes to the big south pasture. Because they won’t go back until the snow gets back, when they get back up into the mountains again. We love the animals too, but sometimes it gets to be a real pain in the behind.

She argued that leaving grass for winter livestock grazing was problematic because deer often grazed it before the cattle could.

Predators also affected ranching practices, in particular in calving locations. Ranchers put up security lights and used guard dogs to protect livestock against bears and wolves. In one
case ranchers sold their sheep before moving to a particular property known for problems with grizzly bears.

In turn, ranching practices affected the movement of wildlife across property boundaries. A wildlife biologist described this process.

How a ranch is managed, how heavily the grazing land is stocked, what’s planted in the fields and how that’s managed, etc., can affect habitat for some of those transitional range species, ungulates. If a guy plants a great hay field, that means something completely different from a guy who grazes in terms of where the deer are going to be and how they’re going to move. How he manages riparian areas has a lot to do with pasturing birds that probably use those zones as well.

Specific management practices affect the abundance of species, the duration of their stay on particular lands, and patterns of migration on particular properties, and across the entire landscape.

**Hunting as Wildlife Management**

One of the ways ranchers manage wildlife populations, at least in the case of game animals, is through hunting access. Different ranchers approach access in different ways. Some do not allow hunting, some manage access themselves, some lease rights to outfitters, and others participate in the Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks block management program.

Historically, ranchers have managed public hunting access to their private lands through systems of respect and courtesy whereby individuals request permission to hunt. According to one rancher, “if you wanted to hunt on private land then you would definitely call and tell them you were coming through or were going to, for the most part just as a courtesy.”

Wildlife legally belongs to the State of Montana and hunting tags are issued by Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. State agencies determine the number of animals that can be killed each year and create restrictions for particular areas based on fluctuations in local game populations. Within the bounds of this system, ranchers manage game on their own properties through control of access. Ranchers usually determine the types and points of access, the number of hunters,
where people can hunt, and whether they can use vehicles or not. They also make decisions about the length of the season and the types of animals that can be killed. In some cases only does can be shot to protect big bucks. In other cases, ranchers direct hunters according to fluctuations in different species. One rancher described this process.

I kind of watch and see what animals are there and if I feel there isn’t any bucks, I tell them, hey, if you want to go shoot some does go ahead, leave the bucks alone. I have felt that the mule deer population has really been depleted last few years and I totally shut off mule deer hunting on my place and told them you can come in and shoot all the white tail you want, leave the mule deer alone and we kind of just got to watching what animals are there and what we felt needs to be helped or shot and let hunters do it.

Some ranchers only allow bow hunters. These decisions are based on ranchers’ goals and knowledge about wildlife populations, safety concerns, and hunting impacts.

Many ranchers saw hunting as a way to manage game populations in the area. Ranchers argued that, in the absence of hunting, they would be “overrun” and suffer “damage” to hay meadows. One rancher described what she sees as an unnatural situation with game animals.

Betty always allowed hunters on and we did too…it’s no longer a natural situation. The game are managed through hunting whether we like it or not and it’s certainly the same on our property and we actually have more elk than the ranch can sustain. We have a herd of anywhere form 150-300 elk on the ranch at any given time, especially in the winter and spring and we have actually had to resort to a spring kill to get elk out of our hay meadows.

Damage hunts that target game populations that are feeding on hay can be negotiated with Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, but do not appear to be common. Ranchers were often critical of the agency estimates regarding herd size. Some ranchers actually wanted fewer elk tags issued and believed wildlife managers were overestimating elk herds to accommodate hunters.

Decreasing Public Access

Residents had mixed, but generally supportive views of hunting access to private property. Respondents to the Community Land Use Survey were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: Hunting access to private property is important. In response, 27% strongly agreed and 59% agreed to some extent. However, when
ranchers alone were examined, only 7% strongly agreed and 36% agreed to some extent. Clearly there is more support for public access to private lands amongst residents in general compared with ranchers.

Public hunting access to private property has been conceptualized as a public good provided by private lands. Because the state, or the public, own the wildlife, some hunter advocacy organizations have argued that public access to public wildlife is a public right. These organizations claim a public right to hunt on private lands. In this sense, the public claim to access extends beyond public lands and into private lands, blurring the categories of public and private. State ownership of wildlife is just one of many overlapping property rights that also blurs these binary categories. However, as described in the last chapter, ranchers regard the right to control access to their property as a fundamental property right. Thus far state legislatures and the courts have supported this assertion.

Amongst the people interviewed for this project, there was a widespread belief that public access to private property was declining, and that entire areas were being “shut down.” A variety of reasons were given for this decline. The block management program was blamed by some residents. According to this business owner,

I could go talk to whatever rancher and he’d say sure you can go down the creek and hunt whitetail or hunt pheasants or go up there and hunt elk or do whatever and maybe we had some good friends and we kind of had a run of the place. Well then pretty soon if it goes into block management then they only let so many a day in and you got to hunt certain places at certain times and park here.

Other residents complained about ranchers leasing hunting rights to outfitters, or charging fees for bird, deer, and elk hunting on their property. However, residents also acknowledged that the increasing number of ranchers leasing hunting rights was understandable given the current economic crunch.

Lack of access to public lands was also blamed. Newcomers were said to cut off access to public lands adjacent to their property, increasing pressure on private lands open to hunting. According to one resident, “many, many of the out of staters are coming in and putting "no
trespassing" signs up, no hunting, no fishing, no going through these roads, which people historically went for 50 years to get to our ranch which is our public land.”

Increasing numbers of hunters were also blamed, in particular increasing numbers of out-of-state and out of the area hunters. Furthermore, hunter behavior was believed to have had a major impact on public access to private lands. One resident described a “weakening of ethical character among hunters.” Stories of hunters leaving open gates, shooting toward homes, killing livestock, tearing up pastures with vehicles, and leaving trash were widespread. There was also much concern about vehicles spreading weeds. These problems are not just inconveniences, they cost ranchers time and money. In short, they impact livelihood. One retired rancher explained this impact.

You do not run your vehicle all over the grass because that’s their livelihood. Each cow takes a certain amount of grass to be able to survive. And if you run all over that grass and knock that down, that affects the rancher. Also, one of the other things, you ever go through a gate that’s closed and you open it and drive through and you close it, whether you’re going right back out or whether you’re not, right behind you, you close that gate.

There was also some mention of liability issues, and concerns about whether a hunter could sue a private property owner if they were to injure themselves hunting on private land. Ranchers also bore the burden of posting signs with details regarding hunting, issuing permission, and patrolling for trespass.

Trespass was quite common. Ranchers bordering public lands had problems when hunters did not understand where public property ended and private lands began. Boundaries were not necessarily marked or fenced, and so hunters and other recreationists do not always know when they are trespassing. Furthermore, tourists often associated public lands and open space, assuming that ranchlands were public.

People often camped and hunted without permission on private lands. One rancher described seeing a campfire in a nearby meadow on her ranch. When confronted, trespassers argued that they believed they were on public land. According to this rancher, “if they had come
to the house and they had asked, they would have gotten directions to Swift Dam. If they had wanted to stay and fish or whatever, that would've been fine. A lot of it comes down to courtesy.”

One rancher described people “sneaking” on to their property in the Spring to gather shed elk antlers. Because the antlers are worth a lot of money, taking a few can amount to felony theft. She indicated that her family might want to collect the antlers, for the additional income, and that they have that right because they winter the elk on their property. Furthermore, she said they could patrol and prosecute people, but they have not yet done so.

One resident involved in paleontology described the national attention generated by the discovery of significant dinosaur fossils in the area. After the publicity, many people came to the area and wandered around on private lands (usually without permission) looking for fossils, which caused problems for some landowners.

Trespass violates a private landowner’s right to control access, a property right that is highly valued by ranchers. According to Meidinger (1998), “the most basic boundary right is the prohibition on trespass” (p. 93). Clearly the power to control access is very important to ranchers, and may explain the lack of agreement amongst ranchers responding to the Community Land Use Survey question about hunting access to private lands. At first glance, animosity toward trespass might imply that ranchers regard property boundaries as impermeable. However, the tradition of public access present on many ranches indicates otherwise. As seen in chapter 7, there are well-defined local customs for who can cross property boundaries under what circumstances. Members of the general public may or may not be aware of these customs and often violate them.

Newcomers and Wildlife

Differences in perceptions of property and boundaries as they relate to wildlife were most pronounced when comparing ranchers and new large landowners. Some of these differences revolved around definitions of private property for livelihood or for wildlife preservation.
According to one rancher, “the rich landowners are hell on their neighbors …especially the ones that ‘we are bear habitat,’ because you pretty much are stuck dealing with all the problems.”

Another rancher described the impacts of a nearby newcomer on an adjacent ranch, saying “just west of there a guy came in and out bid all of the local people for a ranch. And now he uses it for minimal grazing. It primarily serves as a refuge for significant elk herd that just raid everybody else’s hayfields at night.” Confirming rancher suspicions, newcomers often described their desire to increase wildlife numbers, provide habitat, and be a “refuge” for certain species.

Some ranchers argued that newcomers did not understand how their management affected neighbors. One rancher said,

I don’t think they realize… I think people like Joe Smith… I hear he’s going to… kind of a preserve or something… I think if these other people come in, I think they should think about the area which they are buying in and how it affects their neighbors. I think sometimes they’re a little too self-centered and it’s people like that that really do hurt. And if… I mean, it’s fine to like wildlife and so on but they would get plenty of wildlife without just having to say this is a preserve here. Because animals don’t stay in one place, they move.

However, some newcomers did actually realize the impact they had on their neighbors. One ranch manager discussed this in the context of wolves.

The way we feel if we could make an agreement with the animals that they would stay within our perimeter, we would just have a trillion of them there but that is not possible with our neighbors. Our neighbors are in the ranching business you know to put them into that sort of risk, I mean that is their livelihood.

Interestingly, while many newcomers found the wildlife in the area attractive, they did not always tolerate wildlife impacts. An area wildlife manager talked about problems with newcomers and wildlife.

A gentleman up along the Front that has, you know, in the last five or six years has bought a ranch and the deer are a problem in his shelterbelt now. And he has birds nesting on his new house and, you know, so what’s your point? You move to Montana and there are deer and birds here and that’s the way it is. People that move into Arrowleaf and, you know, especially winter range, because winter range is the most limiting factor for any migrating ungulate species. And people build a house in winter range and then they don’t want to have deer eating their flowers, they’re in the wrong place and for the wrong reason. And it’s tough to educate them. And then when a black bear walks through their yard or a mountain lion, then it really gets interesting. We don’t manage so much differently for those individual instances, but we have to spend more time
accommodating those questions and concerns than we did ten years ago when the people who lived here had lived here for three generations. So it eats up more time.

He is talking here about both newcomers with large properties and those with smaller ranchettes in subdivisions. According to Randy, newcomers had the attitude that “they’re your animals, you come take care of them.” In other words, when wildlife became a nuisance state wildlife managers were called on to deal with the state’s wildlife.

**Newcomers and Hunting Access**

There was a widespread belief that newcomers were not as amenable to public hunting access as neighboring ranchers. New large landowners were described as “closing off” lands to “everybody else,” “locking out” “local people,” and creating “exclusive retreats” and “a playground for rich people.” According to a wildlife biologist, “they’ve still taken something away from the community, if they don’t let the community access something it always has.”

Another resident said, “first thing they do is put up a no trespassing signs and big steel gates. And it’s very unfriendly and it is not the Montana ethic.” A regional environmentalist described the hardening of boundary lines, saying “you have people coming in like this guy that bought Fred’s place and the big house goes in and a big fence gets built and thou shall not touch your toe on my land.”

Twila, a rancher, described the change when a nearby ranch was sold to a wealthy celebrity.

Also, they immediately put up signs lock gates, put up signs, keep out. Now it’s private land, and it is some of the most, Smith bought the most beautiful part of Right Creek up there, gorgeous area. It’s gone, I mean you can’t anymore just drive up there recreationally and look at it or hike. It takes that freedom away, that’s for sure.

Note that Twila said, “now it’s private land” even though this property was owned by the same family for generations and clearly was private land, in a legal sense, prior to this transfer of ownership. However, Twila is claiming that an increased level of *privateness or privacy* accompanied the elimination of access.
Two ranchers described the level of resentment over newcomers eliminating hunting access.

JUSTIN: That's something else with a lot of local resentment, these wealthy landowners or wealthy people coming in and buying land because invariably they lock it up and a lot of this stuff historically has been some public access. So, boy, there's a lot of resentment.


JUSTIN: And, you know, private property rights, you can lock it up if you want to but I think as landowners you have a certain obligation to share a little bit. I really believe that.

IRIS: Well, and there's no sense to lock it up because people have to have permission to get on your property anyway, legally.

Enforcement of boundaries was a part of eliminating access on newcomer properties. Residents described newcomers putting up no trespassing signs, hiring security guards, and conducting boundary patrols. Many ranchers argued that newcomers had different concepts of property rights when compared with ranchers. In particular, these boundaries, at least in the context of public access, had a different meaning to newcomers, and were seen as fixed and impermeable.

Not all newcomers had eliminated hunting access, but most who I interviewed did not allow hunting. These newcomers had a variety reasons for eliminating access. They described wanting or needing privacy, wanting to increase wildlife numbers, and not approving of hunting.

New large landowners eliminating public access to private property was considered by most to be an unprecedented change. According to one retired rancher, “these other people come in and can buy these large ranches and things have all changed. Whereas you were welcome on every ranch in this part of the country, most of all Montana, I’ve never found one that wasn’t.”

However, clearly some ranchers had also eliminated public access to their property over the years. Anita, a business owner who grew up on a ranch, struggled to understand the difference.

Hunting’s the tough nut with agriculture, because there are ranchers who have traditionally always provided access to hunters, all they’ve ever requested is that you came and ask. And there are places like my family’s place up at Bynum where it has varied from being completely locked off they didn’t care if you were children of the ranches, spouses have not been able to hunt there, to allowing select hunting with permission, and I know there has been the complaint that new people have come in and shut down property. But they’re really not doing anything different than what a lot of farmers and ranchers have done around here all the time anyway. Which is shut their property down to hunters. All it takes is one bad experience with a hunter and those gates shut, the signs go up, the posts are spray painted. So I don’t know, there, like I said, some
places allowed hunting, some places didn’t. In our family that can change depending on how my grandpa felt about hunters in general that year. Or if my uncle wanted to impress somebody and bring them in and let them hunt… I guess it was probably more consistently closed than it was open. Because we have cattle around so much, but it just depended. So is there is a net loss of hunting access, I don’t know, because that changed, I mean it could change when one generation let go of the control, ownership of a property and the next generation the old guys retired and the young guys came in and they had different feelings so what was closed was opened or what was opened was closed. So I don’t know, I think that the new people who come in who are not agriculturally related to start with, they bought this chunk of property because they want their chunk of paradise or whatever…and so maybe they place a real high value on privacy. Whereas most of these ranchers are placing their value on gates, cows and hay fields. It’s not so much an invasion of privacy as it is if you shoot my cow, I can’t track you down because I don’t know who you are or where you are. I just lose a cow. If you drive through my wheat field and knock a bunch of it over, it’s a loss to me, it’s not so much an invasion of my privacy, it is a loss of my property. I think that’s a difference in mindset. The people closing who just moved here might be valuing that essence of privacy, not be so much concerned about damage to their property. I think the farmers and ranchers are thinking, cows, grain, gates…

As Anita points out, rancher concerns about hunting access revolve around property damage, which impacts livelihood. Newcomers, on the other hand, are concerned about privacy. Both groups are concerned about wildlife; newcomers sometimes see hunting as detrimental to wildlife and ranchers see hunting as necessary for wildlife management. Perhaps protecting livelihood is seen by some residents as a legitimate reason for eliminating access, whereas privacy is not.

**The Livelihood Impact: When Ranchers are Affected by Newcomer Wildlife**

The impacts of decreased hunting access on neighboring ranchers caused resentment and conflict. Because wildlife do not abide by property boundaries, newcomers who eliminate hunting access were widely believed, by ranchers, residents, and agency wildlife biologists, to affect ungulate populations in the area, which in turn impacted neighboring ranchers. One rancher described this situation.

We’ve got some ranchers in the vicinity that are close to the Front that have bought this land up and like they have a lot of elk and they’re coming onto their land. And they’re protecting them. They’re not letting anyone hunt them. Okay, now these elk…and I mean in the hundreds, now these elk don’t always stay there. The next thing, they’re on their neighbors that can’t afford to feed these 3, 4, 500 head of elk. It hurts them. This one ranch, he don’t care. He doesn’t have to make his money off the cattle, I guess, so he can sit there and have these elk…but it’s hard on the neighbors. So they have these damage...
hunts to try hunt these elk to control them a little bit. Well then the elk all run back into this protected area. Well that kind of irritates me to see that going on. And it’s not affecting me that much. I’m not that close to any of these ranches. I know ranchers that are next to them. It’s hurting them. You know, it’s pretty irritating. And of course they’re knocking the fences down pretty bad when they go through. I think it’s frustrating for the Fish & Game also because they’re trying to control these elk and keep their numbers at what they want and here’s a rancher in the middle of it, that’s really throwing a wrench in the works of it because he’s got a lot of money and he can do it. But he’s got the right to do that. I’m not going to say he can’t. It just irritates me. And I’d be the last one to say he should stop doing it. He’s got every right to do it. I think if you own the land you are the one in control of it and you can do what you want.

While this rancher respected the newcomer’s property right to control access, he recognized the ways in which newcomer land management is affecting elk movements and impacting the livelihood of neighboring ranches. Many ranchers expressed similar concerns, suggesting that newcomers did not have to make a living from their ranches and wanted to increase wildlife numbers, and therefore did not understand the economic impacts they were having on ranchers.

One rancher put it simply, saying

If a group of people decide that they’re going to close off the Front to hunting effectively by not letting anybody hunt on their land and those populations get way up high, which means that instead of having 800 head of mule deer winter on us we have 2,000 head winter on us and then can’t sustain our cattle the next year.

An agency wildlife biologist described how the impact of deer and elk are compounded by drought conditions and resulting high prices for hay.

Deer and elk and haystacks, I can think of a couple people this year that have never complained about deer and elk damage. And they’re old school folks, they’ve always just assumed that was part of life here and they have to eat too. But with the bad drought, we’re in our third year for bad drought, the forage hasn’t grown and then it hasn’t come back and now they’re having to buy hay out of country, Canada, mostly, and so now they’re not so inclined to accommodate those big game animals in their haystacks. Completely understandable, but if the source of those big game animals is a neighboring ranch that doesn’t allow hunting or any management practices, it makes it a lot tougher to deal with.

Other wildlife biologists described how newcomer land management affected ungulate movement, confirming what ranchers have observed. According to one Forest Service biologist, One of the things people have expressed a lot of concern to us about is that that will increase competition for elk hunting in that area .... And one of the big ranches down there does not allow hunting access anymore. And so the elk seem to have learned that that’s kind of a refuge. You know, when the hunting pressure gets bad, let’s go to the FR

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ranch and stay there and not come back. Whereas, if there were hunting occurring on that ranch, that might create some more back and forth movement. ...So, one of the things we have to consider in making this decision is the fact that there is no hunting on the FR, that that does affect animal movement patterns and that affects the recreational opportunity that we’re mandated to provide.

Another wildlife biologist discussed her concerns about overpopulations of elk due to newcomers eliminating hunting access.

But one of the things that we see happening is with these ranches the newcomers come in and they buy this ranch and the next thing you know the elk herd builds and builds and builds and then it is spilling over onto the neighbors and the neighbors are outraged and you can’t control the elk herd because there is a refuge there where some guy won’t allow any hunting. And we run into this all the time and you might say ‘oh well having too many elk, what kind of a problem is that?’ But I can go to Yellowstone Park and there are too many elk in Yellowstone Park and there is hardly any deer and big horned sheep are going down hill and so having too many of any one creature is not a good thing. And it is an imbalance of sorts and right now the Front has a really good balance of wildlife.

Both ranchers and wildlife biologists agreed that newcomer landowners did not understand wildlife population dynamics, the role of hunting, or the impacts of their management decisions on neighboring ranchers.

**Recapping the Wildlife Boundary Issue**

The conflict over newcomers and hunting access to private property was described as “ferocious” and characterized by “huge clashes.” This conflict extended on two fronts. One, hunters and some residents resented decreases in public access to hunting opportunities on private lands, challenging the “privateness” of these lands and blurring the categories of public and private. Many people saw private property boundaries as permeable and contingent with regard to public access for hunting. Two, neighboring ranchers supported the rights of new owners to limit access, but resented increasing wildlife populations that impacted their livelihood by grazing on hay meadows and hay stacks. Newcomers and ranchers had somewhat different reasons for limiting public access to their properties. Ranchers were concerned about livelihood issues; newcomers were concerned about privacy and increasing wildlife populations. In many senses,
newcomer boundaries were tighter and less permeable, making them a more “private” version of private property.

Ranchers and newcomers also had different conceptions of the public interest in their private properties. Newcomers felt a moral obligation to keep properties “whole” and protect wildlife for a larger, undefined public. Ranchers felt a moral obligation to share private lands with local publics through hunting access. Both saw a public good on private land, but defined the public good differently and the public at a different scale.

**Weeds, Boundaries, and Newcomers**

The issue of weeds also provides a window into how private landowners consider cross-boundary ecological issues. Again, we see that newcomers have changed the dynamic of neighbor relations with regard to cross-boundary issues. And, like the wildlife issue, tensions revolve around different ideas about naturalness and different livelihood needs.

Weeds, like wildlife, do not abide by property boundaries. They migrate down creeks, through the dung of animals (both wild and domestic), on vehicles, and across fencelines. Weeds that are problematic in the study site include knapweed, leafy spurge, and yellow star thistle. While I focus here on weeds and private land boundaries, public agencies were often accused by ranchers as key culprits in the spread of weeds.

There was widespread concern amongst ranchers about the ecological and economic consequences of noxious weeds. Ranchers described weeds as “worrying” and “disturbing” them. Many different groups in the area have made weeds a focus. For example, one of the top priorities for the Sun and Teton River Watershed Groups is weeds. The Nature Conservancy views weeds as one of the key threats to the biological integrity of the area. The Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee has recently initiated several weed management projects. A Weed Roundtable formed in 2002 to provide a forum for private landowners, county staff, and federal and state agency personnel to collaborate on weed control. There is an annual Weed Wacker
Rodeo. And, more recently, a Community Weed Day was developed in the Teton area and Teton County established a bounty on knapweed.

One rancher described herself as “obsessed” with knapweed. She sprayed so much tordon that her doctor had to forbid her to ever spray again, it was affecting her health so much.

While each landowner is responsible for weeds on their particular property, no one landowner can eliminate the weed problem without adjacent owners attending to the problem as well. One rancher explained how neighboring properties affect one another with regard to weeds. She said, “if they don’t, or if we don’t and you adjoin them, one is going to affect the other. You can reap the benefits or you can reap the fact that they haven’t tried to do anything about it.” Another rancher described the problem with neighbors not controlling weeds.

We have one neighbor up here that has leafy spurge. In fact, if you’re ever over in this area in the summer you ought to go by, because you’ll never see anything like it. Oh, it’s just sickening, it’s just all yellow, the whole fields. And he’s got it in his head that he’s going to control that with the bug. Well, you’re not going to control that much with a bug...I’ve watched the neighbors that are right next to him. And they have to work like a son of a gun to keep their fields clean.

Ranchers described weed problems on fencelines, neighbors who did not manage weeds, recreationists who spread weeds up county roads, and pastures taken over by leafy spurge. While many different kinds of public and private land managers were blamed for the spread of noxious weeds, newcomers were singled out as particularly problematic. Small subdivisions and large holdings were cited as sources of weeds and areas where owners were not taking care of the weed problem. Again, I focus on the new large landowners here.

Newcomers were widely regarded as not properly managing weeds. According to one rancher,

The other problem is maybe they’re not so smart on their weeds. They don’t take care of anything. Unless everybody deals with the weed problem, you’re up the creek. It’s not just one person’s problem. It’s everybody’s problem, especially here, especially in this part of the country.

This rancher realized that without newcomer participation, landowners in the area would not be able to successfully control weeds. Another rancher suggested that newcomers were not as aware
of the weed problem. He said, “you see people come in who are not aware of...they don’t understand weeds, for instance, and so they’re not combating weeds at a level they need to be.”

Many ranchers connected ignorance about weeds to the fact that many newcomer landowners were absentee and were not making a living from the property. According to one rancher,

I would say the average person in Augusta, if they don’t own land that they’re trying to agriculturally make a living from, aren’t as aware. And that’s true of our friends that are absentee landowners that just come and they take a picture of the ranch and hang it down wherever their Jackson Hole home or Maine home or wherever they are. And this is our ranch. I don’t think they worry about weeds.

One rancher explained the different kind of knowledge ranchers have because they make a living from the land.

When you’re raised around one of these ranches, you kind of know what, what the place will do, you know how many cows you can run in a field or, you know when the grass gets to a certain point you’d better move them out or you’re going to lose the grass. You know the spots where the weeds are growing and what it takes to take care of them, and just different things like that that you, you’re really part of the land. And somebody comes in and, and they could learn it if they want to, if they have to, but if they don’t have to make a living on it, if a chunk of ground gets covered with noxious weeds or whatever else, it’s no big thing to them, if it gets bad enough they can hire somebody to take care of it, which usually doesn’t work. You just, to make these things work you have to, you have to understand them and you have to be there and you have to take a real interest in it, and it’s more than...you can’t do it a month out of the year and make it work.

This rancher linked making a living from the land with knowledge of natural resource management and an understanding of the changes of a particular property. He suggested that people can learn this, but that since livelihood is not a motivating factor, newcomers are unlikely to embark on this journey.

Other ranchers believed that newcomers did not want to spray chemicals because they were “environmentalists.” A rancher described one of her neighbors, saying “we have one neighbor up this other way that’s a do-gooder environmentalist and doesn’t, or at least one year, two years, he didn’t believe in spray or controlling. And then this last summer I saw that he did a little spraying, so I don’t know what he’s going to do.”

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During interviews with newcomers I found a variety of perspectives on chemicals. While newcomers were averse to use of chemicals (as were most ranchers), most acknowledged the need to spray. They also described pulling weeds and releasing biological controls, just as their neighboring ranchers did. One ranch manager explained his efforts.

We do an awful lot of knapweed control, my pet peeve is thistle. And so I try to control that the downside to that is we are doing a lot of repair in a couple of, in construction projects up there where the very nature of digging into the ground for some reason it is like loosing socks in a dryer, thistle shows up. But we do control it ...we don’t let anybody drive other than on trails. As far as taking off across the hill or the prairie it doesn’t happen anymore. And I am a firm believer that that helps alleviate weed problems.

However, a few newcomers were very much opposed to the use of chemicals and, in some cases, preferred weed infestation to spraying. They did not see weeds as particularly problematic and did not understand why other landowners were concerned. Even a few such landowners can cause tremendous weed problems for neighbors.

Interestingly, many newcomers told stories about neighboring ranchers teaching them about weeds. These ranchers would come over and show the newcomers which plants were weeds and explain why they were a problem. A newcomers talked about working on weed control with a neighboring rancher, saying “I spent a lot of time last summer hand pulling, with him on his ATV, our ATV, we finally ended up buying one, he showed me, he’s absolutely vigilant about getting out that knapweed and there is some leafy spurge he showed me too.”

Education about weeds came from the ranching community to a much greater extent than from county officials or environmentalists.

Both ranchers and newcomers also described ranchers spraying patches of weeds on newcomer property, often unbeknownst to the landowners. A rancher described sneaking onto a neighbors property at night to take care of a patch of weeds near a fenceline. She said

My husband’s on the Conservation District, and we do spray. We’ve had one of our neighbors, we’ve had to go and do a night spray ... because they didn’t spray and leafy spurge and knapweed started taking over... Yeah, and then we finally talked to them, about a year later confessed, and they had an idea, because they were just getting behind. They tend, and this tends to be one of the families that has come in with a lot of money
and they have a manager there. They're not managing their weeds as well, and we have grave concerns about this because we pull by hand our knapweed.

A ranch manager explained how his neighbor sprayed a patch along the road.

A little spot on our property that myself and one of my neighbors drive by almost everyday of our lives particularly in the summer and there was a patch of knapweed there that for some reason I just didn't see it. I mean it was like my little world and didn't see this little twenty by twenty area of knapweed. Until my neighbor stopped one day and sprayed it. And when it started dying I go who sprayed that cause I mean you can tell sprayed weeds in a heartbeat and I went Jack what is up with that? And he says well I was just going by and saw you hadn't got to that little patch yet so I stopped and sprayed it. And I go you know that's all right. And I have done the same thing for him but I mean you know he is so dam busy and they have got, you know they have got three times as much property as I do, or run and basically we all do it individually up there.

These “trespasses” were justified by ranchers because of the tremendous impact of noxious weeds. The ranchers argued that, in the absence of action, the weeds would spread and eventually affect their property.

The weed issue provides a particularly interesting example of the intersection of livelihood and ecological values. Noxious weeds can displace native plants and often do not provide forage or habitat for native wildlife. At the same time, weeds are not palatable to cattle and thus reduce range capacity for livestock production. Controlling weeds, then, is a livelihood and ecological imperative.

Weeds, like wildlife, cross boundaries, and no single landowner can control weeds in a watershed or larger landscape. However, unlike wildlife, weeds are not owned and managed by the state; they are the domain of each landowner. Weeds are an incredible burden and responsibility for landowners, but the jurisdictional freedom provide opportunities for creativity. In the next chapter, I explore some of the creative approaches to weed management across boundaries landowners are taking.

