

THE CATRON COUNTY CITIZENS GROUP:

**A CASE STUDY
IN COMMUNITY
COLLABORATION**

BY MELINDA SMITH

*Environmental Conflict Resolution
in the Southwest*

New Mexico Center for Dispute Resolution

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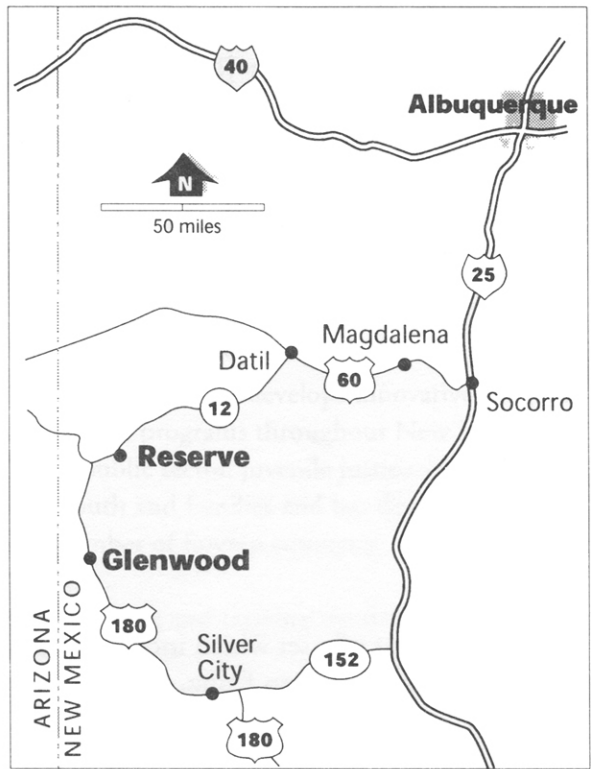
Environmental Conflict Resolution in the Southwest is a set consisting of the publication *The Catron County Citizens Group: A Case Study in Community Collaboration*; a documentary video entitled *Whose Home on the Range?* written and produced by Ben Daitz; and a *Study Guide*. These materials can be purchased separately or as a set through the New Mexico Center for Dispute Resolution.

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CONTENTS

Background	1
Convening the Catron County Citizens Group: July - December, 1995	5
Broadening the Dialogue and Setting an Agenda: January - June, 1996	8
Taking Action and Making Agreements: July 1996 - June 1997	12
The Conference and Aftermath: July - December, 1997	18
Coming Apart and Pulling Together: January - August, 1998	21
Lessons Learned	26
Afterword <i>by Carl M. Moore</i>	28

BACKGROUND

While Catron County, New Mexico has gained national notoriety as the "toughest county in the West," it is now being recognized for its efforts in using collaborative problem solving processes to bridge the wide divisions of attitudes and values about public land use issues. What occurred over a three year period starting in the summer of 1995 to create this change is part of a story which is still unfolding and whose outcome is yet to be determined.

Catron County is one of the most remote and isolated counties in the lower forty-eight states. At nearly 7000 square miles, it is the largest county in New Mexico, with over 75% of its land under federal domain, including a major portion of the Gila National Forest. A scant 2500 people live in the vast expanse of land from the Plains of St. Augustin to the alpine peaks and canyons of the Gila wilderness area. Ranchers and loggers have been dependent on these public lands for their livelihoods, some for over three generations. Like many western rural communities, Catron County has faced dramatic changes during the past decade due to environmental pressure to restrict logging and grazing and policy changes of the federal land management agencies. Residents have confronted the gridlock of increasing federal regulations and law suits and counter suits in an escalating conflict involving environmental groups, the county government, the Forest Service, and the cattle and timber industries.

Before 1990, 30 million board feet of timber were being cut annually in the Gila National Forest. In 1993 the Mexican spotted owl was listed as an endangered species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Forest Service was required to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for each potential timber sale to ensure that the sale would not interfere with owl habitat. As a result of appeals of timber sales and law suits by environmental groups, logging was drastically curtailed. By 1995 timber cutting was reduced to one million board feet, and by 1998, virtually no timber sales, other than those done under forest restoration and salvage sale projects, were being offered by the U.S. Forest Service.

During this same period, ranchers experienced similar restrictions in land management practices by the Forest Service, brought on by pressure from environmental activists. Stricter adherence to the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act and the Endangered Species Act resulted in herd reductions and closer scrutiny by Forest Service rangers of ranchers' management of their allotments. New law suits filed in the fall of 1997 compelled the Forest Service to take actions to insure the restoration of stream sides that were damaged by cattle grazing. Ranchers' problems were compounded by falling beef prices, drought, and increasing competition from elk for forage.

The only large diameter lumber mill in the county, located in the town of Reserve and operated by Stone Forest Industries, closed in 1993. It was no longer economical for it to stay in business. Thirty jobs were lost with the closing of the mill. Out of a population of 500 in the town, this loss was significant. The mill closed once before, in 1990, putting 95 people out of work, some of whom were forced to move away to find employment.

These changes left loggers and ranchers frustrated, afraid for their livelihoods and the well being of their families, and increasingly angry at the federal

Residents have confronted the gridlock of increasing federal regulations and law suits and counter suits in an escalating conflict involving environmental groups, the county government, the Forest Service, and the cattle and timber industries.

government and environmentalists. The National Association of Counties lists Reserve, the county seat, as “an endangered community.” With 25% of its residents living below the poverty level, Catron County’s unemployment rate was 10.8% in 1995.

Jim Thompson, who ran a local log hauling business, reflected on these changes: “There’s more spotted owls than people in this county now—I’m a log hauler—had to leave to make a living—affected me just like people in the Northwest—it just plumb put us out of business—threw us on the welfare lines - we don’t stoop to drawing welfare so we just leave and find a job if we can. Don’t do this county any good when we have to leave to make a living.”

Skip Price, a long time rancher in Apache Creek, who hung an inverted American flag—a sign of distress—near the entrance to his ranch, with a sign declaring “Take Back America,” commented: “Our protest is with the environmental end of it. We woke up one day and it was on us. It gets to people, telling you how to run your business. And they don’t even know what they’re talking about. You’re going to fight it, you’re going to protest.”

Glenwood rancher and former county commissioner Hugh B. McKeen, whose family has ranched in Catron County for three generations, observed: “This was the most peaceful place on earth. It didn’t matter how much money you made. Nobody bothered you. You didn’t have the Army Corps of Engineers getting after you about the river. You had no Endangered Species Act. You had a very good life, free of regulations.”

Fed up with increasing federal regulations, the Catron County commission retaliated, and in the process the county gained national attention as the leader in the county rights movement. A spate of local ordinances was passed that reflected the county’s frustration with federal control over their resources and lives. The county commission wrote its own land use plan for the Gila National Forest and passed an ordinance calling for the arrest of any federal official, implying Forest Service employees, who imposed the “will” of the federal government on the “custom and culture of the people.” The county commission passed a non-binding resolution requiring every household to possess the “firearm of their

choice.” Another ordinance required “environmentalists” to register with the county prior to doing any assessments on land within county borders.

From the environmental perspective, public lands had too long been dominated by the ranching and logging industry, whose top priorities were not ecological preservation. Since the arrival of ranchers, hunters, miners, and federal agents in southwestern New Mexico in the 1850’s, species including the grizzly bear, the Mexican wolf, the jaguar, and the river otter have disappeared in the area. According to 1995 Forest Service studies and range

Preserving the custom and culture of the county was important to ranching families in the county.



surveys, 58% of the Gila National Forest's grazing allotments scored "D." The Gila River basin, according to Arizona State University zoologist W.L. Minckley, is the only riparian area in the world where every native fish species has either been listed as endangered, threatened, or eliminated.

The Southwest Center for Biological Diversity, an environmental group which originally started in Catron County as the Greater Gila Biodiversity Group, has long been focused on the preservation of old growth Ponderosa pine in the Gila National Forest. Kieran Suckling, executive director, described the modified form of clear cutting being practiced in the 1980's in the Gila. He recalled touring a timber sale after the cut: "All the big trees were cut and the ground was ripped up by tractors. It looked like a war zone."