Again, the weed issue shows how social differences are inseparable from land management practices. Newcomers are sometimes unaware or unconcerned about weeds, partly because they are not directly affected by changes in vegetation. Differences in newcomer values and financial resources manifest in different land management strategies which, in the case of
weeds, affect neighbors and the landscape as a whole. In other words, social differences are
made physical and cross boundaries on the ground.

Weeds, while not necessarily a public good, have a public interest component.
Preserving native grasslands is a public good. The public does not benefit as directly from proper
weed management as they do from hunting access. However, in a larger sense, protecting native
biodiversity is a public good on private lands.

Conclusion

Rather than dismiss boundaries as the enemy of landscape conservation, the meaning of
and practices around boundaries need to be better understood. It is unclear what the elimination
of boundaries would look like, who it would serve, and how governance in the area would
change. It is also unlikely that property boundaries could be eliminated without a radical
transformation in the way we think about and legally define property. Furthermore, it has not
been demonstrated that elimination of boundaries is necessary for ecosystem management.
Elimination of boundaries in the current political and legal context would likely further
concentrate power over and responsibility for conservation efforts in the realm of the state,
increasingly marginalizing the role of ranchers in these efforts. Depending on where people
situate motivations for conservation, this type of shift might be desirable or problematic.

Boundaries appear to limit ecosystem and landscape-level conservation efforts.
However, given that boundaries are socially constructed and largely governed by social norms
and cultural practices, it is the meaning rather than the presence of these boundaries that affect
landscape-level efforts. Different meanings result in both tensions around boundaries and
opportunities for cross-boundary cooperation.

There are numerous ways that practices around boundaries affect rancher livelihood,
readily recognized and acknowledged by ranchers themselves. Weed management, hunting
access, water usage, fencing and trailing customs, and habitat management are only a few. Like
biologists, ranchers see the myriad of ways ecosystem processes and natural resource issues cross property boundaries. However, these boundary “trespasses” are seen by ranchers, in part, in the context of livelihood.

The private-private boundaries between newcomer landowners and ranchers are important in that they illuminate social change and significant tensions in the study site; they demonstrate the transformation that resident communities are beginning to face. Understanding the details of the social change provides an understanding of how practices around boundaries are in flux.

In short, different groups of people conceptualize property rights and property boundaries in different ways. Newcomers define private property rights, in part, as rights to privacy, limiting the permeability of property boundaries. Ranchers define private property rights, in part, as rights to livelihood, with the permeability of property boundaries defined accordingly. Newcomers differ from ranchers in numerous ways, in particular with regard to class and livelihood. Newcomers are private landowners, but they do not fit the rancher’s model of livelihood requiring conservation.

Furthermore, there are important differences in the ways different landowners conceptualize the public interest in their private property. Both ranchers and newcomers conceive of public goods on their private lands, but conceptualize “public” in different ways. Many ranchers argue they have obligations to “share” private property with local residents and people in the larger region by providing opportunities for hunting on their lands. Hunters likewise argue a right to public access, thereby claiming a public good on private property. By contrast, newcomers envision themselves to have a moral obligation to keep their land “whole” and protect wildlife. This moral obligation is felt toward humans in general, or even nature. As described in earlier chapters, newcomers and some environmentalists viewed newcomer ownership as a way to “save” the area from overgrazing and subdivision. Both ranchers and newcomers acknowledge and act on behalf of the public interest, but their “publics” occur at very
different scales. Ranchers feel obligated to a largely local public, whereas newcomers are obligated to a more global public.

In Chapter 6, I described the ways that ranchers saw neighbor relationships as key to management of boundary issues. They argued that newcomers’ lack of integration into local communities meant problems around boundaries. Class differences further divided newcomers from ranchers. Ranchers also envisioned their private property as part of a community, connected to neighbors in a way that implied certain obligations. These obligations, or social relationships, were maintained in part through the permeability of property boundaries. Permeability was determined based in large part on what facilitates and constrains livelihood, and encoded in local custom and culture. Neighborly behavior, then, has community, ecological and livelihood components. Newcomers were often unaware of these norms and did not recognize the animosity that different boundary practices caused.

In short, physical trespass, while important to ranchers, is only the most obvious of boundary violations. The figurative “wall” erected by many newcomers is also seen as a violation, because it breaks with the historic permeability that ranchers have employed based on social relationships and livelihood. As different landowners move into landscapes like the Rocky Mountain Front, boundary practices will increasingly be challenged and renegotiated, providing potential opportunities for cross-boundary conservation.

Whether or not newcomers will integrate into local communities over time remains to be seen. In an attempt to ease tensions between newcomers and ranchers, Nature Conservancy staff have been engaged in a “matchmaking” effort. They are introducing ranchers and wealthy newcomer landowners in an effort to educate newcomers on local social norms and integrate them into local communities more quickly. One Nature Conservancy staffperson described this effort.

We’ve found it’s been very effective to try to get to know those folks and help educate them to what’s going on in the neighborhood and a lot of them are very open because they want to be part of the community but they’re not there year round and they don’t
know how to be in the community and so sometimes we can be sort of a networker where we're short-cutting that whole process which may take years if it's not done. So I guess I see my role sometimes as being a matchmaker.

The Nature Conservancy hopes to improve relations around boundaries and provide opportunities for ranchers to access to grass on newcomer property. In exchange, ranchers can offer management services to owners who might be gone most of the year.

Newcomers who were in close contact with neighbors were more aware of local social norms and boundary issues. However, class differences remain and this power differential will not be equalized by any amount of social contact. Large landholdings in combination with financial resources insulated from local conditions means that newcomer livelihood is not at all tied to local communities. Furthermore, newcomers' need for privacy may prove to be a significant barrier to collaboration across boundaries. In many senses they view their property as more "private" than existing private landowners.

The relationship between conservation and livelihood is central to conservation efforts that cross public and private land boundaries. To the extent that public land managers, environmentalists, and policy makers view conservation and livelihood in opposition, this is yet another boundary that must be bridged for successful landscape-level conservation. In the following chapter I explore efforts at conservation across boundaries, conservation that incorporates livelihood as a key component. I examine how these efforts build on, yet challenge, existing boundary customs and institutions, and how they reconceptualize the notion of public goods.
Chapter 10:
Grassbanks and Weed Work as Cross-Boundary Practices

Introduction

As described in the last chapter, there are a variety of conflicts around property boundaries in the study site. Certain local customs and boundary practices provide some effective avenues for landowners to address tensions around boundaries, such as access issues. At the same time, some boundary problems are exacerbated by changing land ownership. Different ideas about property, privacy, and the public interest influence the permeability of different landowners' boundaries.

While I have explored different ideas about property, and some of the neighborly customs and local boundary practices that exist in the study site, I have not yet examined any cross-boundary initiatives, meaningful efforts to address natural resource issues with multiple landowners. I have made the case throughout this dissertation that ecosystem management, or any type of landscape-level conservation, requires working across boundaries with multiple properties and property owners. In short, cross-boundary conservation requires coordination or collaboration among decision-makers and landowners.

In this chapter, I examine different people's ideas about collaboration and look at actual projects that bring different people together to work across boundaries. First, I explore Forest Service perspectives on and efforts in ecosystem management and collaboration. Then, I describe resident, in particular rancher, views on collaboration in general. These sections are followed by a detailed examination of the efforts of the Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee, including their weed work and the proposed grassbank project.

While not necessarily a collaborative, the Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee provides an interesting case study through which to examine the opportunities for cross-boundary initiatives. This group is landowner-driven and focused largely on private lands. While still in
the formative stages, its work reconceptualizes property and boundaries, both capitalizes on and challenges newcomer change, and redefines public interest, in part, in terms of local landscape and community. In many ways Advisory Committee work supports and builds on existing rancher discourse about private property rights, government regulation, and livelihood. At the same time, both the grassbank and weed work redraw property boundaries and create new property institutions, develop practical and effective linkages between livelihood and conservation, and redefine the public interest on private ranchlands. Whether or not Advisory Committee work represents and fits into a new discourse, a new set of ideas and practices emerging across the West, remains to be seen.

Agency Perspectives on Collaboration and Ecosystem Management

There is increasing momentum amongst federal land management agencies to consider landscape-level management approaches, whether under the banner of ecosystem management or some other label. Ecosystem health is touted as a priority. Scientific assessments are being organized and attempted at the landscape and watershed scales. These landscape-level assessments are described as fundamental to planning efforts.

Forest Service staff interviewed for this project agreed that private lands were essential to these landscape-level efforts. I interviewed line-officers, biologists, ecosystem management staff, and others at the Washington, D.C. office, the Forest level, and the District level. Officials and staff at the national level argued that addressing natural resource issues generally required working with private landowners.

Well, I think the important thing is as we look at issues like water quality and endangered species, forest health, dealing with noxious weeds, we're not going to resolve our problems and challenges on the back of the fed... It's going to take more than federal land.

LAURIE: Do you see the Forest Service increasingly collaborating or working with other landowners, either private landowners or state agencies?
CHARLES: Yes.
LAURIE: How will that take place?
CHARLES: It has to take place. Yes, it should. It has too. We can't sort of manage these lands in isolation of other landscapes or communities. It's attractive or it's too easy sort of sit back and say, "Well, you know, we'll do our thing, they'll do theirs. It's a lot easier for everybody involved and we don't have to get into this pesky collaboration." But the fact is that if we don't build a support for protecting places like the Front in these outlying communities that are all on this map, then the long-term prospects for conservation are just greatly diminished. If you don't build, through the hard work of collaboration and bringing diverse groups of people together to come up with a common vision, if you don't do that hard work, it's much less likely that you'll be able to build ownership and sort of buy-in to the long-term conservation of an area, whether that's conservation through some limited use or conservation through no use or whatever, but just from the, sort of, sociological point of view that if people don't work together, you get less done.

It is important to note that Charles argued that the purpose of collaboration is building support among private landowners and rural communities for “conservation” and “protecting places.” He also suggested that more could be accomplished if different kinds of people worked together.

At the local level, Forest Service staff agreed, arguing that their goals demanded a landscape scale, including private lands.

If we're going to do vegetative management, let's do it on a scale that it's going to have some influence on the landscape and on the wildlife that use it...We take a look at prescribed fire and we try to make decisions that consider areas that we have no influence on and only try to treat that small area, it's going to be insignificant. We need to work with other outfits, whether they're private landowners or organizations.

Certain management objectives, such as the restoration of fire, required larger scales that reach beyond Forest Service lands. Forest Service staff were also interested in private lands management more generally.

I think that the Forest Service, if it isn't already, which I think it is, should be involved in interaction with those ranchers and discussions about their management practices and interaction about how what's going on in one affects the other...I'd like to see us work with the other land owner entities to achieve some broader scale objectives of maintaining whole chunks of ecosystem and landscape. I'd like to see us potentially do more in interacting with private landowners to maintain some of those goals and objectives.

This biologist felt that working with private landowners was a good idea, but was unsure if this work was already occurring. Another Forest Service staffperson suggested that conservation depended more on private lands than federal land management.
Laurie: What would successful ecosystem management here look like?

Don: I guess it would be like what I told you what the district's all about when I first described it - the large open landscape with grizzlies still roaming around and in existence with humans. And I think the biggest factor that really influences what's going to happen is going to be whether or not there's development on the Front, on the private land, whether or not there's going to be 10 more David Lettermans buying 2,000 acres or whether or not there's going to be a large expansion in the Arrowleaf area [a rural subdivision] or whether or not there's going to be any type of substantial development along the whole Front that would cause more conflicts to exist between bears and humans. The bears are just an example, I mean elk, whatever.

For Don, grizzly bears are an overall indication of ecosystem health. In particular, the ability of grizzly bears to inhabit and migrate through private lands was important to Don. Forest Service staff at the national and local levels agreed that they needed to work with private landowners in some capacity to preserve overall ecosystem health.

Environmentalists working in the study site also argued that Forest Service staff needed to consider private lands.

I'd like to see is a recognition not only by the Forest Service but by a lot of other people that when you're talking about the ecosystem, you're not just talking about federal lands, that what they do on federal lands impacts private lands and this can cut both ways. But from a biological standpoint, I think the days of them looking at their boundaries and just saying this is where the decision-making ends are over. I think they started down that whole road of ecosystem management and I think they're more receptive now to learning about outside influences and taking into consideration other people's opinions. But I'm going to turn the question around and say that I think that that happens with most conservation organizations too. That they tend to be focused solely on government lands and not on private lands and they don't realize the role that private lands in front of those federal lands play. You're talking about mule deer and elk, well they may summer in the Bob, but they've got to winter somewhere and the same goes for grizzly bears.

Notice that this environmentalist also criticized environmental groups for not recognizing the important of private lands and not working with private landowners.

Overall, I found a lot of agreement amongst environmentalists and agency staff about the important role of private lands in ecosystem management and landscape conservation. Forest Service staff also had surprisingly similar ideas about what ecosystem management and collaboration with private landowners might look like.
Ecosystem Management as Information Exchange

Some Forest Service staff admitted that they were unsure what ecosystem management meant. One biologist said, “I’m not intimately familiar with that whole big buzz word thing that came out a few years ago, what exactly it was supposed to mean on the ground. I’m not sure what exactly that was supposed to mean.” Despite some uncertainty about ecosystem management, the Forest Service staff who I interviewed viewed ecosystem management and cooperation with different groups, including private landowners, as being based on information exchange. There was a marked similarity in the ways these individuals envisioned working with private landowners.

One local agency biologist who was very much in favor of working with private landowners and talked extensively about the ecological connections between public and private lands described the desirability of “information exchange.”

If there isn’t already some sort of a cooperative group, I’d like to see that develop because I think that there are some real key things that need constant attention and discussion. For example, if elk move out of national forest land, there’s certain things that we do management wise that affect those numbers and that movement. And then say they winter on one of the Wildlife Management Areas that’s owned by the state and so what they do management wise affects what comes back on us and the hunters that are on the Forest, or whatever, in addition to affecting the private landowners around them. So I think there’s a real need that may be being addressed to some extent, I don’t know, at very minimum, have a lot of information exchange amongst those different landowners because when issues do come up, then we’re not faced with one entity doing something that’s going to affect the other entity without the other entity at least sort of knowing about it until after the fact.

She regarded information exchange as a minimum, and specifically cited the importance of knowing what other land managers were planning before making decisions. She later said, “obviously, there needs to be more involvement of all those parties in information exchange and then, hopefully, to some extent, in management decisions as well.” She moves toward some kind of collaborative decision-making at the end of this quote, but does not elaborate on what that might look like. Another local agency staffperson described how the Forest Service coordinates with other state and federal agencies, saying “between the wildlife management areas that the
state has and the BLM and the Forest Service, there’s a lot of coordination that goes on. We’re made aware of certain activities that are taking place and share information.”

At the national level, Forest Service staff working on ecosystem management focused on creating and managing data sources. Ecosystem management staff argued “sophisticated technology to manage information,” such as GIS, was the underlying factor spurring efforts at landscape-level work. Another D.C.-based staffperson described the role of the Forest Service in landscape-level efforts, saying

Our role ought to be providing information, science, and analysis to local community leaders and trying to encourage these sort of diverse groups of stakeholders to look at the issues that we’re dealing with and help us to manage our lands in a way that protects the incredible resources there, but also helps to protect the communities.

He described the Forest Service role as “providing information, science, and analysis” to collaborative efforts, not necessarily participating in them. A high level Forest Service official talked about how the agency might work with private landowners in the context of landscape management.

Ultimately the move for good solid landscape management where we can provide technical information to private landowners because reducing erosion is as important on private land as it is on public land. And I think that all of the resource management agencies, state, federal, and county, local, really have a common goal, and, in fact, almost a moral responsibility to make their expertise available to anybody that wants it.

Again, the focus is on information, in particular “technical information” and “expertise.” Note that information sharing in these cases is primarily the agency sharing information with local communities and private landowners, not necessarily a two-way exchange of information. This D.C.-based agency staffperson also focused on information sharing.

LAURIE: In terms of ecosystem management, how is the Forest Service currently working with other landowners, private property owners or other state or federal agencies, in order to address cross-boundary issues?

RICH: For most non-governmental organizations, large ones, Ducks Unlimited, Rocky Mountain Elk, we have various MOUs [Memorandum of Understanding] to share data. Nature Conservancy, we share a lot of data with and in some cases, states, state forestry organizations, so there’s a formal, national look at that to encourage it and support it. And then at the regional level you see combinations of regional foresters dealing with governors and governors’ staffs, state DNRs [Departments of Natural Resources], those kinds of things. They form their collaboration information sharing and then usually at the...
forest district level you see the local collaboration of individual, garden clubs, interest groups, local chapters, Sierra Club, Audubon, Wilderness Society. So, what we've seen over the last, probably fifteen or twenty years, for those people who've decided not to negotiate in court, an expanded collaboration over data sharing and input at multiple levels, on projects of interest.

The sole focus here is on how different groups collaborate to "share data" and private landowners are not mentioned at all.

Overall, Forest Service staff and decision-makers tended to define ecosystem management and collaboration with other landowners, whether public or private, in terms of information exchange. This information exchange took on a number of forms, outlined briefly in the typology in Table 10-1.

Table 10-1: Levels of Information Exchange

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Information is Shared but May Not Affect Decisions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level I</td>
<td>Information is Shared but May Not Affect Decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency experts provide landowners and communities with science and technical information (one-way “exchange”)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Example: Forest Service informs Augusta and adjacent ranches of proposed prescribed burn in Scapegoat and scientific reasons for this burn</td>
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<tr>
<td>Two or more entities inform one another about management plans or proposed actions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Example: Forest Service and Montana state grizzly biologist discuss bear populations and Forest Service plans for habitat improvements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Two or more entities (usually both public agencies) hold a public education event on a particular issue</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Example: Weed Whacker Rodeo public education event</td>
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</table>

| Level II | Information is Shared and Informs Management Decisions |
| Agency or other entity made land management decision in the context of adjacent landowner’s management practices and/or plans |
| Example: Nature Conservancy decides to graze cattle in a different manner than neighbors to increase diversity of management practices |
Agency or other entity made land management decision in the context of data on particular species or natural resource issue in entire area

Example: Information about grizzly populations affect Forest Service habitat treatment plans

Example: Nature Conservancy prioritizes prescribed fire because of landscape-level limber pine and juniper encroachment on grasslands

While certainly an important component of landscape-level conservation, this sort of information sharing falls far short of actual collaboration. First of all, even the federal and state agencies in the study site were often uninformed of each other's plans, sometimes finding out through newspaper coverage that adjacent landowners planned courses of action very different from one another. Secondly, most of the information exchange examples were one-sided, expert driven, "educational" events or efforts. In other words, the Forest Service defined itself as the keeper of knowledge, valuing science and technical expertise, and therefore defined its role as the distributors of such information. Agency staff interviewed did not discuss the role or value of local knowledge or expertise, and did not indicate that plans would be modified through learning from local residents. There was very little, if any, focus on exchange, mutual learning, and building common ground through dialogue. In short, meaningful collaboration was not described. (It is important to note that other Forest Service employees have different perspectives. While the agency staff interviewed for this project were very similar in their viewpoints, other Forest Service employees have expressed explicit support for collaborative ideals.)

During one interview, ranchers told me how impressed they were when a county extension agent asked them to tell each other about their weed management approaches during a mandatory training session. Any explicit valuing of local knowledge was perceived as a substantial shift in the approach of government agencies in the area.
Actual decision-making was rarely conducted in a coordinated or collaborative manner, where different entities worked together on management plans. In fact, some Forest Service staff were resistant to sharing power over decision-making. Forest Service staff members claimed they wanted increased collaboration and public involvement. However, when pressed about the power of such collaborative efforts, some individuals argued that the experts should make management decisions. I asked one local decision-maker about a ranchers’ proposal that a local advisory council be involved in management and personnel decisions. He responded:

I would fire back to him “Would he like an advisory council for his ranch?” I don’t feel good about that. I guess there’s certain complexities about what type of congressional acts we have to maintain compliance with. There’s things about personnel actions that there’s no way they could possibly ever know enough about to be involved with, in a relationship type, ongoing. So I’m not saying that they’re dumb or anything. I’m just saying that unless you’re in the office having to work with people, you won’t know enough about what’s going on to make those type of decisions. The last thing I would want is a board overseeing that. I’d rather be responsible for that myself. I’m willing to share everything possible, but when it comes down to decision time, I guess it’s the ranger’s deal. I don’t know. I’ve heard about advisory groups with the BLM. I see more animosity and more stalemate than anything. That’s what I hear. I think we make just as much progress. Obviously, he’s not going to - an individual wouldn’t like all the decisions we make and that would be his route to help stop those. We would just become polarized, I think. That’s basically it. People would have enough power to polarize into doing nothing, and we’d sit around doing nothing. I’d rather be doing something, even if it’s pissing off people.

According to this Forest Service employee, decisions should remain clearly within the scope of current decision-making process. He supported this argument by claiming that decision-makers have specialized knowledge of policies and procedures. He saw a potential Forest Service advisory council as polarizing and divisive, increasing animosity, as opposed to improving management. Don also opposed the suggestion that an advisory committee be involved in personnel decisions.

**Explaining the Forest Service Perspective**

Forest Service staff clearly saw private lands as an important part of landscape conservation. They recognized the need for the agency to work with private landowners.
However, they neither fully practiced nor were entirely receptive to collaboration. Perhaps they feared that, in an atmosphere of anti-government sentiment and private property rights fervor, any meaningful attempt to work with private landowners would be perceived as a government land grab, an effort to control private property. While interviewees did not discuss this possibility, interview data from ranchers and residents indicate a high level of suspicion of government activities and a certain vigilance regarding private property rights.

The Forest Service response to collaboration raises some important questions. Should we assume that collaboration is necessary for effective cross-boundary conservation? Are there other ways for different land managers and landowners to cooperate across boundaries?

**Resident Perspectives on Collaboration**

While most residents and ranchers interviewed did not have first hand experience with collaboration and were not familiar with the concept of ecosystem management, I did ask both interviewees and survey respondents if they wanted to see different kinds of people working together. In the Community Land Use Survey, respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statement:

*Teton County needs more cooperation between private landowners and public land management agencies.*

In response to this statement, 64% of respondents agreed to some extent, 26% strongly agreed, and 12% said they did not know. While 64% may seem like a relatively high agreement, consider the seemingly innocuous wording of the question. Some of the people involved in developing the survey originally wondered who could possibly disagree with this statement. In response to the same statement above, 22% of respondents disagreed to some extent. While responses to this broad statement about cooperation indicate substantial support for collaboration between different groups of people, interview data provides more detailed perspectives on such efforts.
I asked the people I interviewed if there were collaborative efforts in the area, efforts where different kinds of people, ranchers, environmentalists, agencies, were working together. Interestingly, many people answered “I don’t know.” In other cases people cited groups and organizations that seemed to represent single rather than multiple interests, such as the Montana Stockgrowers, the Montanans for Private Property Rights, the Farm Bureau, or a local environmental education consortium. Ranchers also cited loosely organized political movements, such as the fight against grizzly bears. For many ranchers, several landowners working together toward a particular goal was a collaboration, despite the way I phrased the question to include different kinds of people. Some agency staff cited the Weed Whacker Rodeo, an annual weed education event cosponsored by federal, state, and local agencies and environmental groups. A few people cited the Teton and Sun River Watershed groups as collaborative efforts in the area. Only participants or close relatives of participants mentioned the Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee as an example. (These groups and efforts are described in detail later in this chapter.)

When asked what issues might be ripe for collaborative efforts a lot of people also answered “I don’t know.” For example, this rancher supports working together but did not identify particular issues to work on.

Laurie: Are there particular issues that you’d like to see people working together on?
Betty: Oh dear, I don’t know, I can’t name one off the top of my head. But I think working together would help a whole pile of things.

For those who did cite specific issues, weeds and water were frequent responses. People also discussed hunting access, land use, outfitting, federal grazing lease management, grizzlies, elk, and economic development as issues ripe for collaboration. A brief history of collaborative efforts in the study site provides a context for understanding responses to these questions.

The Frontlanders

In the early-1990s, a group of environmentalists and agency staff (primarily Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks staff) attempted to establish a collaborative effort focused on private
lands in the study site. They formed a group called The Frontlanders. The mission statement for
the group follows.

In the shadow of the Rocky Mountain Front, the Frontlanders promote a united,
concerted, continuing effort for planning and sustainable use of area resources, with
sensitivity toward historic values, with respect for property and personal rights, traditions,
and lifestyles, and with balance in the use of this 'LAST BEST PLACE.' (Frontlanders
Document)

The group's literature also stated "If you believe that development and beauty can co-exist, if you
wish to include your voice with others, then welcome to the Frontlanders." (Frontlanders
Document)

The Frontlanders was a short-lived effort that resulted in increased conflict and
polarization in local communities. The intention was to bring people together to focus on the
common ground of love for place. The initiators, primarily Nature Conservancy and Montana
Fish, Wildlife, and Parks staff, intended to provide private landowners with resources and options
for stewardship and conservation with a focus on limiting subdivision. In particular, they wanted
to increase awareness about conservation easements. However, despite the presence of a
professional facilitator, meetings soon deteriorated into screaming matches. Certain community
leaders are said to have broken down in tears. Personal attacks were leveled.

According to one rancher who is a strong proponent of collaboration and who
participated in the Frontlanders effort, "it was too scary, too controversial. It was Fish and Game,
farmers, ranchers, your basic cowboys and hippies group but it just...it never went anywhere." A
business owner who grew up on a ranch described why the group was not successful.

It crashed on rocky shoals. But it was the infant stages of something that could have been
coalition work. ...I was a proponent of the Frontlanders. I thought that it made a lot of
sense to get people together talking. But it foundered because there were people, at least
in the ag part of it, who didn't want to be in the same room as people from the
conservation organizations or even maybe from the Forest Service. And with that kind of
an entrenched position it just didn't go anywhere. It would have been nice if it had, I
think that Jane Smith, who was a big proponent of the Frontlanders, had seen the Devil's
Kitchen work and thought 'hey, we could do something similar here to tackle some of
these land use issues and at least open the lines of communication.' And it was a good
thing to try and personally I think it should be resurrected from time to time to see if we
have come far enough to make it work now. Attitudes change, people change,
landownership changes and so it seems to me it would be a good thing to take out of the drawer and try on every few years to see if we have grown up enough to fit it.

This resident argued that the community was too polarized and conflicted over natural resource issues at that time for the Frontlanders to succeed.

Overzealous state and federal agency participation was also blamed for the group having "backfired." The agency presence at the meetings was believed by many participants to have resulted in mistrust and animosity. A Nature Conservancy staffperson described this process.

Well, Frontlanders came about...we were up at the ski area about 10 years ago talking about all this and just that it would be great to have a forum where we could provide information to land owners so that they could see that they have some tools out there that they could use. I think what happened was at the first meeting, they invited lots of ranchers, lots of agencies. Each agency had a tendency to send five or six people and I would say over the course of the first couple of meetings that there was a facilitator there but I think that the naysayers of the community showed up as did five or six people from each government organization and I think that, in a lot of people's minds, because the naysayers were there saying "this is government-run, the Conservancy is just trying to get us hooked up with the government and our lands, bought by the government."

Even some agency staff acknowledged their presence may have been problematic for the Frontlanders group. A biologist concedes that "part of the problem was that there were so many agency people that went to these Frontlander meetings." Another participant described agency and environmental group staff as "trying to steer the group." She said

I felt like the Nature Conservancy, Fish, Wildlife, & Parks mainly were trying to steer that group in a particular direction and when there were some strong individuals who spoke up and said, well, we'd like to do x, y and z, the folks that were leading this didn't listen to what those people were saying. So next thing we had a facilitator come in and that facilitator, once again I didn't have a lot of experience with facilitators, but this guy I don't think did a very good job of helping to tone one side down and accommodate the other or vice versa.

According to some participants, certain landowners were so alienated by the experience they no longer participate in any efforts involving state or federal agencies.

The opposition primarily emerged from a group of ranchers concerned about private property rights. These opponents described the Frontlanders as wanting to return the area to turn of the century conditions and therefore being against progress. (Note how this accusation in many ways parallels the way many environmentalists, newcomers, and nonresidents define the
area in terms of a lost past that they want to preserve, as described in Chapter 6.) After only a handful of meetings the Frontlanders effort fell apart and opponents formed a new group in response to the experience, the Montanans for Private Property Rights (MPPR). This group was led by key private property rights advocates in the study site, those ranchers who were very concerned that their rights were being violated. MPPR was described by some ranchers as a "more radical" group that "broke off" from the Frontlanders.

Overall, the Frontlanders experience, however shortlived, was disappointing and disheartening for people interested in collaboration between different groups of people. Instead of building trust and bridges, the Frontlanders increased polarization and contention in the study site. Many people are now leery of such groups, and fears about similar reactions have colored the efforts of subsequent efforts, such as the Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee. At the same time, some people believe resident communities have changed in the last 10 years and that the climate for collaboration is now much better. Several people suggested that the Frontlanders provided the crisis necessary to catalyze future efforts. In other words, natural resource issues had to become that contentious in order to motivate people to really work together.