Suckling explained that the original goal of the group was to develop an ecosystem plan for the Gila and Apache-Sitgreaves (across the border in Arizona) National Forests. However, after a careful study of the species and management policies for old growth forests, the group decided that ecosystem management had to happen at a regional level. The Center initiated an onslaught of law suits against the Forest Service which involved the enforcement of the Endangered Species Act and the listing of species. They were responsible for an injunction which shut down logging in Arizona and New Mexico for 18 months from August of 1995 to December of 1996. In October of 1997, the Center filed a lawsuit to compel the Forest Service to reduce cattle on 90 allotments in Arizona and New Mexico to protect riparian areas.

The Forest Service, for its part, has found itself caught in the middle between the resource industries, county government and the environmentalists, and has become the target of law suits from both sides. While ranchers and loggers claim that the Forest Service has gone too far in restricting their grazing and timber activities, environmentalists assert that the Forest Service has not gone far enough in enforcing federal environmental law. Compelled to spend thousands of dollars responding to appeals and law suits, the Forest Service has been limited in the funds it can spend on forest restoration.

The escalating conflicts and political rhetoric that started in the early 1990's were accompanied by increased tension between adversaries, physical symptoms of stress, and even the fear of violence. Elena Gellert, long time environmentalist and resident of Luna, recalled "a dangerous kind of undercurrent that could have erupted any time." Gellert remembered: "I went to public meetings where I spoke in favor of the Endangered Species Act, and listing certain species and that was at a meeting where there were threats of using bullets and shooting. I remember leaving that meeting being concerned for my vehicle, concerned for my own safety. I was very concerned for the safety of the people who are now the Southwest Center for Biodiversity."

Forest Service employees felt the tension so profoundly that they hired a counselor to assist them and their families to cope with the stress. Mike Gardner, district ranger for the Reserve District, described the atmosphere: "You're wondering if you're coming home each night, especially when there is so much rhetoric about guns and every family having a gun and things like that. A lot of people that work for the Forest Service and myself felt threatened."

"I went to public meetings where I spoke in favor of the Endangered Species Act, and listing certain species and that was at a meeting where there were threats of using bullets and shooting."

*—Elena Gellert,
environmentalist*

“With all the environmental suits, all the bureaucratic pressures on ranchers, and the difficulty people have just trying to make a living in these small towns, there’s a portion of them that are going to shoot themselves or shoot somebody else. It’s a reality.”

*— Hugh B. McKeen,
rancher*

Rancher Hugh B. McKeen recalled a relative who tried to commit suicide, and asserted that “with all the environmental suits, all the bureaucratic pressures on ranchers, and the difficulty people have just trying to make a living in these small towns, there’s a portion of them that are going to shoot themselves or shoot somebody else. It’s a reality.”

It was concern for the physical and emotional health of the community that prompted Mark Unverzagt, the only physician in the county, to seek outside help. Dr. Unverzagt, or “Dr. Mark” as he was called, was seeing increasing numbers of patients with symptoms of anxiety and depression, regardless of what side of the land wars they represented. He was treating more drug and alcohol problems and becoming aware of more spousal abuse and family violence. The health of Catron County’s citizens was being affected by the threat of conflict, by the disruption of an economy, and by “outside forces” over which the community felt it had no control. Dr. Unverzagt recognized that the health of the community was in jeopardy.

Mark Unverzagt had come to Catron County in 1993 with his young family at the encouragement of Dr. Ben Daitz, his former professor at the University of New Mexico School of Medicine. Although a newcomer, Dr. Unverzagt had gained the trust and respect of the residents he served. He decided to take some action. In the spring of 1995 he called the New Mexico Center for Dispute Resolution (NMCDR), a non-profit mediation center based in Albuquerque, to seek assistance. He had heard that the NMCDR was experienced in mediation and violence prevention work and thought there might be some useful techniques that could be applied to the situation in Catron County.

CONVENING THE CATRON COUNTY CITIZENS GROUP: JULY - DECEMBER, 1995

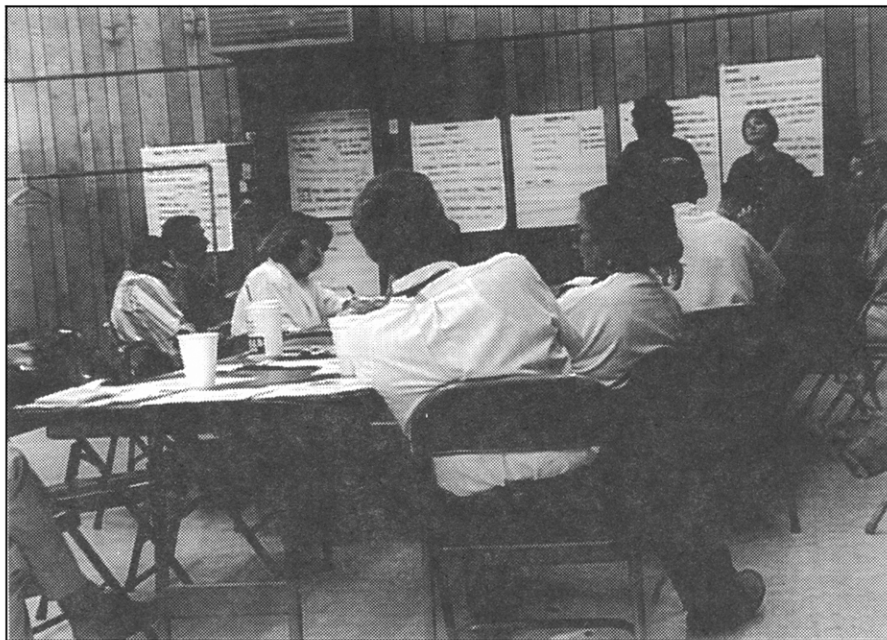
The first strategy that the NMCDR recommended was to bring a number of people together to begin a dialogue on the issues that divided them. It was important to invite people who knew and trusted Dr. Mark and would accept his leadership role in the process of grappling with the complex issues and the strong emotions they engendered.

Dr. Mark identified an initial group of about 20 people, who included rancher Hugh B. McKeen and his wife Margie; Forest Service ranger Mike Gardner; environmentalist Elena Gellert; then mayor of Reserve Harold Dykstra; then county extension agent Doug Baird; Howard Hutchinson, coordinator of the Coalition of Counties of New Mexico and Arizona; county treasurer Jan Porter, and several other ranchers, Forest Service employees, clergymen, environmentalists, and community leaders. With some additions and changes, this group has remained the nucleus of what became the Catron County Citizens Group. Since July of 1995, the group, ranging from 15-50 people, has met monthly, beginning as a dialogue group to create a forum for discussion, and evolving into an planning and action group engaging in collaborative processes.

The first meetings in the summer and fall of 1995 were sometimes tense but with Dr. Mark or Harold Dykstra acting as convenors and John Folk-Williams of Western Network and I acting as facilitators and recorders, participants seemed grateful for the opportunity to vent their frustrations. Harold Dykstra expressed the goal of the first gatherings "to encourage everyone to voice their honest opinions without fear of being criticized and to begin working together to stop the spread of misinformation and to begin building trust." The group generated the following ground rules to keep the dialogue process productive:

1. Listen to all in a respectful manner.
2. Engage in open and honest discussion.
3. Talk to others outside the group in a way that respects all views.

By September of 1995 the group developed a mission statement, motivated in part by both the curiosity and skepticism of people in the community who weren't participating. The mission of the group was written and submitted for publication to the weekly real estate advertising circular mailed to every post office box in the county. The group wanted to educate the residents about the



Members of the Catron County Citizens Group engage in dialogue about resource issues at a monthly meeting.

“It was five years of pretty harrowing times with nobody really coming to your aid. Nobody saying, you know, ‘attaboy Mike, hang in there, things are going to change pretty soon.’ Now with this group, I feel like I’m not just dealing with somebody with opposing views from mine or somebody saying things intentionally to make me mad.”

*—Mike Gardner,
Forest Service*

purpose of the group and invite them to participate. The mission statement read as follows:

“The mission is to come together to openly and honestly discuss and deal with the diverse situations we face, finding common ground from our different points of view to ensure an economic, social and an environmentally sound future for us all.”