Montanans for Private Property Rights

Interestingly, Montanans for Private Property Rights was cited by many of the group’s participants as a collaborative effort. The group is comprised of a single interest group, primarily ranchers who are considered by other residents to be “very strong minded” and active advocates of private property rights. Meetings are open to the public and speakers are often invited to present on particular topics. The purpose of the group was to educate themselves on different natural resource issues and policies, and to engage decision-makers in topics of interest. One of the founders described the group as “solution-oriented.” He described one session with a state agency staffperson.
With the Fish and Game it was to sit down and talk and here's our problems, let's find a solution. There's been too many meetings in the past where everybody brings their problems, nobody has a solution and I think it's getting a little more to where people are trying to help instead of just question everything.

Because meetings were publicized and open to the public, people attended who were not necessarily in agreement with MPPR members. Interestingly, these individuals - local environmentalists, agency personnel, and other ranchers - described MPPR members as “bashing,” “hammering,” and “insulting” numerous speakers who were invited to talk.

The group was very active for a number of years following their inception, but participation and activity declined in the late 1990s. Some members suggested that participants got “burned out.” Ranchers who disagreed with MPPR’s approach suggested that fervor over private property rights might be waning.

**Teton and Sun River Watershed Groups**

Besides the Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee, the Teton and Sun River Watershed Groups are the only cross-boundary efforts in the area that bring together different kinds of people, including ranchers, environmentalists, and agency staff, to work toward a common goal and purpose. The watershed groups focus on areas larger than the study site because they follow the Teton and Sun rivers to their respective confluences with the Missouri River. The Teton River Watershed group describes itself as “a watershed project to benefit all water users in the Teton River Basin” and “local landowners and entities working to solve water quality, water quantity, and noxious weed issues.” (Teton River Watershed Brochure) The groups are facilitated by the same individual (the staffperson for both groups who lives in Great Falls) and have received government funds and other grants for restoration and project work. Meetings are publicized and open to the public. Landowners, agency staff, recreationists, and many others participate, although the groups, like the Frontlanders, have been accused of being dominated by agency staff. While the facilitator has raised issues of instream flow and water

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allocation with the groups, neither seem ready to tackle these controversial issues. The Teton Group has provided weed education, monitoring, and biological controls, watershed assessment and mapping, restoration projects, and facilitated citizen monitoring of water quality. The group has also worked on ways to stabilize streambanks and limit erosion in an effort to reduce sediment loads.

Need for Collaboration

Despite citing few specific examples of collaboration, many different people and many ranchers described their support for collaboration, arguing that working together was the only way to accomplish anything and was a mechanism to "empower" people. Ranchers described collaboration as "win-win" and a "necessity." According to one rancher, "we are affected in a roundabout way by what the U.S. Forest Service does and BLM, of course, very much so, and state lands. And I do think we do have to work together. That's going to be our saving grace. If we don't, it's going to be very sad."

Many supporters of collaboration clearly defined these efforts as different kinds of people working together. This rancher described how these efforts can overcome contempt and result in better decisions.

I think anytime you're working together, you're helping bridge those rifts. I guess sometimes familiarity breeds contempt, but in a lot of cases, the contempt is already there and if you can pull it together and find some common ground, it can help benefit everybody. I think that's how you make the best decisions is when you don't just pull together a group of people that think like you do, but you pull together a group of people that come from diverse perspectives but basically want the same ultimate goal.

A local environmentalist described his vision for a local discussion forum.

We ought to have maybe a little natural resources discussion forum or something here in Choteau where we can get together and exchange ideas about land use and about philosophy and the issues and that sort of thing. Instead all we've had is that property rights group that's ultra right wing that gets together and talks just among themselves and the conservation community here, which is largely underground, is sort of afraid to be very vocal. And so there's the intimidation factor. And so if the collaboration you're talking about will reduce that intimidation factor and get a more intelligent free flowing exchange of ideas whether we agree or not. It'd be great just to interact and bounce off
ideas without getting mad at each other. So I would like to see that. I don’t know if this community is ready for that.

Several people suggested this kind of effort be attempted because there was no existing forum for different kinds of people to work on or at least talk about conservation and natural resource issues.

A Changing Community and the Movement Toward Collaboration

People also argued that resident communities had evolved and become more receptive to collaborative efforts in the last 5-10 years. One rancher who worked for the Nature Conservancy when she was younger described this change.

I think the community’s more open. I think when I first worked for the Nature Conservancy and they first came here that they were very looked down upon, that people really didn’t trust them. And, I guess, working for them and working with them as far as on the ranching perspective, you see a lot of people change their stripes. A lot of ranching folks who maybe cussed the Nature Conservancy, for lack of a better word, now are embracing them mostly because it’s beneficial to them. And, possibly because some people have just seen that things are going to change and so maybe if they can work with the change it won’t be as bad as if they worked against it.

One rancher who participates in several collaborative efforts described the movement away from contention toward working together.

I hope that things will slow down a little bit now and there’ll be more understanding and more collaborative type efforts to come together between people, traditional land users, conservation organizations, individuals. There was a big heavy push and it created a lot of animosity. I think the last 20 years we’re a pretty selfish society, self centered selfish society...And I hope now things will slow down a little bit and people will get to know one another, talk to each other, find out about each other, instead of this is what I want, this is how I want it, that’s not how you’re doing it, therefore you’re a bad guy and I am going to fight you, I’m going to sue you. I’m going to do whatever and by God, my family’s been here for five generations and this is how we do it and we don’t need an environmentalist coming in here and telling us how to do it. I think that’s going to start to whither away. There won’t be these polarizations, this divisiveness, this animosity and I think people are going to be more interested in finding out more about each other and I hope that comes true...Now I see many more collaborative efforts. If there was a good thing to come out of the heavy contention, it was that a lot of people and organizations saw that they did have a lot of things in common, that maybe they weren’t all doing things properly, there is room for improvement in things. And I think if it continues this way in the next twenty years, and I hope this...we’re going to see better land use management, we’re going to see more acceptance of land use and the 5% on each end will whither on the vine, I hope, and the loud, noisy no compromise, I think that gets old.
after a while. It’s fun to be in that for a while, but it doesn’t go anywhere. It’s just a fight if you like to fight forever and never accomplish anything. But after a while I think a lot of people get tired of just fighting and just arguing over a cause and never seeing anything…no fruits for anything. And I think a lot of people say let’s quit going to meetings and hollering at each other and calling each other names and blaming everyone for everything and accusing everyone of everything and let’s see if we can listen for a minute and then let’s see if we can make things better. I think you’re going to see changes in agricultural practices probably will vary region-wise and I think you’re going to see more acceptance and more willingness to be partners to that change from the conservation movement. And there’s always going to be the… in a way it’s kind of sad, but the old crusty cowboys are going to all be dead here one of these days…And the Earth First!, for lack of a better term, but the extreme environmental, antagonistic…I think they’re going to fall by the wayside because they’ve never really accomplished anything but to cause problems. Meanwhile, things continue to go on and you’ve got to be involved with the people who are making the wheels turn if you’re going to affect change. You can’t just throw rocks at them.

This rancher argued that moving away from “antagonistic conflict” and “pointing fingers” toward “collaboration” would result in achievements that would benefit ranchers.

**Doubts about Collaboration**

Despite support for collaboration, doubts, skepticism, and outright opposition was voiced by many different kinds of people for many different reasons. Some ranchers feared that collaborative efforts would further infringe upon their private property rights.

**LAURIE:** Would you like to see more collaboration between different groups of people and the agencies?
**ABBEY:** No, and I don’t think it’s a good thing, period… I just don’t think it’s a good thing. I think they’re tying up, it just brings more rules and regulations and ties things up more, all the time makes it tougher and tougher on private property.

Other ranchers favored people working together but argued they had everything to lose.

When the controversies come up that’s the only way you’ll settle them, is by working together. And it’s a real tough, tough thing as far as private property, when groups come in and want to do something to affect private property, it’s hard to work together because you have everything to lose, and they have everything to gain.

While these concerns may seem like extreme private property rights rhetoric, even academic analysis of collaboration suggests that they are legitimate fears. Brunson (1998) argues that cooperation between public and private landowners is only possible if the private landowners are willing to give up some control over their property to the partnership. Some ranchers were
concerned that collaborative efforts would provide nonresidents an avenue to influence local policies and practices.

LAURIE: Would you like to see more collaborations where different people are working together?
CONNIE: Well, if it’s local people. Without the rest of them stirring the pot.

Other ranchers could not imagine why they would work with environmentalists and what benefits might accrue. According to Jeremy, “Why would the rancher work with the Nature Conservancy?”

A potential impediment to collaboration that was cited by ranchers and nonranchers alike was the independent nature of the ranchers themselves. All ranchers interviewed described how they valued independence, freedom, and self-determination. They wanted to make their own decisions and “call their own shots.” Nearly every rancher, when asked what they enjoyed about ranching, answered “the independence.” That independence did not necessarily mean social isolation or refer to the remoteness of the country. They described their independence in the context of making decisions on their own for a particular piece of property, managing their own business, being their own boss, and having the freedom to set their own priorities and manage their own time. According to one longtime rancher, “I enjoy it because you’re independent, pretty much, your ranch is your little kingdom, and you are the king on that ranch. No one tells you what to do.” Another rancher expressed a similar perspective, saying “I think the independence, like a lot of small business owners. You’re your own boss. You can call your own shots. You have more control over your own time and money than you do if you’re employed by someone else and that’s certainly an advantage.” Many ranchers wondered if their independent nature was a barrier to working together.

JEREMY: Ranchers can never get together and do anything. It’s too bad they can’t, geez they could do a lot.
LAURIE: Why can’t ranchers get together?
JEREMY: They’re too independent...you go to a meeting and there’s 50 ranchers, there’s 51 different ideas because one guy’s changing his mind. I don’t know. But they are very independent.
LAURIE: You said if they could get together they could get a lot done. What sorts of things could ranchers get done if they got together?

JEREMY: We have felt the beef industry, the prices are being controlled by the packers. That would be one real big item. If ranchers got together, they could throw them packers plum out of the country. Ranchers will not get together.

Other ranchers saw the challenge, but believed ranchers working together was essential.

According to this rancher,

We've always prided ourselves to be independent and we can't be that independent anymore. We've got to work as a group because there are fewer and fewer of us out here in the country that are feeding the country as a whole and if we don't work together, where's it going to happen?

Ranchers cited many issues that would benefit from organized efforts, including improving trade policy, tackling the meat processing monopoly, revisiting the beef checkoff, improving the image of ranchers, managing weeds, resolving water disputes, and niche marketing of beef. Many precedents for ranchers working together exist, including stockgrowers and other cattlemen and cattlewomen groups, and grazing associations. Despite the recognition that ranchers could benefit from cooperation, at minimum with other ranchers and potentially with different kinds of people, many were concerned that independence would constrain collaboration.

**Environmentalists: A Range of Perspectives on Collaboration**

Environmentalists, both residents and nonresidents, had different concerns about collaboration. Several nonresident environmentalists interviewed opposed collaboration because it was not "objective," maintained the "status quo," produced "skewed" decisions that focused on the short term, and resulted in the "lowest common denominator." Several nonresidents argued that collaboration between different parties on the Rocky Mountain Front was difficult because the place itself did not "permit much compromise." One former politician said, "it is one of the places where things tend to be black and white. So I frankly think we ought to try compatibility and compromise and sitting together everywhere including on the Front, but I also recognize that
the Front is I think one of the most difficult places to make it work.” (Raymond) An environmentalist expressed a similar perspective.

The Front is very black and white, if you just look at it isn’t a land of moderation and I don’t think you are going to encounter a lot of moderation in the people who care about it. So it is going to be fought over, and there’s going to be wins and there’s going to be losses and they are going to be meaningful. I don’t think you are just going to find a lot of cutting the baby in half there...And I don’t think it lends itself to a lot of easy compromise and so you are going to be discussing edges, just very edges because the fights and once you get off of the edge are going to be just black and white.

One resident environmentalist described himself, saying “I’m not willing to compromise. So that’s why I’m not a very good collaborator on those committees.”

Other environmentalists were generally supportive of collaboration, but had concerns about the time and energy required by such efforts. They wondered if collaboration was more efficient at certain scales. Some environmentalists were also concerned that a successful collaboration would homogenize land management in the study site, arguing that varied approaches provided diversity and experimentation on the landscape. In other words, they did not believe that a single management approach to the entire area would be ecologically beneficial in the long-term (In some senses, this argument challenges a vision of ecosystem management as a single management plan for a large area. However, coordination and collaboration across property boundaries could also produced the variation these individuals desire.).

**Newcomers and Collaborative Efforts**

There were also concerns that new large landowners were too different to work with ranchers in the study site. One rancher responded to the collaboration question by describing newcomers, saying

It’s really difficult because so many people that come in that are looking for little places, they’re from a different world. And they don’t really understand, I mean our way of life is pretty foreign to them I think, they don’t really understand what it takes to survive on a place. And especially today, because it’s getting tougher and tougher, so, you can understand they’ve never been involved in that. So they just don’t have an understanding.
The following newcomer was in favor of collaboration and supported the ranching community.

But notice that he does not include himself in the effort.

Work together, it would be a great idea. The problem is I think there are sort of a lot of very diametrically opposed views...one of the things I learned is people around here, if nothing else, are stubborn. But I think going back to the issue of what becomes of this area in general, if ultimately the various interest groups can’t work together in some fashion, that’s probably the biggest threat to it being messed up. And I think the messing up could be all the way from having no agreement on what you do with the forest so that you get forest fires that burn everything down or oil and gas rigs all over the place exploiting it...there are many forms in which they can mess it up, but ultimately if they can’t figure out how to work with each other they will. But I think the principal element here is to keep the ranching community together because as long as there are ranchers, then those large land holdings out there on the Front are likely to stay together.

Whether or not newcomers see themselves as an integral part of landscape-level collaboration is a critical question. Clearly absenteeism is a serious barrier to participation; new large landowners need to be present to participate. Concerns for privacy, social differences, and different management goals may also constrain the integration of these landowners into collaborative efforts.

**Challenges and Opportunities for Collaboration**

In summary, the Forest Service, at all levels, recognized the need to work with private landowners toward landscape-level natural resource management and conservation. However, despite this recognition and explicit endorsement of “collaboration,” Forest Service staff interviewed for this project tended to see their role in these efforts as experts providing information to private landowners. Some agency staff resisted meaningful power sharing and real dialogue. Fear of anti-government sentiment and private property rights fervor may have limited Forest Service receptivity to collaboration. Residents, while generally supportive of increased cooperation between public agencies and landowners, expressed a diversity of perspectives on collaboration. Many were unfamiliar with such efforts and unsure how they might work or what issues they might tackle. At the same time, many residents and landowners argued that despite past collaborative failures, local communities were now receptive to different people working
together, and suggested significant benefits. Some ranchers were skeptical, voicing concerns that rancher independence would impede collaboration and that private property rights would be limited by such efforts. Some environmentalists also resisted collaboration, arguing that compromise, particularly with respect to the Rocky Mountain Front, was undesirable and unattainable.

**Cross-Boundary Cooperation and The Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee**

While collaboration has been touted as the vehicle for bringing people together toward conservation across boundaries, we need to consider whether collaboration is the only effective means of cooperating across boundaries. Certainly collaboration provides an open dialogue for diverse stakeholders to participate in decision-making about a particular place. But there may other types of successful landscape conservation efforts.

The remainder of this chapter examines the efforts of the Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee. This group brings together a diversity of people to work on conservation across property boundaries. As described earlier, this is a landowner-driven group with a focus on private lands. While the Advisory Committee is in the early stages of working together and many of their projects have yet to be implemented, they have been innovative in a number of areas, in particular in rethinking property and boundaries and how ranchers might work together to address issues of both livelihood and conservation.

This group does not fit all of the criteria for collaboration, as articulated by academics and practitioners. However, they provide insights into how different groups of people might cooperate toward conservation across boundaries. My purpose in providing a detailed description and analysis of this group is to examine the ways in which they both build on and challenge the ideas and practices explored earlier in this dissertation; I am not attempting to evaluate the effectiveness of proposed or existing projects per se. Below I describe the group’s history and evolution, their weed work and grassbank projects, and some of the challenges and opportunities...
they face. The following analysis is based on interviews, meeting observations, and written materials produced by the group.

The Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee was established by the Nature Conservancy (TNC) in 1999. The new TNC Montana state director had experience working with a ranchlands group in Colorado and recommended that TNC staff working on the Front consider forming a similar group. TNC staff then examined a few models and met with a handful of ranchers with whom TNC had good relationships. They asked what TNC activities would be most helpful to ranchers and ranchers replied “buying easements.” TNC staff then gathered a somewhat larger group together, had a few meetings, and described the ranchlands group from Colorado. The ranchers agreed to participate, but in an advisory capacity to TNC. They did not want to form their own group because of time constraints. The ranchers asked TNC for a quid pro quo; they wanted TNC to provide expertise and resources on economic development. TNC agreed. The Advisory Committee describes itself as

A local advisory committee to advise the Nature Conservancy (TNC) to ensure TNC’s work on the Front is responsive to the needs, concerns, and visions of the communities along the Front. The committee will work with TNC to establish a program that conserves the Rocky Mountain Front and its habitat in a way that is compatible with the economic and cultural needs of local people and communities who depend on ranching as a livelihood. (TNC Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee Document)

The original group of ranchers was comprised of people who had easements with TNC and good relationships with TNC staff. Participants have broadened membership over the years to include other ranchers and different types of community leaders.

TNC staff described the changing approach of their organization and the development of an explicit community-based focus as an impetus for establishing the Advisory Committee. TNC increasingly views ranchers as allies and not enemies. A TNC staffperson explained how a landscape-level approach required attention to local communities. He said

We’ve evolved from a buy a preserve here and buy a preserve there to looking at a large landscape scale, and once we did that we realized that if we’re looking at those very huge scales that you really can’t have an impact if you’re not dealing with communities. That
if you just cut them out of, not only the decision making process, but just the involvement in any of it, that it's just not going to be lasting.

TNC staff were looking for common ground with the ranching community, and wanted to work with ranchers to “stabilize” ranching on the Rocky Mountain Front. This is consistent with TNC assertions described earlier in this dissertation that retaining long-term family ranchers as landowners is very beneficial for conservation. TNC staff also believe that the Advisory Committee can assist them in being community oriented and responding to local needs. Furthermore, since the late 1990s TNC has not had sufficient funds to purchase all of the easements that landowners wish to sell in the area. This may be motivating TNC to look at other approaches to conservation.

The Advisory Committee describes itself as “a group of ranchers, community and business leaders, and staff of the Nature Conservancy that is working on projects to further conservation and the economic well-being of the ranching community along the Rocky Mountain Front. Participating landowners guide committee decisions and the Nature Conservancy provides technical expertise and support staff.” (Rocky Mountain Front Grassbank Document) During meetings, members have described the group as providing a mutually beneficial meeting place between conservation and agriculture, taking easements to the next step, ranchers and environmentalists working together, a long-term dialogue, and working on stewardship.

The group has received funding, through TNC, from General Motors (through the TNC Center for Compatible Economic Development) and the Claiborne-Ortenberg Foundation. GM money has provided salary for support staff and expert analysis for development of a grassbank proposal (a grassbank is a collectively managed property which provides grass for ranchers in exchange for specific conservation practices – the proposal is detailed later in this chapter).
The Formation and Evolution of the Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee

Below, Advisory Committee members and TNC staff reflect on the formation of the group and the character of their work. Participants widely agreed that participation is a very positive experience, that they have learned a lot about each other and potential projects, and that the group is constructive and “working toward something.”

One of the ranchers reflected on the inception and evolution of the Advisory Committee.

We met up at Pine Butte, some ranchers. It was pretty much at the start just some families that had taken out conservation easements with the Conservancy so it was kind of a closed house deal. We had dinner and visited and talked about the concept of forming this advisory council to the Conservancy. I think they wanted to use some local ranchers both as a sounding board to bounce ideas off and also possibly to use them for get their opinions on conservation purchase-type maneuvers. What do you think, should we take an easement out on this or we’ve got to do one or the other? I think at some point in time we might get asked those and I don’t think we’ll ever be the last word on anything but I think we’re a sounding board. And since we were the first ones just to see if they thought this concept would fly and we were very interested in anything that will...I don’t want to be an isolationist. We wanted to be a part of anything that would include our input and also give us more knowledge of what’s going on.

This rancher believed that participation provides an opportunity to influence TNC work and better understand different conservation initiatives. Another rancher described the group’s beginnings.

[A TNC staffperson] called me, told me that he had spoken with some landowners and asked if I would be willing to serve. He said that he wanted some women on the group because he had mostly men and he had tried to recruit some women and mostly was getting more positive responses from men. So I decided that I would be real interested in seeing how the group worked and giving it a shot and agreed to do it and really feel like it’s a uniquely compatible group, that it seems uniquely compatible. I’ve had very few groups where people really remained open-minded enough to come to some conclusions that were sometimes hard for them to reach. It’s really helped me understand that process and appreciate it and appreciate how people from very different backgrounds have come a long way getting somewhere. So I really respect and admire and like these people in this group a lot. I was thinking about Eric yesterday saying, ten years ago the political climate was fairly different and when you talk to me about U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, I was much more negative. And now I see that this could be something good. And I see something like that in a man Eric’s age, I think he’s probably between 65 and 70, I’m not sure but that’s what I’d guess and I think wow, what an ability to be open and to be open to change. You just don’t see that in that many people. And so I really appreciate the work that it takes for somebody individually to do something like that. I see Jeremy, who has at times been rabid in that group about government and government intervention and stuff like that, and is able to say, “yes, I can see the benefit of U.S. Fish & Wildlife...”
Service in this landscape. I am willing to set aside some of the other feelings I have about government and support this.” So I really appreciate that.

Other Advisory Committee members agreed with her, arguing that the group is uniquely constructive.

There was an initial period of getting to know people during which there were some tensions and frustrations in the group. Several participants were “vociferous” in frequently stating their opinions on particular matters. It appears that people needed to establish their positions to some extent prior to recognizing the common ground that they shared. The discussion was initially dominated by a few individuals, whereas now it is much more balanced. There was also distrust of the Nature Conservancy that had to be overcome. One participant described how improved relationships with TNC allowed the Advisory Committee to succeed. He argued that 15 years ago TNC “wouldn’t be talking to people out here in a group like this” and that “seven or eight years ago, I would never have sat on a committee with the Nature Conservancy. Largely due to what I see as a changing philosophy, a willingness to try to work out methods that are compatible with both sides, I see this as a good thing.” Many participants argued that this sort of group would not have been possible even 8 or 10 years ago. According to one participating rancher, “you had to get all the stars aligned before it was ready to go and they finally were, but it wouldn’t have come together 10 years ago.”

However, a participating rancher described his continuing caution about working with TNC.

When Judd asked me to come to the meeting, I didn’t really know much about the Conservancy but in the back of my mind I had kind of a negative feeling about it because of what people thought they were all about back when they first bought the preserve up here in ’78 or ’2 or whenever it was and that it’s a conspiracy, they’re going to buy up all this private land and deed it over to the government or whatever. And so I was pretty cautious about mentioning my involvement until I knew where the Conservancy was coming from. And I’m very comfortable with their position on things now. However, I do, in the back of my mind, think that it’s an organization and it can be political like anything else and if their philosophy did happen to shift away from where it is right now, I don’t want to be tied to it in such a way that if I don’t believe in that new philosophy that I continue to be tied to it. Because right now they think and I agree with them that the use of cattle in the landscape is healthy for the landscape. That wasn’t their position.
probably eight years ago. Or, I'm not sure, you might check with them on that but there's been a shift in the Conservancy's position on that. And the ranchers on the committee have talked about that too. Like with this grass banking thing if there were to be some kind of national shift in their philosophy, we don't want to get caught in a situation where we're involved in something where we don't agree with where they're coming from. So I've been real cautious.

While some committee members remain skeptical of TNC as an organization, they appear to trust local TNC staff and be willing to work together.

Amy, one the ranchers in the group, credited the positive dynamic of the group to the "fortunate combination of personalities" and TNC staff with selecting people who were "divergent but not rabid" and "willing to listen." She and other participants agree that the group has a "common cause" or "common purpose" and that there is "consensus" that the group is seeking solutions that include conservation and economic opportunity. She further described the group.

I've never worked before in a group where I felt such absolute respect, loyalty, desire to make it work than I have with this group. I just love this group and I like how they make me feel, I like how I feel about them. I feel like we're so positive and we get so much done with so little time and energy and it's such a unique experience cause so often things are contentious or frustrating and this just doesn't feel that way to me.

Another rancher expressed this sentiment during a meeting. She said, "this is an extraordinary board because everyone comes and is interested."

The group took a trip to the Malpai Borderlands area of New Mexico and Arizona in Spring 2000. There they met with leaders and participants in the Malpai Borderlands Group, a collaborative effort initiated in the early 1990s to address issues of drought, rural change, and the reintroduction of fire. The Malpai trip was described by Advisory Committee members as "pivotal" for the group. Eight people on the Advisory Committee went to Malpai. Not only did the group solidify and bond, build trust, and find common ground, they also became focused on a particular project, establishing a grassbank. A participating rancher described this trip.

Judd kind of brought that up and said, "Hey, you guys want to go down and go to a workshop at the Malapi?"...bunch of cowboys, you know, "Yeah, free trip, yeah, let's go, where is it?" So we went down there and met with them and it just solidified that group and ignited that group and really energized everyone seeing what they got done.
And they have a lot of different circumstances than we do and different conditions that they’re working under and problems that they work on but we really liked what they got done. I mean, that is a success story down there. It was pretty inspirational.

The tangible successes of the Malpai group motivated the Advisory Committee. Upon return from Malpai they met four times in one month. A TNC staffperson talked about how the Malpai trip changed the group.

And as I said, once we went down to Malpai, everything gelled and then all of a sudden, they started saying things they wanted to do and...that there’s more to be gained by collaboration. What I told them is it’s going to be way easier for us to go out and obtain funds for things we want to do as a group if we have conservationists and ranchers working together than if it’s one or the other. So, the evolution was very slow at first, picked up steam, when we went to Malpai it just exploded. I mean, when we came back and I said, do you want to meet next week and we met, I think, three times in June last year which... I was getting tired of it just because I was having to organize all these meetings. I was going, “wow, I can’t believe it!” So it was really interesting.

Visiting a ranching community facing similar challenges – drought, development pressure, low beef prices - and learning about their accomplishments really galvanized the group.

My own observations of the Advisory Committee confirm what participants described during interviews. I had the opportunity to attend nine Advisory Committee meetings between Fall 2000 and Fall 2002. I did not witness the inception of the group nor the formative Malpai trip. However, I watched several new members come on board. I observed the group dynamic during the formal meetings as well as informal moments during meals and before and after official business. Participants are positive, productive, and constructive, giving generously of their time and expertise. They are open-minded, they listen to one another respectfully, and they are not afraid to disagree with one another. At the same time, they rarely argue for the sake of arguing and remain focused on the task at hand-getting some work accomplished. TNC staff facilitate loosely, but do not really control the meetings, although they usually establish the agenda.

TNC staff have articulated a number of benefits from the Advisory Committee. They argue that the Advisory Committee has helped them “prioritize” their work and provided them
with important input on particular initiatives. TNC staff have also learned from the group interaction.

Most of the interactions that I have with ranchers are on kind of a one-to-one basis and so different things come out when you’ve got a group of them together that you don’t otherwise hear about. Just seeing how sort of all the different people coming from different places how they interact with the other participants and what kinds of things each participant has to contribute. It’s been interesting to see. I know a lot more about the cattle market than I ever did. Because if I try to talk with a single rancher about that, half the stuff they’re talking about, I wouldn’t understand and after a while they would just sort of blow the whole thing off, but when they’re sitting around together and talking about it and you don’t understand, they keep talking about it and eventually you start picking up on some things. And you get that in people’s kitchens too when you’ve got a couple of them together, but having a larger group that’s kind of focused on the same thing has been real interesting. Especially when you have people from different backgrounds you get a perspective that you don’t get when you’re sitting in a kitchen with a couple ranchers. So it’s been good.

While the group experienced some tensions and adjustments during the initial stages of formation, they have reached a point where they work well together, feel very positive about the experience, and are focused on tangible accomplishments. The glowing terms that participants used to describe the Advisory Committee stand in stark contrast with the gloom and doom surrounding the Frontlanders effort.

Membership and Community Relations

Frontlanders Influence on the Advisory Committee

Despite the positive feelings participants have for the group and the stark contrast between this effort and the Frontlanders, past experiences have definitely influenced the approach of the Advisory Committee. Both TNC staff and ranchers described their continued cautiousness as a result of the Frontlanders disaster. According to a Nature Conservancy staff person,

What I decided was that the group I wanted to have, it was not a public group, it was an advisory group. I wanted people who were positively-oriented, sort of solution- and results-oriented rather than tearing things down. They didn’t necessarily have to agree with me. They had to be willing to be civil. We’ve got these, sort of, guidelines for the group. And they had to be committed to coming to meeting after meeting. And have an interest in conservation and collaborating together. I think that’s the difference. While the group represents some of the community, it’s not open to everybody. Choteau is traditionally...for the 20 years I’ve been associated with it, any time you have a public
meeting on natural resources, if everybody’s there, there’ll be about four or five people who dominate the discussion, a lot of yelling and shouting and nothing ever gets done and everybody ends up getting very frustrated. So I guess I decided to control that a little bit more with this take. Probably a lot of that is based on the experience of what happened and therefore, being sensitive from that situation to the landowners’ concern, I have been reluctant to bring in government folks other than elected officials. However, clearly those people were involved in places like the Malpai and what not and the group has talked about that, but I want the group to drive that. I don’t want to drive that. And so I could see the day where we might have one or two agency people there, whether it’s state of federal.

A participating rancher also discussed the impact of the Frontlanders experience.

A lot of the people on this group had belonged to the Frontlanders group and they saw that process disintegrate at the mercy of several very outspoken conservative folk. And because of overwhelming involvement on the part of agencies. So there were two things going on there that were really difficult to overcome.

Another Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee member described how lessons learned from the Frontlanders experience affect the approach of this group.

I think we’ve got to be able to make this grass bank thing work or even if it doesn’t work, we’ve got to do it in such a way that we’re very open and honest with both sides and this is our goal, this is what we want to do, if you want to be part of it great, if not, that’s okay too. Because there’s been groups like this, there’s been things like this try to get organized in this area before and you have a public meeting and you get some hard headed radical old rancher come in there and grab his soapbox and next thing you know it’s just...it’s not going to happen, nothing productive’s going to happen. So we’re trying to really avoid that type of situation or at least be far enough along before something like that were to happen where people would recognize, well, that guy’s full of hot air and that’s not really what’s going on here.

Overall, the Frontlanders experience made Advisory Committee participants more selective in choosing participants and much more private in terms of their work.

Who Participates and Who Doesn’t

The Advisory Committee originally began with around 10 people and has expanded to include 15-17 participants. Members include two local officials, three local business owners, three TNC staff, a County staffperson, eight ranchers, and other community leaders (four people wear two hats) (and potentially myself, although my role is somewhat unclear – as noted in the methods section, I take notes for this group in exchange for sitting in on meetings). TNC is the
only environmental group that participates. Most participating ranchers have easements with the
Nature Conservancy, but there is a range of rancher perspectives within the group. While they
are mostly multigenerational ranchers and conservative in many of the ways that ranchers as a
group are, they are described by fellow committee members as “avant garde,” “open-minded,”
and “unconventional.” There are no ranchers on the Advisory Committee who are active in the
local private property rights group, the Montanans for Private Property Rights. The Advisory
Committee has made an effort to include ranchers from different geographic areas of the Front,
although membership has not yet been expanded to include tribal participants from the Blackfeet
Reservation (TNC staff are interested in doing so at some point).

It is important to note that this is a rancher dominated group. TNC initiating the group,
fundraises and provides staff where necessary, and organizes and facilitates meetings. However,
the group is landowner-driven, meaning that the group’s focus is largely determined by the
interests and needs of the participating ranchers. Furthermore, all participating ranchers are from
multigenerational ranch families; they are not newcomers to the area, even newcomers from the
1950s. This stands in contrast to many collaborative efforts in the West, whose participants tend
toward newcomers, in particular progressive new large landowners.

There has been explicit discussion on a number of occasions about the role of
government participation in the Advisory Committee. While meetings are sometimes attended by
USFWS staff and occasionally other agency representatives, the only government employee who
has been asked to join the group works for one of the Counties in the study site. TNC staff have
been clear that the Committee itself will need to choose whether to invite agency staff to
participate formally. The Frontlanders experience and widespread anti-government sentiment in
the ranching community have obviously influenced this decision. However, the example of the
Malpai Borderlands Group and their successful collaboration with the Forest Service may be
changing some attitudes. According to one of the TNC staff,
[One of the ranchers] after coming back from Malapai said, “I hate government agencies but after seeing what Malapai’s done, I realize I need to talk with everybody.” I mean, you could just see the wheels whirring for a lot of these guys thinking, I just need to talk to other people even though I might not agree with them. Dialogue is a positive thing.

Positive interactions with USFWS staff regarding the Partners for Wildlife Program and the proposed grassland easement program have likely improved perspectives on government as well.

One participant, who is known for his skepticism of the federal government said:

You go back 15 years here and you find out why there’s been so much resentment in this area about the federal government and why I’m so encouraged about this group with the Nature Conservancy. This will hopefully start mending some fences and get government agents being viewed back in the light where they truly are our friends and co-workers rather than enemies... One thing that I would like to see is I would like to see in this Nature Conservancy advisory group, I would like to see a little more government input. I’d like to see somebody from the Forest Service or the BLM at the meetings or from Fish & Game at the meetings to maybe have a better feel for where people are coming from. You heard the snickers about when the guy was at our meeting... Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Montana. Rigidness... It’s good that those people come. And he might’ve taken home some things that he wasn’t aware of. Now, you’ll notice the other fellow, he was just fine. But that guy from Helena, that’s your typical bureaucrat that you work with.

As he pointed out, some Advisory Committee interactions with agency staff have been less positive and are often brought up during meetings as examples of the problems with state and federal agencies.

Another group of people who are currently absent from the table are new large landowners (one newcomer participated for several years but recently resigned from the Committee). Newcomers are often discussed in the context of changes wrought by their arrival and how to incorporate them into the grassbank. However, their potential participation in the group is rarely mentioned. Obviously, absentee owners would have a difficult time attending regular meetings. However, their ranch managers might be able and willing to participate (although this is clearly different from the owners themselves).
Community Relations and Going Public

The Frontlanders experience also affected Advisory Committee perspectives on community relations and what they would try to accomplish through this effort. According to a participating rancher,

A lot of the people on this group had belonged to the Frontlanders group and they saw that process disintegrate at the mercy of several very outspoken conservative folk. And because of overwhelming involvement on the part of agencies. So there were two things going on there that were really difficult to overcome. We also decided that while we recognized that there were people who wouldn’t agree with us, our purpose was not to convert the world. It was not to make everybody believe the way we did or to serve as a community sounding board for these issues. That what we wanted to do was make physical progress on this landscape, economic and conservation progress here and if other people liked what we were doing, they were welcome to find out about us, come together with us, ask for assistance, and that we would do outreach for people who seemed to be willing to do that... Naturally, you hope people come along with you as you make progress. But the main purpose is to make the progress and then to hope that secondarily, to hope people come along, not vice versa.

In fact, Committee members have not been very vocal or public about the group or their participation. During interviews the only residents who brought up the Committee were participants themselves or the close relatives of participants. Meetings are not advertised and are by invitation only. The group’s work has not been covered at all by the local paper, although short stories have appeared in TNC publications. Amy explained the group’s focus on accomplishing something on the ground.

I don’t think there’s any intent to be hush-hush. But I think all of us feel that the way we’re going to get stuff done is by example, that’s how we’re going to convert. And we can’t get anything done if we’re spending all of our time in the public arena explaining ourselves and trying to get people to our side or whatever... I think it would be very likely that you would meet nobody or very few people outside this group that would know anything about it because we’re not talking about except amongst close friends or family. I don’t think any of us are talking about it that much.

Another rancher described his hesitancy to talk with neighbors and family members about the group.

To be honest with you, I haven’t been real vocal about it. I haven’t visited about it a lot. One of my neighbors... actually I didn’t visit with him, but my wife mentioned to his wife, it was when we were going on a trip and she said, oh, he’s going down there with the Nature Conservancy. And she looked at her real funny and said why is he on that board? And she said, well, they just asked him to be on the board. And she said, well, you
know what they’re after don’t you? Jenny says no what? Well, they want an easement on your ranch. And I thought, that has nothing to do with it but that’s the perception that some of the ranching people have is that they must be up to something. So, no I haven’t been real vocal about that. Mainly because I want to get real comfortable before I go to my neighbors who also happen to be a lot of my relatives and advocate one thing or another. I want to make sure I know what they’re bought in. I’m very comfortable with that now but I wasn’t. It took me a while to really get a feel for where they’re at on things. Although I had a pretty good idea knowing some of the ranchers that are on that committee, I thought, well, if what I thought about them is true, these guys wouldn’t be here either. So but, no, I haven’t been real vocal about the fact that I’m on that. But that’s why I’m kind of excited with this grass banking thing. If we can get it put together and then come out with it, I think it will be positively received in the ranching community and I think that’ll be a very beneficial thing for the Conservancy and the ranching community. But there’s a lot of...I shouldn’t just say old guys because a couple of my cousins that are just a little older than me, I mean, they think the Conservancy is just a bunch of Nazis. So there’s a ways to go yet in reaching the ranching community about that. But I think most of those opinions are out of being naïve or ignorant. I don’t like that word, ignorant, but they just don’t understand and they want to believe what they believe and they’re not really very open minded about change or whatever.

It was clear that Advisory Committee members believed they needed a tangible success story, such as an operating grassbank, to provide an example of their work to the community. They did not want to spend time touting the benefits of their efforts to skeptics and naysayers. Instead, they wanted to provide a concrete example and allow that accomplishment to speak for itself.

Despite the private nature of their work and approach, the Advisory Committee has made some tentative efforts at community outreach. They have invited other landowners to participate in the weed projects, the monitoring workshop, and a presentation on ranching costs of production. These events and efforts were not publicized; individuals were invited personally by Committee members.

**Weed Work**

Before turning to the primary focus of the Advisory Committee, the grassbank project, I provide a brief description of weed management activities. This is a recent thrust of the Advisory Committee that I call “weed work.” Weeds, as noted in the previous chapter, are a particularly challenging and relevant cross-boundary issue. No single landowner can manage weeds
effectively, if neighbors are not also attending to the problem. (Weeds are defined here as nonnative invasive species, not “weedy” natives.)

The weed work described here involves a series of efforts to manage weeds across property boundaries. Some projects were initiated by the Advisory Committee; others were established by other entities, such as Teton County, and Advisory Committee members participate. Some involve the entire Rocky Mountain Front, while others focus on small scales, such as small watershed units. This “weed work” is an example of how people are tackling a cross-boundary management issue that affects both livelihood and ecology. It is also an example of how the Advisory Committee is working with government agencies and other ranchers in the area. Below I have listed and briefly described each of these efforts.

_Teton Community Weed Day_

During the summer of 2002, landowners, agency staff, and TNC sprayed and pulled weeds along the Teton Road and several other nearby roads. One of the landowners provided lunch and Teton County provided chemicals and helped people calibrate sprayers. The Forest Service and Fish, Wildlife, and Parks participated, despite the fact that none of the weed management was conducted on Forest Service lands. TNC helped organize the event. TNC and Teton County hope to make this an annual event and to encourage other areas to organize similar efforts.

_South Fork Dearborn Weed Project_

This project was organized by a rancher who is a member of the Advisory Committee who also works for TNC. A three day event, the Dearborn project focused on a riparian corridor. USFWS provided a Youth Conservation Corps crew to pull weeds within the riparian area and private landowners sprayed on the uplands. Every landowner
participated. TNC staff mapped the location and type of weeds for future efforts, and created a project report for interested parties.

*Upper Teton Cooperative Weed Project*

This is a pilot project organized at the watershed level to find ways for landowners to be more effective and efficient at weed control. There are five large private landowners involved: two are Advisory Committee members, four are ranchers, and one is a newcomer with a large property. Small landowners will hopefully be brought into the project later. Participating ranchers described their weed program as different every year, depending on the weather, availability of labor, and other factors, saying that they are never able to do as much work on weeds as they want to. The focus of the cooperative effort is on both spraying and other control techniques, depending on the desires of the landowner. The group plans to put together a comprehensive weed management plan for the area, keeping in mind the needs of each landowner. Participants may help each other with trouble spots, and may hire someone to map and monitor weeds, and oversee their efforts to ensure quality and effectiveness.

*Weed Roundtable*

In 2002 a variety of organizations and agencies in the study site began meeting to coordinate efforts on weed management on the Rocky Mountain Front. This roundtable is attended by staff from TNC, Teton County, the Sun and Teton River Watershed Groups, the Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and one rancher. Participants are now better informed about each other’s efforts and have identified gaps where no one is doing anything. They would like to involve more private landowners. They are considering hiring a weed person to coordinate efforts in the area.
Weed Bounty and Weed Wacker Rodeo

Both projects were established and run by Teton County. In 2002 the County organized the 5th annual Weed Wacker Rodeo, an educational event with prizes and a weed pulling contest cosponsored by state, federal, and local government agencies, and TNC. Also in 2002 Teton County initiated a bounty program for spotted knapweed. Kids were paid 25 cents per pound for knapweed with two inches of root.

Each of these efforts reconceptualizes boundaries in some manner. Furthermore, these new boundary ideas are put into practice, on-the-ground, in efforts to deal with natural resource issues that cut across multiple properties. The Teton County Extension Agent, in describing the Weed Bounty program, specifically said he was “not too concerned about boundaries” and would accept weeds from all of the Rocky Mountain Front.

The premise of the Teton Cooperative Weed Project, as articulated by the rancher leading the effort, is to define a region beyond property boundaries, “get a group of people who have a bond to a geographic area,” and encourage ownership and management of the whole. He argued that landowners need to “look at the region as a whole instead of my fenceline, your fenceline” in order to be more efficient and effective at weed control. In this project, landowners pool resources and prioritize work based on need. In other words, some properties may receive more attention than others during certain years.

The scale of each effort is determined by the specific goals of the project, and what might be effective and achievable. Thus, while each project involves multiple private landowners and, in some cases, public land management agencies, the scale varies considerably. If containment of roadside weeds are the problem and a one-day event is a reasonable timeframe, a certain amount of road miles are selected. If a long-term, untested, landowner-driven weed coordination effort is to be implemented, a small watershed area with a manageable number of landowners is the desired scale. It is interesting that most of the weed work takes place at scales much smaller than
the entire Rocky Mountain Front, implying that the entire area might be too large for weed management efforts.

Both the Upper Teton and the South Fork Dearborn weed projects are unprecedented in this area. The fact that both efforts were able to obtain the participation of every single landowner in the watershed area (except some small owners in the case of the Upper Teton project) is remarkable. (The Sun and Teton River Watershed Groups also work on weeds, but they cover much larger geographic areas and do not have comprehensive landowner participation.) Organizers hope that these watershed units are small enough that people can identify with them, but large enough to affect change. They also hope that, like the grassbank, these projects will provide working models for other like units in the study site and beyond.

It is important to note, however, that the two watershed projects and the Teton Community Weed Day began at the Forest Service boundary and did not include federal lands. It is unclear whether organizers plan to reach further up into their watersheds by involving the agency in their efforts. Given that weeds are spread through riparian corridors and many ranchers are critical of Forest Service weed management, these projects may eventually need to involve the agency to be successful over the long term.

Furthermore, involving newcomers in general, and especially those with small parcels, may be a critical challenge for future weed work. Advisory Committee members agree that weeds are particularly problematic on many newcomer properties, and sometimes refer to small parcels as “weedettes” because of the proliferation of weeds. They have acknowledged the challenge of convincing the average person that weeds are a concern, especially in the absence of any economic incentive. But, as one rancher put it, it’s a matter of priorities and “it doesn’t cost anything to care and some people don’t care.” He argued that convincing people to care will make a big difference to birds, big game, and biodiversity in general.

The sudden burst of coordinated weed activity in 2002 may indicate the growing weed crisis and/or a willingness for people to work together on this seemingly insurmountable issue.
The Advisory Committee, TNC, and Teton County have been the key initiators of these efforts, but federal and state agencies have participated in several events and forums. The weed projects provide the Advisory Committee with tangible outcomes without the substantial capital outlay required for a grassbank. Furthermore, they provide avenues for involving non-Advisory Committee ranchers, newcomers, and agency staff in cross-boundary initiatives.

Establishing a Grassbank

The primary focus of the Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee is the establishment of a grassbank in the area. The grassbank is particularly relevant to this dissertation because the project provides an example of one way to effectively integrate livelihood and conservation goals. It also reconceptualizes private property, essentially inventing a new category of property and redefining the public interest in this property. This effort builds on existing grassbank projects but also adapts them specifically to the circumstances of the Front and the goals of this group. Again, the purpose of this example is not to evaluate whether or not grassbanks are effective tools for conservation; that evaluation is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Rather, the grassbank project is a window into a new approach to cross-boundary conservation. I turn now to a brief review of the grassbank efforts of the Malpai Borderlands Group to provide a context for understanding the initiative of this group.

Malpai Borderlands Group

The Malpai Borderlands Group, located in the region of Arizona and New Mexico just north of the Mexican border, describes itself on the cover of its brochure as “protecting a working wilderness.” The organization is a “grassroots, landowner-driven” nonprofit. They describe their approach as part of the “radical center” and state the groups’ goal as:

- to restore and maintain the natural processes that create and protect a healthy, unfragmented landscape to support a diverse, flourishing community of human, plant and animal life in our borderlands region. Together we will accomplish this by working to
encourage profitable ranching and other traditional livelihoods which will sustain the open space nature of our land for generations to come. (Malpai Borderlands Group Brochure)

A core group of ranchers came together in the early 1990s in response to increasing subdivision development, regulation, growing public opposition to ranching, drought conditions, and problems with fire suppression (Schumann, 2000). This group of ranchers then began talking with public land managers and environmentalists about working together.

One of their initial efforts was to create a fire map outlining which areas ranchers wanted to see burned. By 1997 more than 100,000 acres had burned under the new fire plan, including 10,000 acres of prescribed fire (Smith, 1997). They also established a grassbank on the privately owned Gray Ranch. In 1990, the Nature Conservancy purchased the 321,000 acre Gray Ranch in the Malpai Borderlands area. They sold the ranch to a non-profit, the Animas Foundation, established by Drum Hadley, a relative newcomer to the area and an heir to the Anheuser-Busch fortune (Page, 1997). Ranchers who participate in the grassbank donate conservation easements on acreages equal in value to the monetary worth of the grass they receive through participation. These easements are held by the Malpai Borderlands Group and predominantly limit subdivision. The primary motivation for participation is lack of grass available on home ranches during drought years. The Malpai Borderlands Group raises money from foundations and private donors for operating costs.

The group also works on endangered species restoration and research. To date, a number of studies have been conducted in cooperation with universities and other research institutes examining frogs, jaguars, snakes, owls, bats, and sheep. They are also working on niche marketing and ways that ranchers can ensure increased prices for beef. The group describes one of its accomplishments as “greatly improved coordination between government agencies and private landowners and between different agencies themselves.” (Malpai Borderlands Groups Brochure)
The Malpai Group has become a poster child for rancher-conservationist collaboration. Their efforts have been covered in numerous popular magazines and journals, they host visiting ranchers several times a year, and put on conferences and workshops. They have a growing number of donors, an office and meeting space, and paid staff.

Not all landowners in the Malpai area participate, and some ranchers have voiced concerns about the Nature Conservancy’s “hidden agenda.” Likewise, environmentalists opposed to ranching in general have questioned the stated accomplishments of the group (Page, 1997).

National Grassbank Work – Challenges and Opportunities

While the Malpai grassbank is one of the most well-known and high profile such efforts in the west, there are many more fledgling grassbank projects in the West. While grassbanks are, in many ways, a new form of property and a new type of conservation effort, they build on previous models like grazing associations, where ranchers pooled resources for access to grass. What is new about grassbanks is that nonranchers, such as the Forest Service or environmental groups, are providing grass and resources in exchange for conservation practices on private ranchlands and public lands allotments.

In November 2000, a grassbank conference was held in Santa Fe, New Mexico (two Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee members attended this meeting). At this conference Bruce Runnels of the Nature Conservancy defined grassbanks as “a mechanism whereby forage values can be exchanged for desired conservation values” (Runnels, 2000). TNC is currently exploring grassbanks on a number of its properties in the West. According to Runnels, grassbanks work because ranchers “do not have economic alternatives. They cannot afford to remove cattle from the land they control to enhance range conditions; they cannot afford to make improvements that would give them more flexible grazing regimes; they cannot afford to acquire other forage on the open market; and they cannot afford to voluntarily implement desired conservation measures.”
TNC and Malpai recently created an organization called Grassbank, Inc. and have trademarked the grassbank name to prevent it from being misapplied to projects that are not in keeping with their goals. While TNC and the Malpai group hold the rights to the term "grassbank," Runnels acknowledged that grassbank specifics must be adapted to local circumstances. For example, a TNC grassbank in Wyoming was initiated to allow for the reintroduction of fire. Another budding TNC grassbank in Eastern Montana will promote prairie dog town restoration.

Runnels outlined a number of challenges for grassbanks, including the substantial capital required to secure grassbank properties or forage, the scientific and technical expertise required for continually monitoring, and the ongoing operating costs. The Malpai grassbank, like several others, is not self-sufficient and relies on substantial outlay of capital to acquire the grassbanks and ongoing external inputs for operating costs. Two operating grassbanks are currently threatening to close because of prohibitive operating costs.

Despite these challenges, Runnels concluded that grassbanks promise to become the most significant high-leverage conservation tool to be devised in many years. They directly enable landscape-scale conservation benefits, such as abating the threat of development and restoring critical natural processes. They build on the entrepreneurial spirit of private ranching landowners. They broadly support the concept of a working landscape that involves a commitment to long-term conservation practices and the means to carry them out. They foster collaboration, innovation, and a solution-oriented approach to addressing common problems.

While grassbanks are a relatively recent innovation in ranchland conservation and they face significant challenges in some areas, there is a lot of momentum and interest in these efforts amongst the Nature Conservancy and like environmental groups, and various ranching communities. Clearly, Runnels and others believe they have incredible potential, even in the context of exorbitant operating costs.
The Rocky Mountain Front Grassbank

As described earlier, the trip to the Malpai Borderlands inspired a concerted and ongoing effort to establish a grassbank on the Rocky Mountain Front. The Advisory Committee has defined a grassbank as “grassland available for use by a rancher(s), in exchange for donation of a conservation easement, rest of a home place, or other conservation measure for a specified period of time, for ranchers using sustainable grazing practices.” The goal of the grassbank is “to perpetuate the biological and cultural heritage of the Rocky Mountain Front through improvement of the ecological, economic, and community health of the Front. The grassbank does this by trading forage for conservation action” (Guidelines for Grassbank Operation and Participant Selection, 2002, p. 1). Note the simultaneous focus on ecology, economics, and community.

The Advisory Committee was originally interested in trading access to grass for conservation easements in the area. However, the rising price of private land in the study site has driven up the cost of conservation easements to such an extent that the market value of grass would likely equal only a small portion of an easement on a particular property. The group has since expanded the “trade” to include conservation benefits on participants’ home ranches. These conservation benefits might result from weed management, resting pasture, riparian fencing, reintroducing fire, or some other management action. Most of the proposed practices restore native species, habitat, and ecological processes.

The power of the grassbank is twofold. One, a grassbank provides economic space for ranchers to initiate conservation efforts on their home properties. Ranchers have grass for cattle to live on while they rest, reintroduce, and restore the areas they usually have to graze. A participating rancher described how this works:

We’d like to put together a grass bank where individual families can, who want to do projects on their own property, can relieve some of the pressure on their place, go to this other property to graze cattle while they do and that might mean burning, changing fence, changing pasture size, water development or maybe it just means they want to rest one pasture to start a rest rotation, get a rest rotation going, any kind of restorative work. And
this gives them...this would allow them...you need a place to go at a reasonable, that will economically work so that they can get this started.

In this way, the grassbank makes a successful link between conservation and livelihood.

Second, a grassbank results in conservation benefits on a far greater number of acres than the grassbank property itself. Because participating ranchers are restoring home ranches, grassbank property leverages conservation benefits on many acres in the area. Current models for the Front indicate that one grassbank could leverage conservation on 40,000 acres. In this sense it is a conservation tool with widespread impact. Unlike a traditional TNC preserve, where conservation is a focus on that property alone, a grassbank theoretically promotes conservation across the landscape.

The biggest challenge to establishment of a grassbank on the Rocky Mountain Front is acquisition of a property. Most of the original grassbanks, such as Malpai, have had significant public agency involvement and rely in large part on public lands. Or, they capitalize on a newly purchased TNC preserve. In the case of the Front, there are no large chunks of public lands available for grazing. And TNC has long standing relationships and leases with neighboring ranchers who are already utilizing grass on the preserve. The Advisory Committee is therefore interested in TNC purchasing a property for use as a grassbank or creating an innovative arrangement or set of arrangements with new large landowners.

Purchase of a grassbank by TNC would likely cost several million dollars, money that may not be forthcoming, from foundations or private individuals, in the wake of the current stock market downturn. The other option is to work with new large landowners to obtain use of their properties for grassbanks. A landowner who owns a property primarily for recreation values would enter into a lease to allow their property to be utilized for the project (this new large landowner would not necessarily be a member of the Advisory Committee). It is in the arena of newcomer large landowner participation that the Advisory Committee is actively exploring new kinds of property ownership models. They have discussed different arrangements involving the
property owner, TNC, and grassbank participants in leasing and purchase of various property rights. The new large landowner receives "local management, knowledge, and expertise applied" to their ranch. Newcomers would likely receive management of fencing and weeds, along with the benefits of limited grazing on their property. It would also be possible to exchange recreational access on a participating ranch property in exchange for forage. TNC is working on creative policy solutions that would provide flexibility and financial incentives to newcomers to participate.

The Advisory Committee does have a small pilot project, a mini grassbank (360 acres) that has been running for two years with two adjacent newcomer landowners. One rancher who is on the Advisory Committee is resting home ground in exchange for access to grass on this property. He has provided fencing and weed management for the property owners. While clearly a benefit to this particular rancher and grasslands on his home ranch, the Advisory Committee has their sights on a much larger property (probably 5,000 acres or larger) where several ranchers could participate. To date, none of the newcomers with large properties in the study site have agreed to participate.

While a large, ideal property is not currently available, the Advisory Committee is doing everything possible to prepare for eventual establishment of the grassbank. They have selected a monitoring system endorsed by numerous organizations in Montana, held a training session for landowners, and established monitoring on the mini-grassbank property and the participating rancher's property. They have come up with a detailed process for selecting participants, including specific criteria, an application process, and a selection committee. They have a model lease and management agreement crafted for the mini-grassbank. They have conducted a detailed economic analysis to determine what kind of property would work best and how to make the grassbank financially self-sufficient. They are determined to cover operating costs through the actual operation of the grassbank and not to succumb to the pitfalls that may close some existing grassbanks.
Much of this work capitalizes on the expertise, in the areas of law, finances, ranch management, and biology, of Advisory Committee members. The group contracts to individuals for detailed analysis. Subcommittee work is volunteer. Local knowledge and priorities are embedded in each of these efforts.

Criteria for selecting participants focuses on conservation and community benefits, broadly defined. The Advisory Committee is defining the collective or public good through this process. While ranchers on the Advisory Committee may hope to participate, it is clear that there is a higher or more important goal - stabilizing family ranching in the area and promoting good land stewardship. Several ranchers told me that they themselves do not need to participate for the grassbank to succeed. One rancher expressed this sentiment.

My personal feeling right now is that I want it to work so much that I don’t...I have less interest that I profit from it personally. I feel like maybe I won’t get as rich as somebody else, but I really, really want this to work and mine will come to me some other way, some other time. That’s kind of how I feel about it.

Ranchers are participating in the grassbank effort partly out of self-interest, but also in an effort to further community goals. Note that collective benefits are defined very locally, in terms of the specific landscape and communities in the study site, not in terms of what will benefit Americans or the population as a whole. Committee members want to expand conservation on the Front, improve the local economy, and “support the local community in the long-term.” As one participant put it “for our community to do well, all of our community needs to do well.”

Advisory Committee members are also conscious that their work may have broader implications. In fact, they hope to provide a model to other communities. Again, however, the scale is community level, even when applied beyond the Rocky Mountain Front.

Within the study site, participants would like to provide an example to other people in the area. According to one participant,

I think it’s something that you can point to as a small group in the big picture of having a successful working relationship between environmental concerns, agencies, and private landowners to help private property owners survive, maintain the historic use and aesthetic values of the private property adjoining wilderness areas and, third, of giving
the public something to feel good about. I mean, those things. But I don't see the whole Rocky Mountain Front being in a grass bank. I see a little pocket here and a little pocket there and hopefully, if that's successful, maybe there will be offshoots that may not be called grass banking, but maybe some ranchers will get together in their grazing associations and take into consideration the crop rotation and the wildlife uses and so on, to enhance both their market value of their property and better use of the land. So that's what I see is, good p.r. and perhaps some good economic slash environmental working relationships.

In the context of grassbank property, ranchers in the group have repeatedly raised concerns about community relations. How this property is perceived by residents is key to grassbank success, especially if the group hopes to expand rancher participation in the future. Certain properties available for purchase have been questioned because of their wildlife populations or water rights. For example, one ranch is close to Choteau and provides the corridor through which grizzly bears move into town. Many ranchers on the committee felt that utilizing this ranch as a grassbank could be a public relations disaster. Another ranch sits at the center of a contentious water rights dispute. Ranchers are also concerned about public hunting access. If the grassbank provided some public access for recreational purposes it would go a long way toward securing community support.

One of the key questions, however, is whether the grassbank is for ranchers who are already practicing sustainable ranching and want to make further improvements on their property, or whether the grassbank should be used to entice ranchers with poor management practices to institute conservation measures. Advisory Committee members have voiced concerns that providing access to additional grass to ranchers whose profit margin outweighs all other considerations may just encourage them to purchase additional cattle. At the same time, participants agree that increasing herd size to a profitable level may be the way to stabilize ranchers in the area.

They say now 250 cows isn’t big enough for a family to survive on so you need 4-500 cows is kind of the range. And I don’t necessarily agree with that but that’s what most people say. Well, in this area, how do you go from 250 to 400? You can’t go out and compete against the out of state buyers to buy more land so my hope…and this is why I’m really interested in this grass banking concept we’ve been talking about at the Conservancy is my hope is that I think it’s inevitable we’re going to see more out of state
buyers come in, buy up these big ranches and so the only way I can see that that can benefit the local ranchers, or one of the ways, I should say is if we can get our grass bank concept or get some kind of structure in place in where a local rancher who needs more grass can go to one of those individuals and say I’ll take on the management, I’ll get all that headache out of your way but I need to be able to graze your ground. And not only would that be good for the ranching community but that would also be healthy for the ground itself rather than just let it sit idle.