Despite differences, the group quickly established common ground and discovered shared interests in the need for economic development and diversification, the maintenance of rural life styles and values, the importance of sound land stewardship, and the importance of participation in the decisions that affected the county. There was a sense of relief among some of the participants that there was finally a forum to deal with these issues. Reserve district ranger Mike Gardner expressed it this way: “It was five years of pretty harrowing times with nobody really coming to your aid. Nobody saying, you know, ‘attaboy Mike, hang in there, things are going to change pretty soon.’ Now with this group, I feel like I’m not just dealing with somebody with opposing views from mine or somebody saying things intentionally to make me mad.”

Our role as facilitators was to insure that meetings were productive and balanced, and to assist the group in using processes that would help them achieve their purpose and goals. Early on I asked for assistance from my colleagues from Western Network, an environmental dispute resolution firm based in Santa Fe. Its staff, including John Folk Williams and Richard Pacheco, assisted me in co-facilitating many of the meetings during the first ten months of the process. Carl Moore, also of Western Network, joined the team after the first year, replacing his colleagues.

Designing processes to deal with the complex issues and differing agendas of the participants was challenging and circuitous. There were false starts, dead ends, and uncertainties during this long and multifaceted intervention. In addition, gaining the trust of the group and an acceptance as outsiders was critical to our continued presence. Dr. Ben Daitz of the University of New Mexico School of Medicine provided initial funding to the New Mexico Center for Dispute Resolution to cover facilitation and travel for the first six months. However, our continued presence depended on our ability to raise additional funding through our own organizations. The group accepted and invited us to pursue this path.

The group also agreed to allow Dr. Daitz, who is a documentary film maker, to film the meetings. He wanted to create a record of the process and produce a film which would show the progression of events in Catron County. Some group members were initially uncomfortable with the idea of being filmed but that discomfort diminished over time. Most people got used to the camera and trusted Dr. Daitz, since he had been involved in health care planning in the community for a number of years.

“ON THE GROUND” PROJECTS

During the first six months, the group engaged in mutual education of their diverse points of view. The county rights advocates pressed their agenda of taking over control of the public lands and recounted the changes and increasing

difficulties in working with the Forest Service. Hugh B. McKeen expressed these sentiments this way: "The people in this county need to set their own destiny—they need to make the decisions about the land they live on. The county movement is saying we can do a better job of management on public lands—better for the wildlife, better for the watershed, better for the environment, better for the economy."

While some group members wanted to use as a starting point a pilot project proposal prepared by the county which would transfer public lands to county control for 20 years, the group as a whole was persuaded to pursue a fresh agenda. By the end of 1995, six months after the first meeting, the group decided to undertake several "on the ground" projects, both as a learning tool and as a means to collaborate on projects to achieve common goals. Two projects were put on the table. Hugh B. McKeen proposed a pinon/juniper removal project on his allotment. He wanted to bulldoze these trees in a 20 acre area at the headwaters of the Cedar Breaks allotment, which were encroaching and taking over grassland. He proposed that pushing pinon and juniper and reseeding would create more habitat for wildlife and grazing for cattle. While there was some disagreement about the long term benefits of this project, the group agreed to initiate the process and identified a committee to work on it. The procedures set forth in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) would be applied to the project, so that the group could learn together about the Act's requirements, and according to some, reveal its overly regulated and protracted procedures.

The second project, proposed by the Forest Service, entailed the transfer of public land to the county for the purposes of creating a business park to attract commercial enterprises. The NEPA process was also required for this project and the Forest Service suggested that the county take responsibility for it to streamline the process.

Because of intervening agendas and other obstacles, neither project was completed quickly. By December of 1996 the regional forester had approved 300 acres of land that could be considered for the business park project and five acres were designated for purchase by the county. An addendum to a memorandum of understanding between the county and the Forest Service was written allowing the county to have cooperating agency status in the project. The Cedar Breaks project was undergoing a scoping analysis as of January of 1998 and was slated for implementation some time in 1998.

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— Hugh B. McKeen

BROADENING THE DIALOGUE AND SETTING AN AGENDA: JANUARY - JUNE, 1996

In early 1996, the group decided to expand the circle of participants and agreed that each group member would bring an additional county resident to the monthly meeting in February of 1996. By this time, four group members had participated in a facilitation training sponsored by NMCDR and were asked to facilitate part of the meeting agenda. This was done to build local leadership and build capacity and skills within the group.