Current Advisory Committee documents stipulate that the grassbank is for “ranchers using long-term sustainable grazing practices” (Rocky Mountain Front Grassbank Document). However, I suspect that this discussion will continue within the Committee as a grassbank is established and begins to operate.

There is also the question of how sustainable ranching will be defined, a question the Advisory Committee has addressed to some extent. There seems to be agreement amongst ranchers in the group about which area ranchers manage sustainably. In other words, ranchers are looking at locally agreed upon indicators that have not been explicitly acknowledged to determine sustainability. At the same time, ranchers and other participants recognize the need for scientific documentation of range conditions and other ecological indicators. To this end they have established a monitoring program.

In many ways, the grassbank is a response to the newcomer landownership change, low beef prices, and ongoing drought discussed elsewhere in this dissertation. Newcomer large landowners are seen by many ranchers as a threat to community, ranching livelihood, and conservation. But ranchers are often at a loss about how to address this seemingly unstoppable tide of migrants purchasing large properties in the study site. The grassbank seeks to stem this tide by capitalizing on it. As one rancher described,

I sense it’s a group that’s come together and they want to do something but they aren’t sure exactly what it was they want to do and we kind of stumbled across this grass banking. And that’s kind of caught our interest because I think of what we’ve already talked about, we can see...the ranchers on the committee can see that the ownership of our landscape is going to change and if we don’t do something proactively to meet and greet that change, that we’re just, we’re going to be out in the cold as far as having access to that ground or even preserving it for the cultural or economic aspects of it. So right now, our focus seems to be going towards the grass bank, but I think the whole idea behind the grass bank is not just to keep cattle on those grounds but we see that as a real
feasible way to leverage maybe a small number of acres across a broad piece of the landscape where you can maybe instead of impacting one or two ranches, you can get several ranchers using that grass bank and get them to endorse certain conservation practices that in the long run are probably healthy for them anyway. Some of them might already be doing it and don’t even realize it.

The grassbank is specifically designed to capitalize on this landownership change and harness newcomer lands for the stabilization of existing ranchers. It is a response that does not attempt to stop the tide of newcomers directly, but seeks to use their presence to the advantage of ranchers. If these ranchers are more financially stable, they may be less likely to sell their properties, which would indirectly limit the number of landownership changes in the area.

The grassbank also responds to newcomer change without violating strongly held concepts of private property rights. Instead of becoming caught in the conundrum of rights versus regulation, the Advisory Committee’s approach builds on private property customs, recognizes ranchers’ livelihood concerns, and capitalizes on the flexibility of private property arrangements.

The grassbank might also provide a way to integrate new landowners into the community and encourage them to work with neighbors on cross-boundary management issues. The extent to which this has occurred with the mini-grassbank is unknown. The owners visit these properties only occasionally.

Clearly the biggest hurdle on the path to a successful grassbank is the acquisition of the property itself, either through outright purchase or through convincing newcomers with suitable land to participate. The Advisory Committee has worked hard on the requisite economic analyses, management plans, monitoring systems, selection processes, and other decision-making mechanisms that need to be in place to take advantage of an opportunity. In short, they are ready to move forward on a larger scale.

Whether or not the Advisory Committee will be able to entice new large landowner to participate remains to be seen. To date they have only convinced two smaller newcomer landowners of the benefits of participation. It is unclear whether the Advisory Committee’s
assumption that land management services rendered by participating ranchers would benefit new large landowners is correct. New large landowners in the study site tend to be wealthy and readily hire fulltime property managers. Given the fact that nearly every new large landowner has a fulltime manager in residence on their property, they may not require additional land management services. Because of the limited (and currently absent) participation of newcomers on the Advisory Committee, the group may not have an accurate view of newcomer interests. And, newcomer concerns about privacy may stand in the way of participation. On the other hand, newcomer concerns for the environment and the close relationship that many newcomers have with the Nature Conservancy may persuade these landowners to participate for ethical reasons.

Furthermore, whether or not the Advisory Committee’s goal of making a grassbank economically self-sufficient, with no financial inputs required for operating costs, is actually possible has not yet been determined, although economic analyses support this goal.

**Future Potential of the Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee**

Advisory Committee members see the potential of the group as far greater than the grassbank and weed efforts. Members would like to see the Committee serve the broader agricultural community in the study site. Some believe they might have a potential role advising Fish and Wildlife Service on local endangered species management. At some point the Committee will likely pursue niche marketing of beef. One rancher described the range of activities she would like to see the group involved in.

You’ve read about Malpai and what they’ve done. And I guess to a lesser degree I’d like to see this group do similar things for the ranching community that Malpai has done. I’d like to see it be an example of how when ranchers cooperate the benefit, it’s exponential because ranchers so often do everything individually and here, even us, Chuck’s going to get 80 AUMs because he sat in this group, for free. I mean, that to me is a big deal. We’re going to be able to support legislation, we’re going to be able to even propose legislation potentially that’s going to help hundreds, maybe thousands of other people. We’re going to set an example. We’re going to potentially be marketing things differently, so it’s mostly that example, providing an example of how you could do things differently and cooperatively that would benefit this much much larger group. And that’s what I’m hoping is that we will show that by thinking outside the box and cooperating, that we’ve
set a new model for how you can ranch. And it serves both a conservation and an economic purpose. That it’s not all economics, it’s more than that. It’s giving something back, taking care of things.

Many Advisory Committee members talked about creating models and examples that other ranchers both within and outside of the study site could draw on, particularly examples that show how environmentalists and ranchers can work together. One rancher described how a successful grassbank would assist the group in providing a positive model.

If we can pull this grassbank thing off and it’s productive and positive, I can see that as maybe being a group that both sides can come to maybe initiate discussion or projects or practices because you kind of have that barrier between the ranchers and the conservation community which I think is kind of silly, but it’s there. I think if the ranching community could see our group and have some degree of trust or faith in us and the same with the conservation community, then maybe we could accommodate or facilitate some of those kind of things on a broader scope beside just the grass bank project. But I think for that to happen, I think we’ve got to be able to make this grass bank thing work or even if it doesn’t work, we’ve got to do it in such a way that we’re very open and honest with both sides and this is our goal, this is what we want to do, if you want to be part of it great, if not, that’s okay too.

Another participant described the transition away from polarization toward working together.

I think it’s a good springboard for creating acceptance in our local community of some of the environmental groups. See, we’ve had such splitting, such, almost animosity, against outsiders coming in and dictating and then having that reinforced by blind uncaring government regulation with no sensitivity to the concerns of local people, that we’ve had to just chew back this very gradually to the point where local people are now realizing that the fact that you’re from the Nature Conservancy or that you’re from the Montana Wilderness Association or that you’re from some other conservation group does not mean you’re an enemy. It just means that you have a different view on life than they might have.

He sees the Advisory Committee as a “springboard” for mending some of these rifts.

For the Nature Conservancy, the Advisory Committee provides a source of constant, coordinated community input. One TNC staffperson described this process.

I think, for me, it’s that constant feedback because these guys have all reached the point where they’re very candid. They may not always tell me in a meeting, but they’ll let me know afterwards what they think... They’ll challenge me on things I say. It’s good. It’s usually very good feedback and so it helps me adapt my program to be more community-based to reflect the community’s feelings. In other words, our easements are evolving, they’re always evolving. And so the terms we put into those easements change and so I feel like we’re always polishing that apple and making it better and brighter and they’re helping to do that. Certainly, I wouldn’t go to the Fish & Wildlife Service and say, yeah, you guys ought to see about designating this as a site you can spend money in without
having them come talk to the group. So I think just their advice is great and I think there are a lot of potentials out there that we don’t even know about yet. More community stability, cultural stability and that match of new owners and old owners.

The Advisory Committee is acting as a valuable sounding board for TNC and for other organizations.

In short, participants are willing to work hard for the Advisory Committee because it provides a sense of possibility and hope. The group provides a structure for these individuals to work together. This structure does not mandate or ensure cooperation, but it capitalizes on already present leanings toward collaboration and creates a positive sense of obligation and reciprocation amongst the group.

That said, the Advisory Committee faces several important challenges. While seemingly solid, this group is still in the early stages of group development. Whether or not they will retain momentum in the absence of large-scale tangible successes, such as the proposed grassbank, remains to be seen. Hopefully, if the grassbank project does not succeed or fails to get off the ground, committee members will find other projects through which they can implement their innovative approach to livelihood and conservation, property and boundaries, and the public interest on the ground. Another challenge the Advisory Committee may face is increased public scrutiny. When local communities become more aware of the Advisory Committee and its efforts, there may be considerable pressure from opponents to abandon the effort. It is my assessment that the Advisory Committee is unlikely to implode as the Frontlanders did; they are too committed and invested to give up easily in the face of community pressure. However, such pressure may cause tensions both within the group and for individual participants.

Continued Nature Conservancy support is probably critical to the group’s success. TNC has thus far provided the basic infrastructure for the group. While local staff appear very committed to the Advisory Committee and the grassbank project, national priorities may shift. TNC, locally and nationally, was not always supportive of ranchers, and did not always view livestock production as potentially compatible with their conservation goals. The TNC focus on
communities and ranchers is likely to be essential to the continuance and success of the Advisory Committee.

Questions of participation and membership may become more critical in the next few years. Whether or not agency staff should formally participate in the Advisory Committee has not been determined. Participants may continue to resist government participation for numerous reasons. They may want to retain the flexibility they currently enjoy, unhampered by bureaucratic constraints. They may also fear that they will have to sacrifice some private property rights if they work closely with agency staff (as Brunson suggests is the case). However, in the long-term, meaningful cross-boundary work in an area with checkerboard ownership will have to involve government agencies in some way. The Advisory Committee may be able to partner with public land managers on specific projects and initiatives, without inviting them to be formal members.

It is also unclear whether or not Advisory Committee members feel that newcomer participation is essential. And there is the question of how to involve newcomers. The Advisory Committee may provide a way to integrate these newcomers into the larger community. However, because the vast majority of these landowners are absentee their personal participation is unlikely. There has been little discussion within the Advisory Committee about whether or not ranch managers might suffice in these situations.

At this point, the Advisory Committee may be succeeding, to the extent that participants have ownership of the process and the proposed projects, and believe their efforts meet their respective needs, because they are exclusive. In other words, the lack of publicity and the selective membership has provided a space somewhat insulated from local politics within which participants have developed trust and nurtured creativity. Examined through the lens of collaboration, the Advisory Committee is violating the very important principle of inclusiveness. Inclusiveness is often critical to obtain the buy-in of a variety of stakeholders, many of whom can exercise veto power over proposals if not involved. However, in this case, the Advisory

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Committee has proceeded without much concern for inclusiveness, deliberately failing to invite key stakeholders to the table. Because they are focused primarily on private lands, the excluded stakeholders (including newcomers, members of the Montanas for Private Property Rights, agency staff, and other environmental groups) have little formal power over decisions. In other words, because, to date, there are no formal policy proposals emerging from the Advisory Committee, there is no avenue within which to oppose their work. Of course, public scrutiny and local political pressure can be powerful, as was the case for the Frontlanders attempt.

If the Advisory Committee succeeds in part because they fail to adhere to the principles of collaboration, what does that say about the collaborative process? Are there certain situations where collaboration might cause more problems than it might solve? Proponents of collaboration have long argued that collaborative processes are not always appropriate and that decision-making mechanisms should be specific to particular natural resource issues. At the very least, the example of the Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee alerts us to the possibility that, in some cases, less collaborative approaches may achieve certain positive results in the short term.

The other important question regarding membership is the extent to which the Advisory Committee is asked, by the Nature Conservancy and other entities, to represent local communities. In other words, can the Advisory Committee speak for residents or area ranchers as a whole? They make no claims to represent the larger community, but to some extent the Nature Conservancy and Fish and Wildlife Service treat them as if they represent a larger constituency. Whether membership and participation will provide surmountable challenges or formidable obstacles remains to be seen.

**Linking to National and State Policy-Making**

While thus far I have argued that the Advisory Committee conceptualizes public interest largely at the local level, this is not to say that they neglect decision-making processes outside of the study site. Participants view both horizontal and vertical linkages as essential to their work.
They are aware of and actively learning from community-level initiatives taking place elsewhere in the West, such as the Malpai Borderlands Group. This kind of horizontal linkage – community to community – was essential for the demonstration of tangible outcomes from cross-boundary cooperation. As described earlier, participants hope to provide a model for ranching communities elsewhere in the West.

Vertical linkages are also important to their work, and there is the real potential for the Advisory Committee to influence state and national level policy-making. In some cases, local level initiatives require state or national policy changes. There are several policy changes that would enable the grassbank project to move forward, most related to tax law. If national tax law allowed for a private individual to donate grass to a non-profit and count it as a charitable donation (which is currently prohibited), there would be significant financial incentives for newcomer large landowners to participate in grassbank projects. TNC is aware of this problem and keeps the Advisory Committee apprised of any movement to amend national tax code accordingly. Advisory Committee members also provide TNC with ideas about how to put pressure on particular members of Congress to achieve this change. There has also been some discussion of state level property tax changes. This would likely involve recategorizing newcomer property as agricultural (as opposed to recreational) if they participated in the grassbank, thereby lowering their tax burden substantially.

At other times, external groups or agencies approach the Advisory Committee for assistance with moving legislation forward. The Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has engaged the Advisory Committee in a series of discussions about easements on the Rocky Mountain Front since early 2001. FWS would like to establish a grassland easement program in the area. This requires Congressional designation of the study site as a project area and allocation of funds through the Land and Water Conservation program. The agency approached the Advisory Committee initially to assess local support for such a program. Because TNC has been unable to purchase easements from all interested landowners, TNC staff and many ranchers believe that
bringing in additional resources for easements is necessary. The Advisory Committee was originally skeptical but eventually decided to support the project. FWS then approached the group to ask them to generate local support. They argued that the project would only be approved and funded by Congress if Senator Conrad Burns and other Montana Congressmen were persuaded that local people supported the initiative. The Committee was reluctant to be publicly vocal about the project, but agreed to meet with County Commissioners and to write letters. FWS view the Advisory Committee as their entrée into the ranching community because this is the only organized group of ranchers working on conservation issues in the area. Again, this brings up the issue of whether the Advisory Committee can and should speak for local communities as a whole.

In still other cases, the Advisory Committee interacts with national or state policy-making by providing TNC with advice on specific legislative or other policy proposals, which are sometimes provided as fulltext to participants. TNC recently asked the Committee how they should respond to the Lewis and Clark National Forest proposed Travel Plan governing motorized recreation on Forest Service lands. TNC also asked for input on how to interact with agencies and corporations regarding oil and gas development. TNC asked the group for feedback on the Montana State Department of Natural Resources proposal to create a land bank that would allow sale of state lands to private individuals. TNC also requested input on two Congressional initiatives to change tax code regarding conservation easements. Most recently, TNC alerted Advisory Committee members to potentially problematic changes to Montana’s state easement law. Committee members were invited to contact local representatives and provided with the fulltext legislative proposal. Several ranchers testified before a state legislative committee about the proposal. In all of these cases, TNC staff appeared to take seriously the recommendations of Committee members and agreed to convey suggestions or concerns to appropriate TNC decision-makers. In the case of local Forest Service decisions or Montana state policies, I suspect these TNC staff have some influence. Whether or not Committee critiques of national level easement
changes will be influential in Washington, D.C. policy-making circles remains to be seen. However, prior to the formation of the Advisory Committee these ranchers had no inside avenue through which they could provide feedback to decision-makers, except through traditional channels such as letter writing or membership in stockgrowers associations.

At times, TNC simply updates that Committee on particular legislative initiatives, such as the Grassland Reserve Program, currently being pursued as a sister program to CRP that would keep lands in production agriculture while providing financial incentives to preserve native grasslands. In this manner, ranchers are kept apprised of policies that may affect them through participation with the Advisory Committee.

The Advisory Committee potentially provides a voice for ranchers to influence policy-making at the state and national levels. And, while they are focused on the community and landscape-levels, their work may depend on national or state level legislative efforts. As one rancher in the group excitedly put it, “we’re going to be able to support legislation, we’re going to be able to even propose legislation potentially that’s going to help hundreds, maybe thousands of other people.”

Conclusion

While collaboration across boundaries is often touted as an essential component of ecosystem management, different people have different ideas about and approaches to such efforts. Forest Service staff interviewed for this project focused almost exclusively on information “exchange” as the primary feature of the collaboration that accompanied ecosystem management. They emphasized data management and sharing, technical expertise, and science, defining themselves as the keepers of this information. In many cases Forest Service information “exchange” with private landowners was conceptualized as a one-way transfer of information from the agency to the landowner. While agency staff claimed to value collaboration, their work
with private landowners appeared to be limited to interactions over shared fencelines, grazing permits, and traditional NEPA-style public participation processes.

In the Community Land Use Survey, residents demonstrated some support for collaboration between public land management agencies and private property owners. Interview results revealed that many different people support such efforts, but that support is buffered by skepticism and some outright opposition. Ranchers were concerned about infringement on private property rights and their own abilities to overcome their independent nature. Environmentalists were concerned about compromise.

While not necessarily a collaborative (as defined in the literature), the Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee does provide an example of successful cross-boundary work that incorporates private property owners. The group both capitalizes on and challenges important trends, practices, and ideologies in the study site. The Advisory Committee seeks to provide economic opportunity to stabilize existing ranchers, thus stemming landownership changes in the area. One of the means to do so, the grassbank, capitalizes on these very changes because it may rely on newcomer participation for acquisition of a grassbank property.

The Advisory Committee works within existing ideas about private property because they are not seeking regulatory or punitive solutions to conservation or development. Instead, they capitalize on neighborly social obligations through small-scale weed programs. They address landscape-level issues, such as weeds or subdivision, by redefining boundaries, in keeping with local social traditions. They define public interest in terms of local communities and the local landscape. The scale of the collective may be critical to their motivation and their sense of accomplishment.

However, because Advisory Committee purposefully excludes specific groups of people, they do not meet the widely accepted definition of a collaborative. To the extent that they succeed in bringing together different stakeholders (primarily the Nature Conservancy and a range of ranchers who are receptive to working with them), they raise important questions about
collaborative processes. The Advisory Committee appears to succeed in part because of their exclusivity. They have avoided the scrutiny of potential opponents and naysayers, and created a space for building relationships and developing on the ground projects. Because they focus on private lands, they do not violate the law through their selective membership. What this means for the applicability of collaborative ideals to private property conservation is an open question.

The Advisory Committee has demonstrated how creative forms of property might resolve tensions between private rights and the public interest. A grassbank, in the case of the Rocky Mountain Front, would be an interesting hybrid property. It would be entirely privately owned and managed. However, collective goals and decision-making would prevail. The public interest in this property would take the form of community priorities. In some senses it would be more akin to a local commons, than to public lands.

The Advisory Committee has also been successful in integrating conservation and livelihood goals. In fact, these are so intertwined in the mission and common vision of this group, they are rarely, if ever, seen in opposition. It is assumed that these are compatible, although participants are not naïve about unsustainable ranching practices. The grassbank and the weed work simultaneously address ecology and economics.

Despite their early successes, the Advisory Committee may face substantial challenges. Acquiring a grassbank property will be difficult. Persuading newcomers that they are part of a larger community, both socially and ecologically, may be a challenge. Participants are obviously cautious about community relations and outreach to other landowners. Hopefully they are correct in their assessment that local communities are more receptive to collaborative efforts today as compared with 10 years ago when the Frontlanders experiment failed. The group’s focus on tangible outcomes as opposed to ideological conversion will position them for a constructive debate when they do “go public” at some point.

Much of the ecosystem management literature has an implicit or explicit public lands focus, despite some calls for incorporation of private lands. In the case of the Rocky Mountain
Front, creativity and innovation in conservation across boundaries are coming largely from private landowners, not federal or state agencies. Even within the constraints of private property, these landowners may have more legal and procedural flexibility than government agencies. Instead of private property presenting a barrier to conservation across boundaries, as many advocates suggest, it may present an opportunity for creativity.

Perhaps the greater challenge on the Rocky Mountain Front is incorporating public agencies into cross-boundary initiatives. Thus far, anti-government sentiment and prior collaborative failures have prevented participants from including agency staff in the Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee. However, at the same time, Forest Service staff do not define collaboration as joint problem solving and decision-making. Agencies may need to move beyond the “information exchange” definition of ecosystem management before they can successfully join the innovative efforts being pursued in the study site. At the same time, ranchers may need to allow the agency into the private lands discussion by reigning in suspicion and encouraging participation.

Whether the Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee and their work represent a new discourse, a new way of thinking about property, livelihood, and conservation and a new approach to solving natural resource issues that cross-boundaries, remains to be seen. The Advisory Committee is certainly part of a larger movement, coined the “radical center,” which seeks tangible solutions that work toward conservation and community level economic development. This movement challenges the private property rights advocates who argue that the Nature Conservancy is a “runaway predator” and a “destructive” “beast” (see Findley, 2003). It also challenges the environmentalists who view livestock production as wholly incompatible with preservation of landscapes and biodiversity. Whether or not the Advisory Committee and similar groups can forge a different path, an approach that makes a meaningful, tangible difference in rancher’s lives and on the ground, will depend the efforts and support of ranchers, environmentalists, and policy-makers.
Chapter 11: Implications and Recommendations: Research, Policy, and Cross-Boundary Conservation

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the implications and recommendations that follow from the research results detailed in this dissertation. I begin by discussing the role of the case study approach - how this dissertation focuses on the Rocky Mountain Front and has broader implications for rural communities, policy-making, and social theory. I then reexamine my research framework, reassessing what was learned from each aspect of this approach.

I review the research results reported in previous chapters and outline eight key findings from the dissertation as a whole. I then discuss how to build the bridges required by cross-boundary conservation, raising questions and challenges, and providing suggestions where applicable. Next, I propose specific policy initiatives to facilitate effective work across boundaries, integrating livelihood and conservation at appropriate scales. I also revisit the challenges and opportunities posed by the work of the Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee. I close this chapter with an exploration of future research opportunities and challenges.

Understanding Research Findings: Discursive Communities and the Case Study Approach

The Rocky Mountain Front is clearly contested terrain. Different groups of people have different perspectives on the identity of the landscape, the appropriateness of ranching, the role of newcomers, the meaning of boundaries and property rights, the legitimacy of the state and national policy-making, the relationship between conservation and livelihood, and the role of collaboration. Throughout this dissertation I have examined different discourses related to the
politics of cross-boundary conservation on the Rocky Mountain Front. These discourses are more than concepts or ideas; discourses connect meaning and material interests in political struggles. Discourses are political because different groups of people promote particular discourses in efforts to influence public opinion, policy, and land management. The discourse that comes to dominate over time tends to benefit a particular group of people and have specific consequences for particular places.

Wherever possible I connect these discourses to specific groups of people: ranchers, environmentalists, agency staff, newcomers, and others. In many cases I found clear patterns; certain groups of people belonged to specific discursive communities. For example, ranchers were nearly always strong supporters of private property rights. However, in other cases the overlap was imperfect. The discourse of compatibility, which suggests that ranching and conservation can coexist, had adherents amongst environmentalists, ranchers, and policymakers, but no one group of people consistently held this viewpoint. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that no category of people is monolithic and diversity exists within each of the groups described. There are always exceptions – individuals or subcultures who think and act differently from their peers. Furthermore, people are dynamic; they change over time; they respond to new circumstances, political opportunities, and emerging discourses.

It is also critical that readers understand the case study approach of this dissertation. The case study allows for in-depth exploration of social phenomena and results that can be understood within a particular context and inform broader social theories. The communities and landowners on the Rocky Mountain Front are both unique and emblematic in the Intermountain West. These communities are situated adjacent to the largest Wilderness complex in the Lower 48, and within the last place where grizzly bears utilize prairie habitat and an area that may hold significant oil and gas reserves. Residents find themselves increasingly in the national spotlight, as environmental groups, national level agency officials and policy-makers, and oil and gas interests focus on the area’s unique attributes, and work to legitimize their visions for the future.
in policy decisions. The struggle for the future of the Rocky Mountain Front has been elevated into a national discussion that further politicizes and polarizes conflicts over ranching, subdivision, wildlife management, and any number of natural resource issues. This national spotlight may lend a certain distinctiveness to the politics of cross-boundary conservation on the Rocky Mountain Front.

Like many Western landscapes, the Rocky Mountain Front is just now beginning to experience the land use and cultural changes that accompany an influx of newcomers. Emerging studies on rural change in the West also found tensions over in-migration and newcomers (Nelson, 2001). Private property rights discourse among ranchers in the study site also has much in common with writings published in popular ranching publications such as Range Magazine and Agrinews. The growing number of grassbank efforts, ranchland groups, and working landscape proposals indicate that the intersections of rural change, ranching livelihood, and conservation are important throughout the region and elsewhere. In fact, participants in the Malpai Borderlands Group in Arizona and the Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee in Montana exchanged a series of personal letters exploring their long-held animosity toward federal agencies and environmental groups. These individuals, at opposite ends of the country, confirmed the common fears and hopes they had regarding cross-boundary cooperation. In short, the findings of this dissertation should be viewed both within the context of the Rocky Mountain Front and within the larger contexts of environmental policy-making in the U.S. and rural change and conservation in the Intermountain West.

Revisiting the Research Framework

Earlier in this dissertation I describe the research framework that I forged from the theories of poststructuralism, place, and political ecology -- the framework I utilize to investigate research questions about the politics of cross-boundary conservation on the Rocky Mountain
Front. I now revisit the major aspects of this framework and how each influenced the dissertation.

This research was grounded in a particular place, a set of communities and a landscape known as the Rocky Mountain Front. The challenges and opportunities of the case study approach are examined above and in Chapter 4. The research framework I crafted also required analysis at multiple scales. During interviews with residents I asked what kinds of broader economic and political trends affected them and their communities. I became familiar with the national and international level policies, trends, and programs that residents discussed during the interviews, from rancher dissatisfaction with the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association to the price of hay during drought years. I also interviewed individuals involved in policy-making or discourse production related to the study site at the regional and national levels. All of these research activities allowed me to better understand the politics of cross-boundary conservation in the study site. For instance, I learned how drought, the meat packer monopoly, international trade, the price of beef, and South American livestock production all interacted to squeeze ranchers economically and reduce resources available for weed management on particular properties. I gained knowledge of how regional wilderness politics and media coverage affected the image and public lands politics of the Rocky Mountain Front, and how the local private property rights movement was responding, in part, to this outside attention to the area. I addressed the challenge of potentially unlimited regional and national level information by focusing on those trends and policies that research participants identified as important, and on the environmental groups, agency decisions, and media outlets that I deemed most relevant to the questions at hand. The focus on multiple scales ensured that I did not ignore a range of factors that research participants identified as affecting cross-boundary conservation in the area.

This dissertation research focused, in part, on the discourses generated by different groups of people. For my interviews, I focused on landowners (ranchers and newcomers), public land managers, environmentalists, and other individuals affected by or involved in natural
resource issues in the study site. My goal in focusing on these groups of people was to understand the key players in cross-boundary conservation – those who own, control, or manage land in the study site, and those who work to influence policy and discourse regarding the management of land in the study site. Because I targeted specific groups, I was able to obtain in-depth information about their perspectives. I interviewed a large number of ranchers with a range of perspectives, of different generations and genders, with larger and smaller properties, including community leaders and marginalized loners, private property rights activists and ranchers with easements. I was able to interview a substantial number of regional wilderness advocates and Nature Conservancy staff. I also interviewed nearly all of the newcomers with large properties in the study site.

Furthermore, focusing on different kinds of people, as opposed to one group, meant that many different perspectives and discourses became part of this research. Ranchers told me what they believed newcomers thought about the area and how they managed their properties, and I was able to ask newcomers about those topics directly. Residents accused environmentalists of popularizing the place-name Rocky Mountain Front and I was able to confirm their suspicion through interviews with regional wilderness advocates. I avoided the paralysis of “he said, she said” by making judgments in this conclusion that are grounded in the research results and my research framework, which makes certain assumptions about social justice, environmental preservation, and sustainability.

My research framework also required analysis and integration of material interests and power. I obtained information on landownership change and economic and population trends in the study site, and focused on the livelihood concerns of ranchers and the class differences between newcomers and other residents. I did not, however, generate new data on economic or biological trends in the study site, nor did I focus on the ecological literature on the environmental impacts of ranching. I focused primarily on how material interests, such as livelihood concerns, intersected with different discourses.
In my research framework I assume unequal access to resources, but I do not presume that a particular group of people had more political power than another. Research results indicate that different groups of people had power in different arenas at different moments in time. For example, during the 1980s, wilderness advocates in Great Falls influenced the media portrayal of the Rocky Mountain Front. During the late 1990s, environmentalists affected Forest Service decisions at the regional and national levels. At times, ranchers have had considerable power over Montana legislative decision-making. Newcomers clearly have economic power based on their significant financial resources. Ranchers have considerable power in the arena of cross-boundary conservation because they own most private lands in the study site. Newcomers are increasingly powerful in this arena as well. At the national level, the state exerts power through environmental policy and public lands management. Different groups of people have power in the national policy-making arena depending on the composition of Congress and the politics of the Administration. With regard to power, I found investigation of the shifting nature and multiple types of power particularly revealing.

I also experienced some tension between the goal of examining politics on one hand, and making recommendations to improve policy and management on the other. Examining politics requires understanding and investigating the conflicts inherent in natural resource management. In some situations, diverging interests severely limit opportunities for consensus and collaboration. Finding common ground and reaching agreement are not always possible. Certain positions simply do not leave room for negotiation. For example, extreme private property rights advocates may resist all policies affecting private lands and refuse to participate in cross-boundary work with nonrancher owners such as newcomers and public land managers. At the other end of the spectrum, environmentalists who believe that cattle are wholly inappropriate in the American West may resist programs to work with ranchers and make ranching more sustainable. Natural resource politics are unavoidable and there will always be intractable conflicts. In making recommendations for management and policy I pointed out places where
mutual interests would be served by particular policies or programs. Some common ground must be identified for different kinds of people to work together across boundaries. At the same time, I was explicit about the places where these opportunities did not exist, and where conflict and polarization limited the potential for cross-boundary work. This optimism with politics reveals points of potential engagement and mutual interest without ignoring intractable conflicts.

A Summary of Results

Before moving into implications and recommendations, I summarize the key findings from this dissertation. These are organized below in the order described in this dissertation.

• The study site is experiencing some in-migration, rural subdivision, landownership change, and rural gentrification, although not at the rapid pace of some other areas of the Intermountain West. Overall, lands are slowly shifting from a production to a consumption emphasis. In the last century, public land designations and decisions have largely favored wilderness, recreation, and wildlife conservation. Private lands have been acquired by the state and various non-profits for the purposes of wildlife conservation. Increasing subdivision and the purchase of large properties by wealthy absentee owners have also removed lands from agricultural production and have increased the price of land. Despite these changes, the vast majority of private lands in the study site remain in production agriculture and are owned by resident ranch families.

• The name and location of the Rocky Mountain Front are contested. The name Rocky Mountain Front was popularized by a group of nonresident wilderness advocates in an effort to further particular goals for public lands in the area. Some residents resist this name because they disagree with the political agenda they believe it symbolizes. Despite some disgruntlement and outright opposition to the name, most residents refer to the area as the Rocky Mountain Front. The boundaries of the area are also not agreed upon. Boundaries appear to be moving eastward as environmentalists and agencies “follow” wildlife onto private lands. Interestingly, many residents, ranchers and nonranchers, regard the area as encompassing all private lands to the highways, including the towns of Choteau, Bynum, Augusta, and Dupuyer. When people refer to the Rocky Mountain Front in public forums, there may be substantial confusion about what lands they are referring to, potentially increasing contention about particular policy proposals.

• Different people also define the area differently, attaching different images and meanings to the study site. They essentially see different places when they imagine the Rocky Mountain Front. Everyone interviewed regarded the area as beautiful. However, in general, newcomers, environmentalists (resident and nonresident) and many agency staff focused on wildness and wildlife, and heritage and the west. They described longing for a lost past of ecological integrity, native species, Indian and frontier history, and the American West. Residents, including ranchers, usually defined the area in terms of both social and biological attributes. They identified strongly with and valued the mountains,
but also described the area in terms of the friendly, rural communities, and the working, agricultural landscape. There are, in a sense, two Rocky Mountain Fronts – one, wild and uninhabited, the other a working, agricultural landscape of rural communities – in the same physical location.

• The meaning and image, and the very definition of the Rocky Mountain Front are contested. There are different discourses, or coalitions of meaning, about the Rocky Mountain Front. These discourses are political because they are connected to ideas about legitimate use (or nonuse), goals for the future of the area, and, in some cases, specific policy agendas. The level of national interest in and scrutiny of the Rocky Mountain Front invests this area with a highly politicized symbolism, and the struggle for the future here is both discursive (involving contests over meaning and image) and material (involving contests over land and resources, and livelihood).

• Despite the seeming incompatibility of these two discourses about the Rocky Mountain Front – one wild and uninhabited, the other a working agricultural landscape – there may be a third discourse that merges the two. Certain individuals, including some ranchers and environmentalists, suggested that their visions were compatible. They argued for the preservation of wildlife and ranching, of open space and livelihood, and of conservation and production.

• Residents, including ranchers, were concerned about the rapid and seemingly inevitable transfer of large properties to wealthy newcomers. They argued that absenteeism and different social values meant that newcomers were not involved in community in the same ways as their predecessors. Real differences in access to material resources, class differences, also divided newcomers from their neighbors and the larger community. There was much resentment and concern amongst ranchers about gentrification, because rising land values have consequences for passing on properties and sustaining operations. Newcomers often removed cattle from the properties they purchased and there were substantial differences of opinion about their ability to manage their land. Ranchers argued that the absence of a livelihood connection to property meant poor stewardship, while environmentalists suggested newcomers had the financial resources to restore the area. Ranchers regarded landownership change as altering a social landscape overlaid and inseparable from the biological landscape. Changes in this social landscape meant changes in the ways neighbors worked together, particularly around boundaries. Longtime ranchers had well-understood customs and "rules" about property boundaries. These boundary practices were increasingly being violated as landownership changed.

• Property is generally conceptualized as public and private, but these categories blur much more than often acknowledged. Many different people acknowledged the public interest in private lands. Conversely, some private uses, such as grazing, are treated in many ways as private rights on public lands. To some extent, residents in the study site made local claims to public lands.

• Different people located conservation, or the motivation to conserve, in different places. Environmentalists argued that it was the state that motivated, or rather mandated, conservation through regulation and land acquisition. Ranchers argued that livestock production and multigenerational ties to the land required good stewardship, although they acknowledged that unsustainable practices, such as overgrazing, occurred in response to drought and economic pressure.

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• Private property had an important livelihood component for ranchers. They saw livelihood and property as inseparable, and therefore conservation and livelihood as inseparable.

• Property as a bundle of rights provided conceptual and practical space for financial compensation of ranchers for particular public goods, such as preservation of open space. Conservation easements, in particular, represented one way that the bundle of rights was being untangled in the study site for the purchase of development rights. The ranchers who opposed conservation easements appeared to view their bundles as tightly woven – for these landowners, removal of one stick meant loss of control over the whole property.

• Some advocates of landscape level approaches - environmentalists, agency staff, and scientists - have called for the elimination of property boundaries, viewing these boundaries as barriers to the implementation of large scale conservation. More important is understanding how boundaries work – the perceptions and practices around these property edges. Understanding the meaning, permeability, and negotiation of property boundaries is essential to landscape level efforts.

• Examination of tensions over hunting access and weed management demonstrates the ways ranchers and new large landowners differ in their conceptions of private property rights and the public interest. Newcomers define private rights largely in terms of privacy, whereas ranchers focus on the connections between livelihood and private rights. Ranchers express an obligation to local communities and landscape, while newcomers envision their responsibility to an American or global public. Despite that ranchers see themselves as advocates of private property rights, their property boundaries were much more permeable than newcomer boundaries, although usually in keeping with specific local customs.

• The Forest Service defined ecosystem management and working with private landowners largely in terms of information exchange. This “exchange” usually involved the agency dispensing science, technical expertise, and other data to the private landowner. Forest Service cooperation with private landowners on the Rocky Mountain Front was largely limited to the areas of grazing permits, outfitting, common fencing, and traditional NEPA public involvement.

• Residents and many ranchers supported collaboration, but rarely cited tangible examples of collaborative efforts in the area. Some ranchers believed they would benefit from working together with environmentalists and agency staff, but others feared intrusions on private property rights. Resident and nonresident environmentalists expressed concerns about decisions that were compromised or reduced to the lowest common denominator.

• The Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee provided an example of a group working on cross-boundary conservation. They were responding in part to newcomer changes in the area. They have integrated conservation and livelihood, both conceptually and in practice, seeking to stabilize and find economic opportunities for ranchers. The proposed grassbank would both capitalize on newcomer landownership change while seeking to arrest the trend toward nonranching owners. This grassbank would be privately owned and run, yet incorporate the public good through nongovernmental channels. The grassbank and weed work both define public goods in terms of local...
community and landscape, emphasizing neighborly social obligations, rancher commitment to place, and a sense of common vision and future.

- Innovation and creativity across property boundaries in the study site have emerged primarily from ranchers and local environmentalists working together. Public land management agencies neither attempted nor succeeded in bringing together different groups of people to date. It appears that, instead of acting as a barrier to cross-boundary conservation, in some instances, private property and private property owners have the necessary flexibility to move beyond existing models toward solutions that effectively combine conservation and livelihood in ways that are socially acceptable to ranchers and environmentalists.

**Key Findings At-A-Glance**

The following eight points bring together the key findings of this dissertation:

- **Meaning is political.** Images of place, the meaning of boundaries, and concepts of ranching are connected to ideas about legitimate use of natural resources, concerns about livelihood and environmental degradation, and political goals and policy initiatives. These images influence people’s responses to policy proposals, and they affect political strategy and willingness to work with different kinds of people.

- **Conservation and livelihood are inseparable for ranchers.** Especially in the case of private property, conservation goals cannot be pursued without incorporating the livelihood needs of owners such as ranchers. The institution of private property and the motivation for stewardship are both inextricably linked to livelihood in the minds of ranchers.

- **Ranchers strongly support private property rights.** Concerns about infringement on private property rights and strong support for these rights are not confined to so-called extremist property owners and industry-funded wise use groups. Beliefs about the importance of private property rights and the decision-making authority of property owners are widespread in the ranching community.

- **Landowners feel obligations to the common good or public interest at multiple scales.** Because of our focus on the nation-state as the primary unit of environmental policy-making, we often miss the ways in which private landowners conceive of and respond to an obligation to local community and landscape. Ranchers, for instance, do not necessarily find the national public interest particularly compelling in the context of conservation, but often consider local, community-level public goods in the management of their private lands.

- **Property and boundaries are malleable, permeable, and contested.** Different groups of people do not necessarily agree on the role or definition of public or private property, nor who should maintain the public interest in those properties. Boundaries are also contested, in concept and practice, with ranchers and newcomers differing on who can cross property lines for what purposes. The contested nature of property and boundaries means that any effort at cross-boundary conservation that incorporates multiple interest groups will have to negotiate these differences.
• **New landowners are transforming established relations around boundaries.** New wealthy landowners are quickly changing established customs that govern neighbor relations, in particular around property boundaries. Newcomer violations of rancher norms alter local culture and land management, and present challenges for cross-boundary efforts that seek to build on existing relationships and practices.

• **Private property may provide opportunities for creativity, as opposed to barriers to conservation.** While most researchers and environmental groups have looked to the federal land management agencies for leadership on cross-boundary conservation, private property and private landowners may provide overlooked opportunities for creativity and innovation. Private property owners can adapt and experiment with more flexibility and timeliness than their federal agency counterparts. Furthermore, private property owners, such as ranchers, have numerous motivations to pursue such efforts including livelihood interests and social obligations to landscape and community.

• **Diverging interests and incompatible visions may limit the potential for collaboration.** Many people expressed a desire to find common ground and bring different groups of people together to work across property boundaries. But natural resource issues on the Rocky Mountain Front continue to be contentious and political. There are numerous factors that limit the potential for collaboration. For instance, public land managers may want to retain power and authority; environmental groups may see the national policy-making arena as their best avenue for affecting private land management and the future of Western landscapes; newcomers may refuse to cooperate with ranchers; and, ranchers' positions on private property rights may limit their participation in cross-boundary efforts. Furthermore, some visions for the Rocky Mountain Front may be incompatible; a publicly owned buffalo preserve cannot exist in the same space as privately owned production-oriented cattle ranches.

The Lessons Learned: Building Bridges for Cross-Boundary Work

Cross-boundary conservation requires that different kinds of people work together across political, cultural, class, and property boundaries. I assume here that cross-boundary conservation is necessary, that cooperation between different groups of people – landowners, public land managers, environmental groups, and policy-makers – is desirable, and that different people can identify and build on mutual interests.

In the following section, I describe some of the challenges posed by certain groups of people, such as newcomers, Forest Service staff, and extreme private property rights advocates. I raise questions that I think should be explicitly explored by decision-makers, cross-boundary
groups, researchers, and communities in the region. I also provide specific suggestions about how different groups might overcome particular challenges.

**Working with Private Landowners**

The ecosystem management literature often refers simply to the private landowner, implying this is a monolithic category. However, there are important and striking differences between ranchers and new large landowners in the Intermountain West. Advocates of cross-boundary conservation must understand the real differences between these groups. For instance, the connection between livelihood and conservation is going to be particularly important to ranchers, as are private property rights and retaining autonomy in private land management. Obtaining the meaningful cooperation of ranchers means integrating livelihood and conservation goals. This cooperation also requires a respect for different views on private property.

There is much potential to build on existing, locally-understood customs of cooperation in cross-boundary efforts. This means understanding different views on property and boundaries, and social norms regarding neighbor relations. Instead of assuming that cooperation needs to be taught through a new collaborative process, mutual learning might involve exchanging information about local neighbor practices. Making these norms and practices explicit may reveal opportunities for building on existing and agreed upon cross-boundary management practices.

That said, local norms may not always lend themselves to specific cross-boundary natural resource problems or conservation goals. New practices and customs may need to be created and adopted. Furthermore, even when existing customs provide opportunities for cross-boundary conservation, new landowners will rarely subscribe to or have knowledge of these practices. Building bridges with newcomers will be essential to securing participation.
The Contested Role of Newcomer Landowners

As described earlier in this dissertation, there are different viewpoints on the role of newcomer landowners in cross-boundary conservation. The term newcomer landowners (or new large landowner) in this context refers to people who have recently purchased large properties in the West. While those newcomers who live in subdivisions will also need to be participants in cross-boundary work at some level, they are not addressed in this section. On one hand, newcomers have the financial resources to restore property and do not usually require income generation from their land. On the other hand, few newcomers are experienced land managers, some want to make a profit from their property, and many do not spend much time with the land or community because their primary residence is elsewhere.

Because newcomers usually have a primary residence, social group, and financial resources outside of the communities where their properties lie, they do not necessarily have a strong incentive to participate in community. They have different ideas about property and boundaries as compared with ranchers, and often challenge social customs in the areas where they purchase lands. Whether or not they can be effectively integrated into cross-boundary conservation efforts is an important question. In particular, newcomer privacy priorities may stand in the way of cooperation across boundaries. At the same time, newcomer participation in cross-boundary work would help integrate them into the community, open lines of communication with neighbors, and potentially leverage financial resources for implementation of specific projects.

Absenteeism is an obvious barrier. It is difficult to attend local meetings if you reside in the area for only a few weeks or months each year. In the absence of regular landowner participation, perhaps ranch managers can fill the void. Managers often have a background in ranching, live in the area year round, seem to have some longevity with particular properties, and make day-to-day management decisions. However, whether they build a bridge between newcomers and family ranchers, or whether they constitute a new service class is an open
question. The ranch managers I interviewed argued that their incomes were much more steady when compared with their owner-producer counterparts. However, managers do not own the land and, therefore, do not have ultimate decision-making power and cannot pass land on to their children. Despite these challenges, ranch managers are likely the best mechanism for incorporating these properties into cross-boundary efforts.

In the context of landscape conservation and the transformation of private land ownership in the Intermountain West, political debate in the region needs to address uncomfortable but fundamental questions about class. The ranchers and residents I interviewed on the Rocky Mountain Front spoke freely about the differences between themselves and newcomers, including class differences. They were acutely aware that someone purchasing a multimillion dollar ranch was in the upper tier of American economic strata. The transfer of private land ownership from middle-class working families to wealthy absentee owners represents a radical change, with implications for community and land management. A whole new set of people will be controlling a substantial portion of these landscapes. Do Westerners want their landscapes transformed into second home properties for absentee owners? What does this transformation mean for ecology and for community? These questions need to be tackled head on, in academic, policy, and community circles, despite a collective discomfort about openly discussing class differences.

**Take Home Messages for Environmental Groups**

Environmental groups are varied in their strategies, philosophies, and approaches to collaboration and private lands. For example, the Nature Conservancy focuses largely on private lands and is itself a private landowner and manager. On the other hand, the Montana Wilderness Association works primarily with public lands, advocating for wilderness designation. These recommendations are for environmental groups that want to forge working relationships with rural communities and ranchers, but certainly do not apply equally to all environmentalists. Furthermore, some of these suggestions could also be directed at federal land management.
agencies. I suggest below that environmental groups need to understand the politics of meaning, place-names, and boundaries, and the importance of integrating livelihood into private lands conservation.

Environmental groups need to be savvy about the politics of meaning and discourse. For example, decisions about how to use place-names should be made carefully, and environmental advocates should be aware that nonlocal names may generate resistance to particular policy proposals. In the case of the Rocky Mountain Front, the name itself has become symbolic, for some people, of an externally imposed vision and conservation agenda. If environmentalists want to focus attention on specific policies instead of the contested nature of place-names, they may want to choose established locally accepted place-names. This may be a challenge, however, because relevant landscape scales may not have apolitical names.

I experienced this very challenge while writing this dissertation. I needed a term, a label, to refer to my study site, and the obvious choice was the Rocky Mountain Front. However, I was aware that this term was, quite literally, "loaded" for some residents and symbolized an agenda they resisted. During the research process I talked with interviewees about "the area," but writing up results required use of a specific place-name. I struggled with how to reconcile my own use of this term, which seemed to contradict my examination of its contested nature. Clearly, selection of neutral and nonpolitical place names is easier said than done.

Throughout this dissertation I have argued against proposals to eliminate boundaries (although such proposals are admittedly vague). Instead, I argue that different groups of people need to understand landowner perceptions and practices around boundaries, and the different ways that boundaries are political. For example, on the Rocky Mountain Front, different ideas about the location of the area may be increasing conflict over specific policy proposals. In other words, when a wilderness advocate writes a letter to the editor in Great Falls suggesting that the entire Rocky Mountain Front be protected as wilderness, they are likely referring to federal lands. However, ranchers in Choteau reading this letter may assume that this individual is arguing for
federal acquisition of their property. Being explicit about the areas being discussed might defuse these conflicts.

Furthermore, when environmental groups tout the economic and cultural benefits of the “New West,” their proposals may not be well-received in rural communities. While rural restructuring and in-migration may diversify rural economies and provide infusions of outside financial resources, these changes often mean the demise of the multigenerational family rancher and long held customs, values, and community identity. Celebrating these changes implies that the disappearance of ranching is inevitable and desirable, and generates animosity in rural communities.

Most importantly, environmental groups need to fully understand the connections between livelihood and conservation in the context of private lands. Every single environmental group staffperson I interviewed for this project, at the national, regional, and local levels, discussed the increasing importance of private property to their conservation goals. In many cases, environmentalists view private property institutions as a barrier, not an opportunity, for environmental protection. Furthermore, some environmentalists argue that making a living from the land necessarily involves greed. Richard White’s argues in his well-known and controversial essay “Are you an Environmentalists or Do You Work for a Living?” Work and Nature (1995) that most environmentalists “equate productive work in nature with destruction. They ignore the ways that work itself is a means of knowing nature while celebrating the virtues of play and recreation in nature” (p. 171). He suggests that when environmentalists “segregate work from nature” they further divide humans from the natural world. To build effective relationships with ranchers, environmentalists need to better understand the relationship between private property and stewardship. In other words, environmentalists must not assume that all work is destructive, and need to acknowledge the possibility of sustainable use of private property. Building coalitions with ranchers also means that environmentalists need to truly care about issues surrounding rancher livelihood, such as gentrification, the price of beef, international trade, and
the meat packing monopoly, and understand how these issues affect potential opportunities for cross-boundary work.

Environmentalists who wish to forge working relationships with ranchers and rural communities face the difficult challenge of dealing with rancher animosity toward those groups who are seeking to eliminate federal lands grazing. While many ranchers in the West do not have federal grazing permits, policy proposals to eliminate grazing on federal lands are usually seen by ranchers as a general attack on their right and ability to raise livestock in the West. Environmental groups who support continued grazing on federal lands should make this clear to potential rancher partners.

**The Need for Recognizing and Nurturing the Private Lands — Stewardship Connection**

Throughout this dissertation I have examined the ways ranchers claimed that private property ownership and livelihood activities required sustainable land management. These ranchers argued that it was not state regulation that prompted good stewardship, but a longterm relationship with a parcel of land that they were responsible for and had to understand and manage to make a living. Berry (1984) makes a similar argument about property ownership, saying that property “always implies the intimate involvement of a proprietary mind - not the mind of ownership, as that term is necessarily defined by the industrial economy, but a mind possessed of knowledge, affection, and skill appropriate to the keeping and use of its property” (p. 30). Berry argues that having property that is of a scale that people can know and care about is essential to stewardship.

These claims bring up a number of important questions that need to be carefully considered by environmental groups, policy-makers, and researchers. If ownership is required to truly know property in our society, then is the maintenance of private property ownership important to cross-boundary conservation? If the owner is required to make a living from a parcel of land, does that owner gain a special knowledge of that land? Does a livelihood
relationship with property motivate good stewardship? Can it also promote abuse, during times of drought or market downturns, or in the case of greedy or ignorant ranchers? What do ranchers mean by good stewardship, given that most ranchers argue that livestock production and thriving wolf populations cannot coexist? Do livelihood requirements motivate ranchers to participate in cross-boundary efforts?

A number of writers and academics, in addition to numerous ranchers, have argued for the importance of multigenerational connections to particular properties. Knight, Gilgert, and Marston (2002) suggest that an important component of sustainability is multigenerational use and ties to the land. Alexander and Propst (2002) argue that “preserving working ranches in the West depends on securing long-term land tenure based on viable economics and cooperation” (p. 204). In a society as mobile as the U.S., where few people own substantial property, it may be difficult to understand the relationship people have with property they have owned and worked for several generations. The connections between multigenerational ranch ownership and land management practices need to be investigated.

Meeting the Challenges of the Private Property Rights Movement

I have argued in this dissertation that support for private property rights is strong and pervasive in the ranching community. It is absolutely essential that advocates of cross-boundary conservation recognize the widespread and important nature of this discourse and ideology. All different kinds of ranchers who I interviewed, those who loved wilderness and worked with the Nature Conservancy, as well as those who drove snowmobiles and cursed the Forest Service, expressed concerns about infringements on their private property rights and argued that property owners should control private property. In fact, most natural resource issues were viewed by ranchers through the lens of private property rights. This was one of the most striking commonalities among ranchers interviewed.

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Despite this commonality, there are clearly differences between ranchers who are willing to sell easements, work with the Nature Conservancy, and talk with environmentalists on main street, and ranchers who believe in a conspiracy to take over their lands and see environmentalists as promoters of "genocide." Ranchers on the Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee explicitly differentiated themselves from participants in Montanans for Private Property Rights, calling the latter extremist and destructive. I would argue that the difference between these groups lies not in their degree of support for private property rights, but rather in where they see potential solutions to problems of ranching, rural change, conservation, and cross-boundary natural resource management. Ranchers on the Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee view their participation as benefiting them as private property owners, not as compromising their rights.

Extreme private property rights advocates, on the other hand, do not see solutions in working with environmental groups. In fact, published private property rights discourse is often inflammatory, polarizing, and divisive. For example, the Spring 2003 issue of Range Magazine ran a series of articles on the Nature Conservancy. By way of introducing the series, Findley writes,

Unless we as a people are willing to accept the continued loss of not only private property and individual rights, but of large portions of our national culture and customs as well, The Nature Conservancy must be brought to heel. Right now, it is a well-fed and generally admired beast leading us in a wild run that is as destructive in its seemingly friendly character as it is in its seldom-seen attacks...it is a runaway predator...the monster we made with indifference.

(p. 1 TNC)

He goes on to accuse the Nature Conservancy of trying to control large portions of land, using wealth and political power to determine the future of rural places, and employing strategies that are dishonest, illegal, and unethical. Keep in mind that the Nature Conservancy is itself a private property owner, and, at least on the Rocky Mountain Front, supports private property rights much more than most other environmental groups. Furthermore, the Nature Conservancy has an explicit policy of supporting family ranching, and is not part of the movement to eliminate
grazing from public lands. Of the national environmental groups, Nature Conservancy, at least at this time, is the most obvious ally of Western ranchers. Overcoming the polarization between ranchers and environmentalists generated by the extreme private property rights discourse will be challenging.

How do advocates of cross-boundary conservation confront the extreme discourse of the private property rights movement without alienating all ranchers? Arguing that these individuals are wrong about private property rights will only increase resistance among ranchers. If cross-boundary efforts are to truly succeed, they need to incorporate most or all large landowners eventually. For example, how will expanded weed work on the Rocky Mountain Front succeed if ranchers who are extreme private property rights proponents refuse to participate? This is the nature of cross-boundary work — proponents must eventually deal with the challenge of landowners who refuse to participate. Ranchers who currently participate in the Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee do so because they believe they can accomplish certain goals through the group that they cannot accomplish as individuals. They hope that their community, landscape, and individual ranch operation will benefit from participation. Perhaps the pragmatic nature of such efforts can overcome the ideologically-driven conflict over private property rights. Proponents of cross-boundary efforts should continue to emphasize on-the-ground projects and issues, making clear connections to rancher livelihood, to combat this polarization.

Federal Land Management Agencies Need to Rethink their Role

With regard to public land management, one of the most astonishing findings of this research was the degree to which Forest Service staff I interviewed at all levels defined their role in cross-boundary conservation almost exclusively in terms of scientific and technical information. The Forest Service is certainly responsible for providing accurate, relevant information about ecology and natural resource management. However, if they define themselves only as technical experts, they perpetuate the era of technocratic land management. Technocratic
land management assumes that the technical experts (that is, the Forest Service managers) should make decisions and that the public (including private landowners) needs to be taught, by scientists and other educated experts, how to properly manage lands. This model has increased animosity toward the Forest Service in rural communities because it fails to legitimize local knowledge or local needs. It also fails to acknowledge that decisions about public lands management often emerge from political debate not from scientific literature.

If the Forest Service's only role in cross-boundary conservation is to provide scientific and technical information, the agency will not play a leadership role nor will they come to the table as equal partners in such efforts. Moreover, by holding themselves aloof, agency staff will not avoid political conflict, they will only generate resistance and increased animosity. While the ecosystem management literature suggests that the federal land management agencies have a leadership role to play in cross-boundary efforts, I found little evidence that the Forest Service staff I interviewed were moving toward true partnership with private landowners.

The agency’s focus on information “exchange,” as the interviewees termed it despite its one-way nature, may reflect the demoralized culture of the Forest Service. In other words, perhaps anti-government sentiment is so strong in rural communities that Forest Service personnel are frightened to provide a leadership role. However, most local Forest Service staff I interviewed were largely unaware of the intensity and widespread nature of anti-government sentiment in their own communities.

Obviously public lands must be incorporated into cross-boundary efforts. Public land managers and private landowners will need to forge working partnerships. How the Forest Service will fit into these new models of natural resource management is an important question. Forest Service staff at all levels, but especially the local level, need to reinvent themselves as community partners. They need to envision landscape conservation as a common cause, involving public land managers, local communities, and private landowners. Forest Service staff need to recognize that different kinds of information contribute to effective decision-making.
While science provides some of that information, other information comes from ranchers and other community members. Mutual learning means valuing both sources of information and together forging an understanding of current conditions and possible avenues of action. Working effectively with private landowners will require the Forest Service to share some power and give up some authority and expertise. The Forest Service staff interviewed for this project appear to adhere to an expert-driven decision-making model. However, holding onto an outdated mode of decision-making means that they may be bypassed as private landowners and other interest groups move forward with innovative cross-boundary conservation efforts that exclude agencies and public lands.

**Policies that Rethink Scale, Livelihood, and Environmental Protection**

While it is generally agreed upon that private lands provide many public goods — open space, wildlife habitat, hunting opportunities, weed control — how to protect the public interest in private lands is an ongoing policy dilemma. How, specifically, to include private lands in cross-boundary efforts, such as ecosystem management, is part of that dilemma. If we acknowledge the public interest in private lands, are we willing, as a society, to step back and allow the rancher total control over private property? Even well-intentioned ranchers may overgraze lands during periods of drought and market downturn. Oftentimes, ranchers who want to implement restoration measures, such as protecting riparian areas, cannot afford to make the necessary changes. If we are unwilling to cede total control of private property to landowners, how do we ensure that public goods are preserved? And how do we formulate policies that are fair, equitable, and appropriate for particular places and communities?

Ranchers clearly fear that ecosystem management initiatives will result in increased state regulation of private land management, regulation that impacts the economics of already marginal livestock operations. Ranchers claim that state regulation is not an effective method for ensuring that the public interest in private lands is preserved. Moreover, the work of the Rocky Mountain
Front Advisory Committee demonstrates the numerous ways that local initiatives are either facilitated or constrained by state and national level policies. Clearly policy plays a role, for good or bad, in conservation across landscapes. Below I outline some of the ways I believe that policy can facilitate effective cross-boundary conservation, through rethinking scale, connecting environmental protection with livelihood, and providing new models for environmental protection.

Recalibrating Scale: Broadening Notions of Public Interest and Common Good

One of the key findings of this dissertation is that ranchers often conceptualize the public good at a local scale. In other words, instead of feeling compelled by a national public interest, ranchers feel obligations to a local collective that includes community and landscape. Perhaps we need to rethink the scale at which we conceptualize public interest.

A national public interest may be too remote to be compelling, but responsibility to a local common good may be generated through social ties and local obligations. The paradox is that ranchers are often patriotic, identify strongly with America, argue that they are feeding the country, and claim that private property is the foundation of the nation. But the national public interest in environmental protection evokes images in the minds of ranchers of Easterners dictating policy from Washington D.C.. Perhaps there are ways to recognize and capitalize on the sense of responsibility and sacrifices ranchers make for a local common good.