At the February meeting, nearly 50 people crammed into the meeting room of the Presbyterian church and brainstormed in small groups their concerns and desired outcomes for their community. The list they compiled included the following:

- Job availability
- Youth opportunities/parental and community support of youth
- Environmental issues and land management
- Lack of cooperation between communities and divergent groups
- Diversification of economy
- Reduction of social polarization between long term and new residents
- Reduction of hostility and development of tolerance for different views
- Maintenance of culture and acceptance of change
- Control change that happens and diminish negative influences
- Maintain work ethic
- Public education about land management from local perspective
- Relief of tension/stress
- Good conflict resolution
- More effective decision making process about land management
- People in county deciding the future of county

Several members took the list and formulated group priorities, which the group endorsed in March. These priorities, listed below, set the agenda and structured the working committees of the group to the present time.

1. Education, including educating each other about their different points of view and values, as well as the public about the issues and conflicts the county is experiencing;
2. Dispute resolution—finding processes for resolving differences and preventing threats of violence or destructive behavior;
3. Land stewardship—finding common ground for maintaining healthy range and environmental conditions everyone can agree upon;
4. Economic development—developing new sources of revenue for the county and its residents and;

5. Youth development—creating a means for full participation of the county's youth in the current process and the future of the county.

The participants decided that they would commit to an additional year's work and then assess their progress. While never explicitly agreeing to make decisions using a consensus process, we as facilitators worked to insure that decisions were made with the approval of all participants. The group also decided it was time to involve the public in larger numbers. They had resisted a public involvement process earlier because they wanted to feel more confident about the group's identity and purpose. More important, they were concerned that tensions were so high that the meetings might deteriorate into shouting matches.

FUNDING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

While the group was engaging in dialogue and self definition, the New Mexico Center for Dispute Resolution, along with the UNM Medical School, were writing proposals to foundations to continue the work. A grant from the Hewlett Foundation allowed Dr. Daitz to continue his filming, and funding from the Surdna Foundation in March of 1996 enabled me to continue in my role as process consultant. More important, it provided funds for the group to hire its own local coordinator to manage meetings, publicity, projects, and committees. The idea of a local coordinator was suggested by the facilitators and the group seconded it.

A hiring committee was put together to interview and hire the group's first coordinator, Gail Phetteplace. Gail and her husband Alan were newcomers to the county, but in some ways that benefited her, since she was perceived as neutral by the community. She had the energy, social skills, and organizational savvy to maintain the group's momentum and encourage continued participation. The hiring committee soon became the steering committee for the CCCG, with Gail reporting to the steering committee. Capacity was being built for group self governance. Instituting potluck dinners before each monthly meeting starting in the spring of 1996 also contributed a sense of community to the group.

There was a sense of optimism in the group but at the April, 1996 monthly meeting, tensions again mounted. The group had invited staff from the forest supervisor's office in Silver City to provide information about a proposed salvage timber sale, the H.B. sale; and to address the NEPA requirements in the grazing permit renewal process. Ranchers were facing herd reductions in their annual and ten year renewal of permits. In addition, loggers and those who would benefit from timber sales were frustrated by the appeals that had been made to prevent the H.B. sale from taking place. Adding to the tense atmosphere was an incident that took place in Eager, Arizona a few days earlier.

INCIDENT AT EAGER

A Reserve Forest Service ranger and regular group attendee saw a sign on the Catron County courthouse door advertising a meeting of permittees in neighboring Eager, Arizona with featured speaker Karen Budd-Falen, an attorney and property rights advocate. The meeting was a strategy session to pursue litigation against the Forest Service for restricting grazing permits. At the meeting

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were several Catron County commissioners, other county officials, and permittees, including several members of the Catron County Citizens Group. The Forest Service employee was recognized and asked to leave. He was told that it was a closed meeting. A member of the Citizens Group went over to the ranger and asked him to leave, at which point the ranger went into the hallway, still within ear shot. Then several ranchers, none from Catron County, proceeded to escort the ranger out of the building in an allegedly rough manner. The ranger went to the police to report the incident.



The group discusses range conditions on a field trip to seek a shared understanding of sound land management.