Capitalizing on existing local social and ecological obligations requires that federal and state policy be flexible enough that rural communities can reshape goals, objectives, and methods to local conditions and local needs. This does not mean that policies cannot stipulate baseline ecological standards, such as protection of particular species. However, it does mean devolving the implementation of these standards to a more local level.
Incentives and the Policy Arena: Connecting Conservation and Livelihood

I argue that the link between private lands, conservation, and livelihood is not just a conceptual connection, it is a policy imperative. Environmental policies, such as the Endangered Species Act, that seek to regulate private lands management without attending to livelihood will continue to inspire political resistance and backlash in rural communities. The continued decoupling of conservation and livelihood will result in decreasing political support for environmental policies in many rural communities, and a further polarization between rural Westerners and urban constituencies across the country. In this context, ranchers may be less receptive to working collaboratively with environmental groups and public land management agencies. However, there is another important consequence. Ranchers are already struggling economically. Ignoring the potential opportunities to connect conservation and livelihood in policy-making may accelerate the rapid transition of Western private lands from ranch families to subdivisions and wealthy newcomers, with dramatic ecological and cultural consequences.

There are numerous ways that conservation and livelihood can be linked in policy initiatives. Incentive systems that are specific to the ecological, economic, and social contexts of particular regions merit examination. Of course, such policies might be viewed as unfair subsidies, and some ranchers and environmental groups might resist such initiatives. However, in a democracy we use our tax dollars to preserve and nurture what we value, whether that is roads and transportation, military defense, or environmental preservation. In this case, we, as a society, would be deciding that preserving the open landscapes of working ranches is a viable way to facilitate community and conservation goals. Below I describe a range of actual and potential policy proposals that combine livelihood and conservation.

- National Grasslands Program. There is currently a national proposal pending for a rangelands conservation program similar to the Conservation Reserve Program. This program does not, however, take lands out of agricultural production. It would
compensate landowners for keeping grasslands in native prairie while allowing them to continue with livestock production activities.

- **Niche Marketing and Local Processing of Beef.** State level policies should encourage niche marketing and local processing of beef. State legislatures can also provide tax incentives for processing facilities and assist ranchers in developing markets for grassfed beef. States can mandate purchase of local beef in state facilities such as schools, universities, and prisons, promoting local consumption of locally produced beef.

- **Tax Relief for Conservation.** Environmental policies can integrate conservation measures and tax relief at the national, state, and local levels. Under such policies, a whole range of public goods could be protected through tax relief. Ranchers who protect riparian corridors according to certain criteria could qualify. There could be compensation for ranchers who provide wolf pack dens on their lands. Supporting viable endangered species populations could be rewarded.

- **Funding and Amending Easement Programs.** Federal conservation easement law needs to be amended to ensure that lower income ranchers can take full advantage of tax relief (there is currently a proposal in Congress to do so). Under such circumstances family ranchers would benefit from donating easements to environmental groups or federal agencies. At this time, landowners must have a sizable income to benefit from the tax relief accompanying a donated easement. Federal easements programs also need to be fully funded through the Land and Water Conservation Fund of the Conservation and Reinvestment Act (1999). Project areas, such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed Rocky Mountain Front project, need to be approved by Congress and fully funded before subdivision makes these programs a moot point. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service experience suggests that many politicians and their staff do not fully understand the difference between easements and federal land acquisition. Political support for easement proposals might be forthcoming if proponents were able to educate decision-makers about the differences in these programs.

- **Matching Funds for Restoration.** Federal programs, such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Wildlife, should be expanded in terms of staff, funding, and
geographic area. These programs provided matching funds for restoration of habitat on private lands. They are voluntary and tailored to individual landowners.

- **Expanded Opportunities through the Bundle of Rights.** Policy at the state and national level needs to focus on inventive mechanisms for untangling the bundle of rights and compensating landowners for specific rights. There are clearly opportunities that go beyond conservation easements in this arena, in particular with regard to wildlife, hunting, and other types of public access. A hotly contested proposal from the Montana Stockgrowers would allow ranchers to trade hunting access to private property for the right to sell hunting tags to the highest bidders (Babcock, 2002). While this specific initiative has raised important concerns about preserving public access for middle and lower class Montanans, proposals of this sort, which compensate ranchers for public access and wildlife habitat, should be carefully considered and explored.

Crafting public policy that responds to both livelihood needs and public goods is particularly challenging. The economic conditions of ranching change over time and policies will need to be adjusted as specific incentives become outmoded and unnecessary. Public goods also present a moving target as ecological science reveals improved methods of conserving biological diversity and society redefines the public interest in private lands. Because of the fluctuating nature of economic conditions and societal public goods, policies need to be continually reexamined for effectiveness.

From the outset, incentive programs should be tailored so that lower and middle class ranchers can participate. Policies need to be flexible enough to be adapted to local ecological and social conditions. Proponents need to clearly articulate the public goods being subsidized to minimize opposition.

*The Potential of Working Landscape Models*

There is increasing interest across the West in working landscape models, projects that combine conservation and agricultural production. Proponents have argued that public
acquisition of private lands threatened with development is increasingly expensive. Furthermore, management of lands in public ownership is quite costly (Barry and Huntsinger, 2002). Therefore, traditional methods of nature protection involving public land acquisition and management of protected areas are cost prohibitive in some areas. Instead, working landscapes attempt to maintain ranching in large holdings. Ranchlands provide many of the values of protected areas, but are less expensive to protect (through easements and other mechanisms) and may prove more flexible in the long run. As one member of the Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee said “keeping agriculture in place is much cheaper than buying a bunch of parks.”

The working landscape model presumes the compatibility of conservation and ranching. National working landscape legislation might facilitate this vision, if it provides flexibility to adapt programs to local conditions, and does not create another layer of federal land management that rural communities would likely resist. Working landscape legislation could provide funding for conservation easements and specific forms of tax relief that would be connected with conservation goals.

Conflict and Cooperation

In the following section I examine the potential of the radical center and the Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee. I also put these efforts in the context of ongoing politics and conflict over natural resource management.

The Radical Center and the Future of the Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee

Ranchland groups across the West have dubbed their work “the radical center.” While the Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee does not use this term, their work clearly fits into this new vision of cross-boundary work. Groups working within the radical center seek pragmatic, workable solutions to the intersecting problems of rural gentrification and subdivision, the financial hardships of ranching, and landscape conservation. Advocates of the radical center
clearly view ranching and conservation as compatible, situating themselves firmly within the emerging third discourse described earlier in this dissertation. According to the third discourse, working landscapes of livestock ranches and protection of biodiversity can not only coexist, but can nurture one another. People who subscribe to this viewpoint believe that ranching can be a sustainable use of natural resources, and that sustainable use is compatible with conservation. This perspective flies in the face of traditional arguments for nonuse of natural resources as the best, or only, mechanism to achieve conservation goals. The efforts of the radical center also challenge existing private property rights discourses. Participants demonstrate the ways that ranchers can cooperate with neighbors, environmental groups, and agency staff without losing significant autonomy or control of land management practices on their property.

The radical center often operates outside of existing national level policy channels and power structures, largely because of the flexibility of private lands and the private nature of private land management. These groups are rarely mandated through legislation; rather, they emerge from particular communities in particular places. However, groups that include agency participation and public lands management are clearly subject to additional federal regulations. Furthermore, as seen with the Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee, numerous policies affect the potential for cross-boundary private lands work; some are barriers, others present opportunities. Ranchland groups like the Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee will need to increasingly enter the policy arena, perhaps in coordination with each other, in order to accomplish local level goals.

In the previous chapter of this dissertation, I argued that the Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee had the potential to create innovative working models that integrate livelihood and conservation, but that they also face some formidable challenges. As described earlier, the Advisory Committee is not necessarily a collaborative, because they are not inclusive of all potential stakeholders and meetings are not open to the public. Whether or not they can sustain a group that is largely under the radar screen of local communities and many ranchers is
an important question. On one hand, they are responding understandably to past collaborative disasters and seeking working projects to demonstrate the fruitful nature of their work to potential naysayers. They have legitimate fears that their efforts will polarize local communities. And, because they focus on private lands and largely work with private entities, such as the Nature Conservancy, they feel that their work is primarily private by nature and does not require public scrutiny. This perspective fits neatly into the private property rights model that ranchers subscribe to. In many senses, the Advisory Committee has succeed because of its exclusive membership; it has avoided a political backlash by including constructive and open-minded participants. On the other hand, as the Advisory Committee expands its efforts it will certainly generate local publicity. Committee participants will need to reach out to potential opponents in order to accomplish cross-boundary goals. Perhaps slowly moving into the public spotlight with concrete projects in hand is the way to defuse opposition and garner community support.

The other challenge the Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee faces is the integration of public lands. Expansion of efforts will eventually require working with the Forest Service and other government partners on particular projects. The Advisory Committee will need to carefully consider the terms of these partnerships. Perhaps that is the power of a landowner-driven group, and what distinguishes these efforts from many public lands collaborations. Because the landowners run the Advisory Committee and have forged working relationships among themselves, they may be able to meet federal agency land managers on equal footing, requiring agency partners to share power and operate on a more level playing field.

The fact that the exclusive and nonpublic nature of the Advisory Committee may contribute to its effectiveness raises important questions about decision-making processes for cross-boundary conservation. Does adherence to the principles of collaboration necessarily foster effective cross-boundary conservation? Are some communities, landscapes, and natural resources issues so politicized that inclusiveness is actually a barrier to accomplishing cross-
boundary work? As the Advisory Committee becomes more involved with public agencies will they need to institute a more open process and membership?

**Keeping Politics at the Forefront**

As stated earlier, collaboration is not always possible, and, for some groups of people, it may not be desirable. For instance, on the Rocky Mountain Front, the grassbank and weed work have met with little opposition because they do not challenge or threaten national policies like the Endangered Species Act (and they remain largely under the radar screen). These efforts do not endanger the power base that some national environmental groups have built in Washington D.C. to influence federal policy-making. However, if the Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee steps into the arena of endangered species management, they may meet significant opposition from environmental groups who favor decision-making at the national level. The broader debate over local versus national power in decision-making processes for both private and public lands is of obvious importance to residents of the Rocky Mountain Front. Cross-boundary efforts on the Rocky Mountain Front may also meet with Forest Service resistance to meaningful power-sharing. Forest Service staff and decision-makers may believe that their interests and lands are better served if they retain authority and control of management. A realistic analysis of the potential for cooperation across boundaries needs to keep politics at the forefront, understanding the multiple ways that these efforts may be stymied by ongoing conflict.

**How Science Can Contribute**

Social and ecological scientists need to acknowledge the importance of private lands to cross-boundary conservation and recognize that private landowners will need to play a role in these efforts. Scientists need to understand that simply writing articles and books about the need for conservation and natural resource management at new scales is not enough to evoke a paradigm shift in public and private land management. Private landowners and public agency
staff, the actual practitioners of cross-boundary conservation, may or may not be compelled by these often eloquent and well-supported arguments. Actually understanding what the practitioners of crossboundary conservation think and do is essential for effective landscape efforts.

What We Need from Social Science

Social scientists need to be talking with actual people in communities across the Intermountain West. I cannot overemphasize the importance of talking with different kinds of people. Too often, research focuses on those individuals who are already participating in some type of collaborative effort, leaving out the perspectives of opponents. These studies create an overly rosy picture of community and collaboration that does not truly reflect the diversity and, in many cases, contentious nature of cross-boundary work.

As described earlier, there may be potential for cross-boundary efforts to build on local customs and boundary practices. Social scientists can make an important contribution by investigating and articulating these norms and how they might be relevant to current cross-boundary conservation work.

Research on rural change and restructuring needs to be better connected with work on cross-boundary conservation. According to Sheridan (2001), “the transition from ranching to real estate development is reshaping rural communities and landscapes across the West, yet this widespread phenomenon has received very little study” (p. 145). A few recent studies make the link between demographic change and the ecological impacts of subdivision. We also need to better understand how the social, cultural, and political changes brought by in-migration and landownership change affect the potential to work across boundaries. For instance, the issue of rural residential subdivision was important to residents and was only briefly explored in this dissertation. Rural subdivision provides an excellent example of the tensions between public goods and private rights, and the challenges of resolving these tensions in public policy.
Private landowner perspectives on the meaning of private property and property rights are particularly important to understand. According to Hurley, Ginger, and Capen (2002) it is not enough to emphasize connections between sustaining human and ecological systems together under the rubric of a working landscape. We still must grapple with conflicts that arise in natural resources management efforts as participants interpret human institutions of ecology and property in varied ways...conflicts arising from varied concepts of property are likely to play a critical role [in the social processes of ecosystem management]. (p. 309).

Social scientists can help reveal different viewpoints on and practices around private property, which in turn can inform policy-making.

Conflicts over the future of Western landscapes need to be understood as more than differences in values, beliefs, or feelings. While the meanings of these places and people’s ideas about the future are important, natural resource struggles also involve material contests over livelihood, land use and ownership, and environmental impacts. Research that focuses solely on describing different values and meanings may miss the ways that discourse and material interests are connected and, thus, politicized. Simply understanding different viewpoints is often not enough to resolve natural resource conflicts. In other words, social scientists can reveal different values to decision-makers, but different material interests may prohibit finding common ground and building political consensus. Social scientists need to acknowledge and attend to politics, and resist the temptation to ignore difference in favor of common ground.

**What We Need from Ecological Science**

In the arena of ecological sciences, we need continued research on sustainable ranching practices. Throughout this dissertation I have avoided making the claim that science has demonstrated that livestock grazing is compatible with preservation of biodiversity and ecological processes in all places at all times. I will argue, however, that livestock grazing can be compatible with and, in some cases actually facilitate, environmental conservation. Admittedly, during the open range era of ranching, certain areas were incredibly abused and overgrazed; some
of these areas have yet to recover. Farming experiments in arid areas also caused widespread and
long-term damage to soils and vegetation. And, unsustainable practices continue on certain
ranches and public lands allotments today. At the same time, some ranchers practice sustainable
stewardship, and produce livestock in a manner that does not compromise native biodiversity or
ecological processes. And, scientific evidence is mounting that ranching is far more ecologically
sustainable than rural subdivision.

Knight (2002) argues compellingly that nonuse, or rest, of grasslands does not necessarily
accomplish the restoration objectives that ecologists, ranchers, or environmentalists seek. In fact,
he suggests that just as lands can be overgrazed, they can also be overrested. A complex and
unique combination of disturbance, climate, and vegetation determine the health of a particular
grass or shrub ecosystem. Ecologists have only begun to understand what kinds of activities,
including what kinds of grazing, might lead to desired ecological conditions. If some grasslands
can be overrested, removal of ranching from the landscape might actually have detrimental
ecological affects. Again, assumptions that removal of livestock will result in improved
ecological conditions are part of the paradigm of environmental protection that suggests that
nonuse of natural resources is best, and ignores the possibility of sustainable use or even
beneficial use.

The Emergence of Innovation and the Reality of Politics

Future cross-boundary conservation will build on existing perceptions and practices of
property and boundaries, but it will also require innovation and creativity. Ranching neighbors
have worked together for generations, but never on issues as challenging and diverse as noxious
weeds, migratory songbirds, grizzly bear management, and climate change. Effective cross-
boundary conservation demands inventive new relationships, institutions, and policies that can
both capitalize on and challenge historical practices. The key players, ranchers, newcomers,
environmental groups, and public land management agencies, will need to carefully rethink their
roles in the context of cooperation across property boundaries. Ranchers will need to be less fearful about threats to private property rights; newcomers less private and more willing to participate in community; environmental groups more concerned about livelihood; public land managers more willing to share power and legitimize local knowledge.

Cross-boundary conservation must build on notions of sustainable use, rather than attempting to adapt existing protected area models that emphasize nonuse of natural resources and state management of critical habitat. The presence of private lands and local communities requires meaningful connections between livelihood and conservation, in policy and on-the-ground management.

Policy needs to be adaptable to local conditions, ecological and social, while maintaining environmental standards that a national public will support. We need to think creatively about what kinds of policies will build on private property institutions and rancher obligations to a local common good. We need to explore incentive programs that work at the local level and accomplish specific goals regarding protecting biodiversity and sustaining ranchers.

Cross-boundary efforts and policies that integrate livelihood and conservation need to be regarded with a tempered optimism, balancing the promise of collaboration and mutual interests with an awareness of conflict, politics, and diverging interests. Struggles over the control of land and livelihood cannot necessarily be resolved through innovation and flexibility alone. Nor can improved knowledge and understandings of different positions alone resolve intractable natural resource conflicts. The politics of natural resource management and conservation across boundaries is about much more than differences in values or beliefs; it is about how we use our natural resources, who gets to use them, and who gets to decide. When different groups of people come to the table to work toward policy change, they come with different resources and have different sacrifices to make. Newcomer privacy is not on a par with rancher livelihood in this context; one is a preference, while the other is a material resource to support a family.
Understanding these differences, and the ongoing political nature of natural resource management and environmental conservation is essential to the success of cross-boundary efforts. Only this balanced view of common ground and political difference will allow the different players – ranchers, newcomers, public land managers, environmentalists, policy-makers, and others – to negotiate the new thinking, new practices, and new policies required by landscape-level conservation.
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Appendix 1: Interview Response Rate – Phase I and II Combined

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Resident</th>
<th>Regional</th>
<th>National</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agreed to interview and</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>were interviewed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message not returned</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreed to interview, but</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>couldn’t coordinate time*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Declined to be interviewed**</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Most of those individuals at the local and regional level who agreed to do an interview, but were never interviewed ended up being unnecessary for the sample. In other words, during the time I was attempting to schedule an interview with them, I found another person in that category to talk with. If I deemed the original individual not necessary for the sample, I did not persist if scheduling was difficult. Also, three congressional staffers agreed to do interviews, but we were unable to coordinate schedules during the week I visited D.C.

** Two individuals at the regional level were too sick or elderly to be interviewed. One famous person (a resident) declined and recommended his manager. Another resident claimed she was not knowledgeable enough about the issues and recommended another person. One resident said he did not like interviews. A national level reporter said no and hung up.
Appendix 2: Sample Interview Guide

Phase II Resident Interview Guide

Let them know again that the interview is anonymous/confidential

Opening/Background Questions
How did you come to live in (Choteau, Augusta, etc.)? (probe why they moved here, where they grew up)
   OR
You grew up in (Choteau, Augusta, etc.)? (probe whether they grew up in town or on a ranch, what it was like to grow up here, why they stayed or moved back)

How would you describe this area/the Front to someone who has never been here or heard of it?

Did you call this area the Rocky Mountain Front when you were growing up/when you moved here? Do you know where that name came from? Did/do you have a different name for the area?

What kinds of changes have you seen in your lifetime/since you moved here?

National Attention/Significance
Do you see this area/the Front as nationally significant? If so, why?

How does national attention to the area affect your community?

Ranching
What’s the role of ranching in this community?

What are some of the struggles or challenges for ranchers in the area?

What do you think about new large landowners like Letterman purchasing ranches in the area? Are these ranches managed differently than traditional family ranches?

Do you see the goals of ranchers and the goals of conservationists as compatible?

Are you concerned about subdivision of ranchlands in the area/on the Front?

What do you think about conservation easements? Does it make a difference if the Nature Conservancy or a government agency buys the easement?

Are you concerned about private property rights?

Forest Service
Did you go to the mountains growing up? Do you use the mountains now? (probe for details about how they use the mountains, what those experiences mean to them)
How do Forest Service decisions affect your community?

How do you think the Forest Service should deal with local, regional, and national perspectives in making decisions for this Forest?

What would you like to see the Forest Service do differently? How can they improve management here?

How would you like to see the Forest Service manage fire on this Forest?

How is wilderness significant to your experience here? Affect you? What do you think about it?

What do you think about oil and gas exploration?

*Collective Efforts/Collaboration*

Are different kinds of people, such as ranchers, conservationists, and the Forest Service, working together on particular issues in the area?

Would you like to see more collaboration between different groups of people? Are there particular issues that are ripe for this type of collaboration?

How do different properties – ranches, Forest Service or state lands, even the Nature Conservancy – affect each other?

*Future*

If you could have your ideal future for the area/the Front, what would it entail?

*Wrap up*

Is there anything else you want to add, anything about your experience here or about issues we haven't touched on?

*Tape Off*

Who else would you recommend I talk with? (Ask if I can say that they recommended I talk with people recommended.)
Appendix 3: Interview Techniques and Procedures

Guidelines, Rules of Thumb, and Notes to Self from Summer 1999

On the Phone
Tell them that I'm doing a research project about the area, and that (name of person) recommended I talk with them. Explain that the interviews are anonymous, that their name will never be connected with anything they say. However, I might say a rancher or a Forest Service employee said.....Also tell people about the tape recorder over the phone. Suggest that I come to their house. Or if they will be in town, I can meet them somewhere. However, don't interview people near noisy roads or in crowded restaurants. Make sure it's a place that they feel comfortable, that is easy to record in, and that is not out of their way. Get directions.

Before the Turning on the Tape
Reiterate that their name will not be connected with anything they say. Depending on the person, talk for a few moments to get acquainted, make people feel comfortable. If the person dives into topics relevant to the research project right away, try to gracefully interrupt and get the tape recorder on. If this isn't possible, take good notes, including verbatim quotes where necessary and a list of topics to return to. Then ask them to talk about those particular topics again when you have the tape recorder on.

During the Interview
Begin with a question that is easy to answer, based on their experience and knowledge, something they are an expert in. I like to begin at the beginning - asking the person to describe growing up in the area, moving to the area or becoming familiar with it. These questions are intended to make them feel comfortable and to find out what's important to them about living in or working on this place. Many topics can be probed from this initial question (sometimes half or more of the interview comes directly out of this question).

Use their language/words/terms/phrases as much as possible. Don't use the term/name Front or Rocky Mountain Front unless or until they do. Call the larger landscape "this area" or use the term they use, such as "mountain front." Don't use place for the larger landscape. Place means someone's ranch or land, as in "the Peebles' place" or "the place west of here." Because place is used in reference to one's property, it doesn't make sense to residents as the whole landscape/area/ecosystem. (be aware of layperson's interpretations of other academic terms)

Use frequent probes to gain clarity and detail on topics/ideas relevant to the study. Probe whenever possible using their terminology/language.

You mentioned subdivision. Can you tell me more about subdivision?
Asking people to tell you more about something is a good question. Or ask what they mean. Or ask them to elaborate/give you more details.

You said that this area is special. What do you mean by special?

Ask why or how questions too. Why did you come back to the area to become a rancher? How do you work with your neighbors on weeds?

The interview guide is just that and not a schedule, so while the first questions are always first and the last always last, the rest are in order according to the interview, according to when the interviewee brings them up. Try to probe the topic that they most recently touched on and return to others later. Keep notes throughout the interview of topics/ideas/phrases to return to (in their
words where possible). Make a checklist and then check each off as you ask about them or they bring them up. Know the interview guide well enough that you only need to look at it toward the end, to ensure you haven't forgotten anything. Probing topics/ideas/issues as they bring them up is less intimidating and threatening, and gives the interviewee a chance to guide the interview. For instance, if I asked what they thought about grizzly bears as my second question, the interviewee might be taken aback, especially if they have strong feelings against grizzlies. However, if they bring bears up in the context of a topic that is important to them, then we discuss bears because it's important to them (they brought it up), not externally imposed by me. An ideal interview is one in which the person discusses what's important to them, and I probe the aspects that are relevant to the research project. Of course, this isn't always possible, and some topics will necessarily need to be brought up out of the blue by the researcher.

During the interview, it may be necessary to ask very specific questions to clarify ambiguities or understand contradiction. Are you saying that wilderness brings added restrictions on use? Are you worried about grizzlies primarily because of human safety or primarily because of livestock?

Be aware of order effect throughout the interview. Some topics lead into others quite obviously. This gives the interviewee the sense of logical progression and relevance of topics. If someone is discussing newcomers, I might then ask what people have in common. However, other topics might influence subsequent answers in ways that are not necessarily desirable. In some cases shift gears and ask a question on a seemingly unrelated topic, and then go back to the question that might have been influenced. For instance, if the person is expressing their suspicion or mistrust of the federal government, ask about ranching and then return to topics like wilderness or fire. The danger is that I seem to jump around, so don't do this within a topic, like wildlife or wilderness.

Also with regard to order effect, in the case of general and specific questions, ask general and then specific questions. Specific questions can influence answers to subsequent general questions.

Difficult Interviews
On rare occasions people agree to an interview, but are not very forthcoming during that interview, giving brief, terse answers to questions. In these cases I tend to talk a lot more, asking more questions in an effort to draw the person into the conversation. This is not ideal. When trying to draw someone out ask questions based on what's been learned in previous interviews (in addition to the questions on the interview guide).

Confidentiality
I did tell people who else I had interviewed if they asked. One person told me it made her more comfortable, knowing that other people she knew had also done interviews. People were also able to help me round out the range of people I had talked with if I could reveal who I had already interviewed. I think it also developed an atmosphere of openness, in which confidentiality was assured.
Appendix 4: Details of Phase I Interview Sample

N=37
I = 34

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Residence</th>
<th>Resident</th>
<th>Regional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Occupation**

- Business Owner/ 4
- Self-Employed
- Conservationist (staff or volunteer) 4
- Elected Official 1
- Forest Service 2
- Nature Conservancy 2
- Outfitter 3
- Rancher 13
- Retired 1
- Teacher/Local 3
- Educator
- MFWP 1

**Sex**

- Female 11
- Male 19

**Ethnicity/Race**

- Blackfeet 2
- European Descent 26
- Mixed European/Native American 2

**Length of Residence**

- Longterm resident 23 (20 or more years)
- Newcomer (less than 20 years) 7

*The above categories are based on primary occupation, how people self-identified, and residents' definitions of longterm residents and newcomers. All nonresidents live 1-2 hours from the study site.*
Appendix 5: Sources of Interview Excerpts by Chapter

Chapter 6
51 different people
Aaron
Andrew
Anita
Amanda
Amy
Bart
Byron
Brian
Charles
Christian
Connie
Derek
Don
Dwight
Eric
Evan
Fred
Garth
Heidi
Holly
Jack
James
Jennifer
Jeremy
Jessica
Jordon
Josh
Karen
Lily
Max
Mark
Meg
Melissa
Merrill
Molly
Patricia
Raymond
Roger
Ron
Sally
Samuel
Sidney
Simon
Steve
Terry
Ted
Todd
Tony
Twila
Victor
Zachary

Chapter 7
36 different people
Aaron
Abbey
Ainsley
Amanda
Amy
Bart
Betty
Bruce
Carl
Cheryl
Christine
Connie
Correy
Dillon
Duane
Evan
Frank
Heidi
Holly
Jack
Jan
Jeremy
Jessica
Josh
Ken
Kevin
Marvin
Max
Melissa
Nancy
Patricia
Roger
Stephanie
Tony
Twila
Victor

Chapter 8
56 different people
Aaron
Abbey
Amanda
Andrew
Anita

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Bart
Betty
Brian
Byron
Charles
Christine
Connie
Correy
Derek
Dillon
Dwight
Emma
Eric
Evan
Frank
Garth
Hank
Heidi
Holly
Ian
Jack
Jake
Jared
Jennifer
Jeremy
Jessica
Jodi
Jordon
Josh
June
Ken
Lenny
Louis
Marcie
Melissa
Merrill
Michelle
Nancy
Owen
Patricia
Raymond
Roger
Ron
Sally
Sidney
Simon
Solomon
Terry
Twila
Victor
William
Chapter 9
24 different people
Amanda
Amy
Anita
Dillon
Emma
Eric
Frank
Heidi
Holly
Iris
Jack
Jake
Jeremy
Jodi
Justin
Lily
Meg
Melissa
Nancy
Randy
Roger
Tony
Twila
William

Chapter 10
27 different people
Aaron
Abbey
Amy
Andrew
Betty
Charles
Christine
Connie
Don
Dwight
Hank
Jack
Jeremy
Josh
Justin
Ken
Lily
Melissa
Nancy
Patricia
Randy
Rich
Roger
Ron
Simon
Victor
William
Appendix 6: Community Land Use Cover Letter and Survey

Mr./Mrs. Smith
1234 2nd Ave.
Fairfield, MT 59436

January 11, 2002

Dear Mr./Mrs. Smith,

As a resident of Teton County, you may have noticed changes in the area as local communities evolve and external trends affect the region. Knowing that Teton County is important to the people who live here, we have begun a process of thinking about these changes and want to learn your views on the future of the area.

As part of this process, we're asking that you participate in the Community Land Use Survey. This survey was developed by Teton County, the Citizens Advisory Committee (a group of local farmers, ranchers, business owners, county staff, and other community leaders), and the University of Montana. The survey is designed to help the Citizens Advisory Committee make recommendations to Teton County Commissioners regarding land use, economic development and other community issues.

You are one of the 610 Teton County residents who were selected to participate in this survey. Your name was drawn randomly from a list of registered voters. In order that the results of this survey truly represent the opinions of people in your community, it is important that each questionnaire be completed and returned in the envelope provided.

We can assure you complete confidentiality. The questionnaire has an identification number for mailing purposes only. This is so that we may check your name off the mailing list when your questionnaire is returned. Your name will never be placed on the questionnaire and never connected to any of your answers.

Please complete the questionnaire and return it as soon as possible. We greatly appreciate the time and effort you are taking. Thank you for your help with this process.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (406) 243-6934 or Paul Wick at (406) 466-2155.

Sincerely,

Laurie Yung
Survey Coordinator

Citizens Advisory Committee Members

Ethan Allen  Clay Crawford  Mike Hager  Rick Johnson  Corlene Martin  Stan Rasmussen
Corrine Rose  Ray Scott  Ross Salmond  Dick Van Aukens  Paul Wick  Sally & Mike Woodhouse
Community
Land Use Survey:
Obtaining Public Opinion about Teton County’s Future

A Collaborative Project of Teton County,
the Citizen’s Advisory Committee,
and the University of Montana
Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey and return it. Your responses are very important to the future of Teton County. After you complete the survey, please send it back to us in the enclosed envelope (postage paid).

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Paul Wick at (406) 466-2155 or Laurie Yang at (406) 243-6934.

Features of Teton County

Here are some of the features that people use to describe Teton County. Please tell us how important each feature is to you by circling a number on the scale.

Not at all important | Extremely important
---|---
Open space | 1 2 3 4 5 6
Agriculture | 1 2 3 4 5 6
Sense of community | 1 2 3 4 5 6
Wildlife | 1 2 3 4 5 6
Rural lifestyle | 1 2 3 4 5 6
The mountains | 1 2 3 4 5 6
Affordable housing | 1 2 3 4 5 6
Knowing your neighbors | 1 2 3 4 5 6
Wilderness | 1 2 3 4 5 6
Other | 1 2 3 4 5 6

Guiding Teton County’s Future

Please indicate how important the following items are for guiding planning efforts in Teton County. (Please circle one number for each)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all important</th>
<th>Extremely important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farming heritage</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranching heritage</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value-added agricultural products</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private property rights</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water rights</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental quality</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Containment of noxious weeds</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic development</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small businesses</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of natural resources</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please specify: ____________________________
Opinions about Issues Facing Teton County

Some statements about issues facing Teton County are listed below. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Don’t Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farms and ranches are a good way to preserve open space.</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting local businesses is important.</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural resources should be used to fuel economic growth.</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land use planning should guide the location of development.</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranching and wildlife conservation are compatible.</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) has been a benefit to Teton County communities.</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunting access to private property is important.</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of agricultural production in Teton County is a problem.</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teton County needs more cooperation between private landowners and public land management agencies.</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New development should pay for itself.</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  5  X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teton County needs more jobs.</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

Opinions about Issues Facing Teton County, Cont.

Additional statements about issues facing Teton County are listed below. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of them.

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Don’t Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Lewis and Clark National Forest does a good job managing forest lands.</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land use planning should determine the amount of development.</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservation easements are a viable tool for preserving agriculture.</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government regulation in Teton County should be kept to the bare minimum.</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subdivision of rural areas, including agricultural lands, in Teton County is a problem.</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public lands on the Rocky Mountain Front should be maintained in their current roadless, undeveloped condition.</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infringement on private property right is a problem.</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure (roads, water, etc.) in Teton County needs to be improved.</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subdivision is a viable economic option for landowners.</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservation easements are a viable tool for protecting the environment.</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subdivision should be regulated.</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```
Opinions about Issues Facing Teton County, Cont.

Additional statements about issues facing Teton County are listed below. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of them.

Teton County needs a long-term land use plan.  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Oil and gas development would be good for local communities.  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Population growth should be located in or near existing towns.  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is too much government regulation in Teton County.  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teton County should provide tax breaks to attract businesses to the area.  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

People should be able to subdivide where and when they want.  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It would be best if Teton County stayed like it is.  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<td>6</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Subdivision of rural areas, including agricultural lands, can be regulated without infringing on private property rights.  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<td>6</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

New development should not increase existing taxes.  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

New homes should be located in or near existing towns.  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Services (police, fire protection, etc.) in Teton County need to be improved.  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Planning Tools and Actions

The Citizen's Advisory Committee will be considering different tools and actions to recommend to Teton County Commissioners for managing land use. We'd like your opinion about the different tools that are available. Please tell us how acceptable each of these is to you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Unacceptable</th>
<th>Strongly Acceptable</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<td>6</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Permits and standards for industrial and commercial development, but no restrictions on location.  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Unacceptable</th>
<th>Strongly Acceptable</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Criteria (type of access, density of homes, open space preserved, etc.) for residential development.  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Unacceptable</th>
<th>Strongly Acceptable</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Zoning in areas where landowners petition for land use regulations (landowners create their own plan).  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Unacceptable</th>
<th>Strongly Acceptable</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regulations for specific sensitive lands (flood plains, steep slopes, wildlife habitat, hazard areas, etc.)  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Unacceptable</th>
<th>Strongly Acceptable</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
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<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Development only within boundaries around towns.  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Unacceptable</th>
<th>Strongly Acceptable</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Requiring developers to pay for roads and other demands on county infrastructure (sewer, water, etc.) that are directly related to development.  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Unacceptable</th>
<th>Strongly Acceptable</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Requiring developers to set aside land for schools and parks or pay fees.  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Unacceptable</th>
<th>Strongly Acceptable</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<td>6</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Requiring developers to designate that there are adequate facilities (roads, sewer, water) to serve development.  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Unacceptable</th>
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<th>Don't Know</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>6</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Designate areas for residential, commercial, industrial, and agricultural use.  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Unacceptable</th>
<th>Strongly Acceptable</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Viewpoints and Activities

Q1 On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate Teton County as a place to live? (1 being a poor quality of life, 10 being a very good quality of life) ______

Q2 When you shop in Great Falls for items which are also available in your community, what are your primary reasons for doing so? (Check all that apply)

___ prices 
___ convenience of shopping 
___ variety of merchandise 
___ quality of merchandise 
___ store hours 
___ merchant friendliness 
___ product service 
___ store policies on returns 
___ other (please specify) ____________________________

Q3 Of the items that you checked above, what are your two most important reasons for shopping in Great Falls? (Please list in order of importance)

1. ____________________________
2. ____________________________

Q4 Do you or does anyone in your immediate family use the National Forest for commercial outfitting? ___ Yes ___ No

Q5 Do you or does anyone in your immediate family use the National Forest for livestock grazing? ___ Yes ___ No

Q6 Do you visit the National Forest for recreation? ___ Yes ___ No

Q7 If yes, what do you do when you visit National Forest lands? (Check all that apply)

___ hiking 
___ snowmobiling 
___ skiing at Teton Pass 
___ backpacking 
___ hunting 
___ scenic drives 
___ cross-country skiing 
___ ATV/motorbiking 
___ wildlife viewing 
___ backcountry snowshoeing/skiing 
___ horsepacking 
___ fishing 
___ camping 
___ visiting the Wilderness 
___ other (please specify) ____________________________

Q8 What term best describes the area where you live? (Please check one)

___ "The Great Plains" 
___ "North Central Montana" 
___ "The East Side" 
___ "The Rocky Mountain Front" 
___ "Great Falls area" 
___ Other (please specify) ____________________________

Q9 Teton County has a population of approximately 6400 people. The County’s population grew 3% in the last decade. How much would you like Teton County’s population to grow in the next decade? (Please circle one)

0% 5% 10% 15% 20% 25% 30% 35% 40% 45% 50% 55% 60% 65% 70% 75% 80% 85% 90% 95% 100% more than 100%

Q10 Under what conditions would you be willing to accept some increased regulation of land use? (Please check all the apply)

___ If regulations protected water quality. 
___ If regulations protected water quantity. 
___ If regulations promoted economic development. 
___ If regulations maintained agricultural production. 
___ If regulations protected wildlife habitat. 
___ If regulations preserved open space. 
___ I would not be willing to accept increased regulation under any conditions.

Q11 Should the Greenfield Irrigation District ...? (Please check one)

___ serve farmers and ranchers 
___ provide water for small ranchettes and subdivisions 
___ both 
___ no opinion 

Q12 In your opinion, which lands make up the "Rocky Mountain Front"? (Check all that apply)

___ Private ranchlands 
___ All of Teton County 
___ Wilderness lands 
___ Public lands (Forest Service, BLM, state) 
___ The Western portion of Teton County 
___ Other (please specify) ____________________________
General Information about You

Q13 Which town do you live in or closest to? (Please check one)

___ Choteau   ___ Fairfield   ___ Dutton   ___ Power   ___ Collins
___ Bynum   ___ Pendroy   ___ Agawam   ___ Farmington

Q14 Which best describes where you live? (Please check one)

___ In or next to town   ___ Out of town

Q15 How long have you lived in Teton County? _______ years

Q16 How many people currently live in your household (including you)? _______ people

Q17 Are you male or female? ___ Male   ___ Female

Q18 What year were you born? _______ year

Q19 Are you presently: (Please check all that apply)

___ employed (not including self-employed)
___ self-employed
___ part time employed
___ unemployed
___ retired
___ homemaker
___ student
___ other (please explain) __________________________

Q20 In which of the following areas do you usually work?
If you are retired, tell us about your most recent work.
(Please check one)

___ retail trade   ___ wholesale trade   ___ telecommunications or public utilities
___ service industry   ___ manufacturing   ___ nonprofit/charitable organization
___ ranching   ___ farming   ___ government/government enterprises
___ construction   ___ homemaking   ___ agricultural services or labor
___ finances   ___ insurance   ___ real estate
___ other (please specify) __________________________________________

Q21 In which of the following kinds of places did you spend the most time while growing up (to age 18)? (Check one)

___ on a farm or ranch
___ rural or small town [under 1,000 population]
___ town [1,000 - 5,000 population]
___ small city [5,000 - 10,000 population]
___ medium city [50,000 - 1 million population]
___ major city or metropolitan area [over 1 million population]

Q22 What is the highest level of education you have completed? (Check one)

___ 8th grade or less
___ some high school
___ high school graduate or GED
___ some college, business or trade school
___ college graduate
___ some graduate school
___ master's, doctoral or professional degree
Please feel free to use this space to make any additional comments about the future of Teton County or about this survey.

Thank you very much for your responses!

Please return your completed survey in the enclosed postage paid envelope to:

Teton County
P.O. Box 610
Choteau, MT 59422
Community Land Use Survey:

Obtaining Public Opinion about Teton County’s Future

Summary of Survey Results

Results for Choteau and Bynum ONLY

March 21, 2002

A Collaborative Project of Teton County,
the Citizen's Advisory Committee,
and the University of Montana

Please contact Laurie Yung at (406) 243-6934 or for more information on this report.
Methods – How the Survey was Conducted

What was the purpose of the survey?
The purpose of this survey was to gather information on the opinions of Teton County residents about community, land use, and economic development. Survey results will inform the efforts of the Growth Policy Citizen's Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee is a group of farmers, ranchers, county staff, and other community leaders working on recommendations to Teton County Commissioners regarding future county policies and projects.

Who developed and conducted the survey?
Survey questions were developed collaboratively by the Growth Policy Citizen's Advisory Committee, Teton County staff and elected officials, planning consultants, and the University of Montana. The Advisory Committee provided ideas for questions and reviewed two drafts of the survey. Survey drafts were also reviewed by Teton County staff and elected officials, planning consultants, and several survey experts and statisticians at the University of Montana. Survey drafts were then pretested with 8 Teton County residents who were not on the Advisory Committee. Laurie Yung, at the University of Montana, drafted and amended the survey based on these meetings, and oversaw sampling procedures, mailings, data entry, and statistical analysis. Paul Wick, Teton County Planner, assisted with sampling, answered questions, and distributed and collected surveys.

Who was part of the sample?
A total of 609 individuals were randomly selected from a list of registered voters in Teton County. A scientific sampling procedure was utilized so that every person on the list of registered voters had an equal chance of being selected for the survey. All 609 individuals who were selected were sent a survey. Of the 609 people selected, 43 were deceased, had moved out of Teton County, or were too elderly or ill to complete the survey. Of the 566 able to complete the survey, 83% (a total of 469) returned a completed survey.

How was the survey conducted?
This survey was conducted in January and February 2002. The 609 individuals who were part of the sample were sent an advance letter informing them of the survey, a survey with return envelope, and a reminder postcard. Individuals who had not sent the survey back one week after the reminder postcard were sent a replacement survey and return envelope. The survey was anonymous. Each survey had a number on the back for tracking purposes only. After the surveys were received, the list linking names and numbers was destroyed. Answers were never linked to names in any way.

How confident can we be that these survey results represent the views of adults in Teton County?
With a response rate of 83% we can be fairly confident that survey results represent the views of adults in Teton County. However, it is possible that the 17% who received but did not fill out the survey have different views than those 83% who completed the survey. Also, because only 80% of the residents of Teton County age 18 and older are registered to vote, the opinions of individuals and groups who were not registered to vote may not be represented in the results of this survey. Hutterite Colonies, college students, and individuals with second or vacation homes in the County may not be represented. The sampling error for this survey is 4%, which means that we are 95% confident that the "true" score on any particular item is plus or minus 4% of the results reported here. For example, if 60% of the respondents replied that they "strongly agreed" to a particular item and the sampling error is ± 4%, there is a 95% chance that the "true" value is between 56% and 64%.
Which results are included in this report?

**IMPORTANT NOTE: THIS REPORT CONTAINS RESULTS FROM A SUBSET OF THE ENTIRE SAMPLE, NOT ALL OF TETON COUNTY.** This subset includes all individuals who live in or around Choteau and Bynum, the two communities in the area primarily associated with ranching (as opposed to farming) that lie relatively close to the mountains. Individuals who live in rural areas around Choteau and Bynum and those who live in town are both included in this subset.

How are the results reported in this summary?

Answers to every question on the survey are reported in this summary. In some places, the order of the questions has been changed from the original survey to make it easier to read and interpret the results. Instructions and question wording have not been altered in any way. Means and/or frequencies are reported for each item in the survey. The mean is the numerical average of all of the answers to a particular question (calculated by adding together all of the answers and dividing by the number of people who answered the question). Frequencies are the percentage of people who selected each answer for a particular question. In some cases the percentages add up to less than 100% because a small number of respondents skipped that question. In other cases, the percentages add up to more than 100% because respondents were instructed to check more than one answer. Please note that answers to some questions are concentrated toward one end of the scale (indicating some agreement on that question), while on other questions answers are dispersed more evenly on the scale (indicating mixed views on that question).

How should these results be interpreted?

It will be up to interested citizens in Teton County and the Citizen's Advisory Committee to decide what these results mean and how to use this information. It is often helpful to examine responses to related questions together. Responses to several questions on a particular topic can provide more detail about public opinion than responses to a single question. One cautionary note: It is sometimes difficult to know exactly why people answered a question the way that they did. For example, comments on the survey indicated that negative responses to questions about conservation easements might mean concerns about private property rights. Other comments indicated that the same answer might mean support for planning as opposed to purchase of development rights. In other words, two people might select the same answer for very different reasons.

How will this information be used?

The Citizen's Advisory Committee will use the results of this survey, in combination with other information, to make recommendations to the Teton County Commissioners about policies and projects related to community, land use, and economic development. The Advisory Committee has not made any decisions at this point and your input can make a difference.

Acknowledgements

We are incredibly grateful to all of the individuals who have so generously donated their time to make this survey possible. Hearty thanks to the 469 individuals who promptly completed their surveys and sent them in. The efforts of the Citizen's Advisory Committee (Ethan Allen, Clay Crawford, Mike Hager, Rick Johnson, Corlène Martin, Stan Rasmussen, Corrine Rose, Ray Scott, Ross Salmond, Dick Van Auken, Paul Wick, and Sally and Mike Woodhouse) have been essential to the development of this survey. Their thoughtful feedback on survey design and question wording was exceptionally helpful. Thank you also to all of the individuals who donated time for pretests. And thank you to Mary Sexton, Dan Clark, Kate MacMahon, Bill Borrie, Mike Patterson, Wayne Freimund, Jill Belsky, Nick Wood, and John Canuso for assistance with survey design, data entry, and statistical analysis. Teton County Planner Paul Wick provided valuable assistance with survey design and served as a much appreciated contact at the County Courthouse. Sam Carlson generously donated the beautiful artwork for the survey cover.
A. Features of Teton County

Instructions read: Here are some of the features that people use to describe Teton County. Please tell us how important each feature is to you by circling a number on the scale. Features are ranked beginning with those items that respondents rated as most important. Note that all features were at least somewhat important to respondents and many were very important. For each item, the answer chosen by the most people is underlined.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The scale:</th>
<th>Not at all important</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Extremely important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>Average (Mean)</td>
<td>Percentage of Respondents who Circled Each Answer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The mountains</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Agriculture</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Rural lifestyle</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Open space</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Sense of community</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Affordable housing</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Wildlife</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Knowing your neighbors</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Wilderness</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Please specify)</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A total of 7% of respondents selected "other" and filled in the blank on their survey specifying what was important to them. Their answers included fresh air and water, good school systems, friendly/talented people, and access to wilderness.
### B. Guiding Teton County's Future

*Instructions read: Please indicate how important the following items are for guiding planning efforts in Teton County.*

Items are ranked beginning with those items that respondents rated as most important. Note that all items were at least somewhat important to respondents and many were very important. For each item, the answer chosen by the most people is underlined.

The scale: Not at all important | Extremely important
---|---
1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Average (Mean)</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents who Circled Each Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Containment of noxious weeds</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>0% 1% 4% 10% 18% 66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Water rights</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>1% 2% 3% 12% 17% 63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Small businesses</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>1% 0% 4% 15% 24% 55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Private property rights</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>2% 2% 7% 12% 17% 58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Environmental quality</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>1% 2% 3% 18% 23% 51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Ranching heritage</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>1% 3% 8% 15% 26% 44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Economic development</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2% 1% 10% 20% 21% 44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Farming heritage</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>1% 4% 10% 18% 24% 42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Value-added agricultural products</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>0% 3% 10% 22% 22% 39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Development of natural resources</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>4% 3% 9% 14% 26% 43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Tourism</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>3% 5% 18% 19% 23% 30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Please specify)</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>0% 0% 0% 0% 2% 5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"Other" answers included wilderness protection/enhancement, jobs for young people, health services, sustainable businesses, good schools, mountain trail maintenance, wildlife habitat protection, and hunting.
C. Opinions about Issues Facing Teton County

Instructions read: Some statements about issues facing Teton County are listed below. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

Questions are grouped into categories with similar questions (not ranked highest to lowest). For each question, the answer chosen by the most people is underlined. Note that answers for some questions are somewhat evenly distributed from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," while for other questions the answers are clustered at one end of the scale. The average (mean) is now located on the far right.

The scale: Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly Agree Don't Know X

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents who Circled Each Answer</th>
<th>Average (Mean)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jobs and Businesses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting local businesses is important.</td>
<td>0% 2% 2% 10% 22% 63% 0%</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teton County needs more jobs.</td>
<td>1% 2% 3% 7% 16% 67% 2%</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teton County should provide tax breaks to attract businesses to the area.</td>
<td>9% 10% 12% 17% 17% 29% 6%</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Resources and Economic Development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural resources should be used to fuel economic growth.</td>
<td>7% 3% 9% 17% 18% 43% 3%</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil and gas development would be good for local communities.</td>
<td>10% 6% 7% 10% 14% 43% 4%</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It would be best if Teton County stayed like it is.</td>
<td>15% 14% 23% 15% 10% 15% 5%</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Section C is continued on the next page)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The scale:</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results | Percentage of Respondents who Circled Each Answer | Average (Mean) |
---|-----------------------------------------------|---------------|

**Agriculture**

Loss of agricultural production in Teton County is a problem.

| 1% | 4% | 5% | 10% | 20% | 52% | 5% | 5.2 |

**Agriculture and Conservation**

Farms and ranches are a good way to preserve open space.

| 1% | 1% | 5% | 17% | 20% | 53% | 1% | 5.2 |

Ranching and wildlife conservation are compatible.

| 4% | 3% | 10% | 15% | 28% | 35% | 3% | 4.8 |

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) has been a benefit to Teton County communities.

| 23% | 12% | 9% | 16% | 10% | 16% | 13% | 3.3 |

**Conservation Easements**

Conservation easements are a viable tool for preserving agriculture.

| 11% | 8% | 10% | 16% | 16% | 17% | 19% | 3.9 |

Conservation easements are a viable tool for protecting the environment.

| 11% | 10% | 10% | 14% | 17% | 15% | 3.9 |

**Private Property and Private Property Rights**

Infringement on private property rights is a problem.

| 7% | 6% | 7% | 13% | 19% | 29% | 17% | 4.5 |

Hunting access to private property is important.

| 13% | 8% | 14% | 16% | 16% | 27% | 3% | 4.0 |

*(Section C is continued on the next page)*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The scale:</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>Percentage of Respondents who Circled Each Answer</td>
<td>Average (Mean)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Subdivision:**
- Subdivision of rural areas, including agricultural lands, in Teton County is a problem: 14% 15% 15% 18% 13% 3.7
- Subdivision is a viable economic option for landowners: 14% 6% 13% 17% 12% 3.8
- People should be able to subdivide where and when they want: 28% 15% 14% 10% 12% 6% 3.0
- Subdivision should be regulated: 3% 5% 7% 12% 17% 47% 6% 5.0
- Subdivision of rural areas, including agricultural lands, can be regulated without infringing on private property rights: 8% 9% 10% 19% 20% 18% 4.1

**Government Regulation:**
- Government regulation in Teton County should be kept to the bare minimum: 4% 5% 9% 13% 19% 42% 6% 4.8
- There is too much government regulation in Teton County: 6% 10% 16% 27% 10% 13% 15% 3.8

**Planning and Development:**
- Teton County needs a long-term land use plan: 5% 3% 8% 20% 22% 28% 12% 4.6
- Land use planning should determine the amount of development: 7% 6% 13% 18% 21% 23% 11% 4.3
- Land use planning should guide the location of development: 3% 3% 7% 21% 22% 26% 6% 4.8

(Section C is continued on the next page)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The scale:</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
<th>X</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>Percentage of Respondents who Circled Each Answer</td>
<td>Average (Mean)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning and Development, cont.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population growth should be located in or near existing towns.</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New homes should be located in or near existing towns.</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New development should pay for itself.</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New development should not increase existing taxes.</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County Infrastructure and Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure (roads, water, etc.) in Teton County needs to be improved.</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services (police, fire protection, etc.) in Teton County need to be improved.</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Forest/Public Lands Management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lewis and Clark National Forest does a good job managing forest lands.</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teton County needs more cooperation between private landowners and public land management agencies.</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public lands on the Rocky Mountain Front should be maintained in their current roadless, undeveloped condition.</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
D. Planning Tools and Actions

Instructions read: The Citizens' Advisory Committee will be considering different tools and actions to recommend to Teton County Commissioners for managing land use. We'd like your opinion about the different tools that are available. Please tell us how acceptable each of these is to you.

Questions have been reordered with the most acceptable planning actions beginning at the top of the page.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The scale:</th>
<th>Very Unacceptable</th>
<th>Very Acceptable</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average (Mean)</td>
<td>Percentage of Respondents who Circled Each Answer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Requiring developers to demonstrate that there are adequate facilities (roads, sewer, water) to serve development.</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>1% 1% 3% 9% 23% 56% 5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Requiring developers to pay for roads and other demands on county infrastructure (sewer, water, etc.) that are directly related to development.</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>2% 2% 3% 9% 22% 55% 6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Requiring developers to set aside land for schools and parks or pay fees.</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>5% 7% 6% 10% 19% 28% 15%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Regulations for specific sensitive lands (flood plains, steep slopes, wildlife habitat, hazard areas, etc.).</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>7% 4% 10% 15% 23% 33% 7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Designate areas for residential, commercial, industrial, and agricultural use.</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>8% 4% 7% 15% 19% 38% 7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Criteria (type of access, density of homes, open space preserved, etc.) for residential development.</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>2% 5% 12% 22% 22% 18% 15%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Zoning in areas where landowners petition for land use regulations (landowners create their own plan).</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>8% 11% 15% 21% 11% 14% 16%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Development only within boundaries around towns.</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>25% 17% 11% 13% 10% 10% 11%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Permits and standards for industrial and commercial development, but no restrictions on location.</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>25% 19% 13% 16% 6% 7% 13%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
E. Viewpoints and Activities

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate Teton County as a place to live? (1 being a poor quality of life, 10 being a very good quality of life)
   
   Average answer was 8

2. Teton County has a population of approximately 6400 people. The County's population grew 3% in the last decade. How much would you like Teton County's population to grow in the next decade?  
   
   Average answer was 12%

3. When you shop in Great Falls for items which are also available in your community, what are your primary reasons for doing so?  
   (Check all that apply) (percentage of respondents who checked each answer)

   83% prices
   81% variety of merchandise
   24% convenience of shopping
   23% store hours
   18% quality of merchandise
   14% product service
   10% store policies on returns
   4% merchant friendliness

   16% other — included 5% shop in Great Falls for availability, 5% try to buy locally, 4% shop in Great Falls when they are there for medical or other reasons.

4. Of the items that you checked above, what are your two most important reasons for shopping in Great Falls? (Please list in order of importance)

   1. prices  
      (most common answer, chosen by 50% of respondents)

   2. variety of merchandise  
      (most common answer, chosen by 38% of respondents)
5. **Should the Greenfield Irrigation District ...?** (Please check one) (percentage of respondents who checked each answer)

- 43% serve farmers and ranchers
- 2% provide water for small ranchettes and subdivisions
- 24% both
- 28% no opinion

6. **Under what conditions would you be willing to accept some increased regulation of land use?** (Please check all that apply) (percentage of respondents who checked each answer)

- 60% If regulations protected water quality.
- 53% If regulations protected water quantity.
- 50% If regulations maintained agricultural production.
- 48% If regulations promoted economic development.
- 41% If regulations protected wildlife habitat.
- 38% If regulations preserved open space.
- 10% I would not be willing to accept increased regulation under any conditions.

7. **What term best describes the area where you live?** (Please check one) (percentage of respondents who checked each answer)

- 83% "The Rocky Mountain Front"
- 6% "North Central Montana"
- 4% "The East Side"
- 1% "The Great Plains"
- 0% "Great Falls area"
- 3% "Other" — included "Choteau," "the Boonies," "God's country," "Big Sky," and "East Slope."
8. In your opinion, which lands make up the "Rocky Mountain Front"? (Check all that apply) (percentage of respondents who checked each answer)

- 61% The western portion of Teton County
- 45% Public lands (Forest Service, BLM, state)
- 41% Private ranchlands
- 37% Wilderness lands
- 28% All of Teton County
- 6% Other — included "Ranchland along foothills," "Range 8 west," "All land within 20 miles of the Rockies," "Western third," and "Mountains and foothills."

9. Do you or does anyone in your immediate family use the National Forest for commercial outfitting? 4% Yes 95% No

10. Do you or does anyone in your immediate family use the National Forest for livestock grazing? 7% Yes 93% No

11. Do you visit the National Forest for recreation? 87% Yes 13% No

12. If yes, what do you do when you visit National Forest lands? (Check all that apply) (percentage of respondents who checked each answer)

- 74% scenic drives
- 62% camping
- 62% wildlife viewing
- 53% fishing
- 53% hiking
- 50% visiting the Wilderness
- 49% hunting
- 36% skiing at Teton Pass
- 21% horsepacking
- 20% backpacking
- 12% cross-country skiing
- 10% snowmobiling
- 8% backcountry snowshoeing/skiing
- 7% ATV/motorbiking
- 6% other — included 2% horseback riding, 2% picnicking, and 1% wood supply.
F. General Information about You

1. Which town do you live in or closest to? (Please check one)
   - 95.5% Choteau
   - 0% Fairfield
   - 0% Dutton
   - 4.5% Bynum
   - 0% Pendroy
   - 0% Agawam
   - 0% Farmington
   - 0% Collins

2. Which best describes where you live? (Please check one)
   - 73% In or next to town
   - 27% Out of town

3. How long have you lived in Teton County? Average was 31 years

4. How many people currently live in your household (including you)? 3 people (average)

5. Are you male or female? 47% Male 52% Female

6. What year were you born? Answer converted to age. Average age of respondent was 52
   (Note: Survey was administered to registered voters who were 18 and older)

7. Are you presently: (Please check all the apply)
   - 38% employed (not including self-employed)
   - 33% retired
   - 25% self-employed
   - 17% homemaker
   - 8% part time employed
   - 4% student
   - 1% unemployed
   - 5% other – included 2% volunteer, 1% multiple jobs, and 1% care provider.
8. In which of the following areas do you usually work? If you are retired, tell us about your most recent work.

- 20% service industry
- 14% ranching
- 13% government/government enterprises
- 10% homemaking
- 10% retail trade
- 9% nonprofit/charitable organization
- 8% agricultural services or labor
- 8% construction
- 7% farming
- 5% manufacturing
- 2% telecommunications or public utilities
- 2% finances
- 2% insurance
- 2% wholesale trade
- 1% real estate
- 21% other — included 6% health care, 5% education, 2% mechanic, also recreation, law, state government, and trucking.

9. In which of the following kinds of places did you spend the most time while growing up (to age 18)? (Check one)

- 33% on a farm or ranch
- 14% rural or small town [under 1,000 population]
- 21% town [1,000 - 5,000 population]
- 10% small city [5,000 - 10,000 population]
- 13% medium city [50,000 - 1 million population]
- 3% major city or metropolitan area [over 1 million population]

10. What is the highest level of education you have completed? (Check one)

- 2% $\leq$ 8 grade or less
- 2% some high school
- 29% high school graduate or GED
- 30% some college, business or trade school
- 19% college graduate
- 7% some graduate school
- 9% master's, doctoral or professional degree