This story ignited the group and two hours were devoted to it at the April meeting. The CCCG group member who had told the ranger to leave was outraged because he felt he had been accused of violence, of which he had no part or knowledge. The treatment of the ranger fueled everyone's fears of violence and sobered the group into issuing a statement. After much negotiating, the statement was prepared which (1) reiterated the group's denunciation of violence as a means of resolving the public lands debate; (2) exonerated the rancher from any involvement in the Forest Service employee's forced expulsion from the meeting; and (3) upheld the ranger's right to be at the meeting given the public notice. A copy of the statement was sent to the permittees' association in Arizona.

In addition, the group agreed anew to a set of behaviors they would adhere to, including (1) hearing all sides with respect and speaking the truth; (2) having direct

communication before categorizing people; and (3) respecting everyone's value to each other and to the community.

Other positive recommendations emerged from the meeting with Forest Service officials from the supervisor's office. A list of suggestions to deal with land use issues was generated. They included:

1. Hire independent scientists to do studies
2. Develop processes for mediating disputes
3. Find uniform methods of analysis by both Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management
4. Involve the State Fish and Game Department in the processes
5. Gain better understanding of NEPA
6. Increase understanding of standards and the land management plan
7. Develop more cooperative monitoring on the ground between the Forest Service and the community.

The CCCG initiated actions to accomplish at least some of these ideas. They invited a NEPA expert to provide a four hour seminar on the NEPA process and how it applied to some of the land controversies the group was confronting. Mediation was explored as a process for resolving grazing issues, as described in the next section. To increase common understanding of forest and range conditions, the group decided to initiate a series of field trips in the county to discuss the specifics of land conditions.

THE ENVIRONMENTALISTS COME TO THE TABLE

At the same time that grazing issues were heating up, the timber issues were heading for major conflict. The H.B. salvage sale was a proposed sale of burned timber on Eagle Peak, an old growth forest area in the Reserve Forest Service District. The Southwest Center for Biological Diversity (SWCBD) opposed the sale because of its commitment to preserving old growth forest and because the sale would involve building roads in roadless areas. The SWCBD was planning an encampment on Eagle Peak if the sale was to proceed, involving potentially scores of activists confronting the Forest Service. We decided to contact Todd Schulke, the SWCBD's New Mexico staff person, to discuss his potential involvement in the CCCG to see if we could bring the issues of the H.B. sale to the table.

Todd Schulke had lived in Reserve, working in restoration and habitat research until the tension in Catron County prompted him to relocate in Pinos Altos, near Silver City to the south of Catron County. After discussions with the SWCBD leadership based in Tucson, he agreed to begin attending the group meetings in the spring of 1996.

While several local environmentalists regularly attended meetings, none was affiliated with the groups engaged in ongoing litigation against the Forest Service. The presence of a representative of the SWCBD was essential if there was to be increased mutual understanding between environmental activists and their adversaries. As dispute resolution practitioners, we also hoped there might be some potential for bringing some of the conflicts from the courtroom to the negotiating table. About his involvement in the group, Todd Schulke stated, "My intention is to develop understanding and trust in each other so at least there is enough common ground that we can move together."

The group attempted to negotiate the issues of the H.B. sale but there was little common ground. Eventually, the sale as it was originally proposed was mooted by the Department of Agriculture's decision to restrict salvage logging to roaded areas. Accepting that there could be no agreement about the salvage sale, Mike Gardner proposed that the group turn its attention to other potential timber sales that involved small diameter timber.

RIPARIAN TOURS

In May and June of 1996, the group organized two tours to provide on the ground education about riparian conditions and practices and give group members an opportunity to have input into standards and guidelines for the Gila Forest land management plan. While there was not full agreement on good riparian recovery, the tours created a common language for discussing issues.

"My intention is to develop understanding and trust in each other so at least there is enough common ground that we can move together."

*—Todd Schulke,
Southwest Center for
Biological Diversity*

TAKING ACTION AND MAKING AGREEMENTS: JULY 1996 - JUNE 1997

EXPLORING THE USE OF MEDIATION

Because there was so much focus on conflicts between ranchers and the Forest Service, some of which seemed to stem from communication and interpersonal problems, we encouraged the group to explore the possibilities of using mediation to resolve some of these disputes. Further, the enforcement of environmental impact assessments on grazing allotments also created a host of conflicts involving data collection, analysis and interpretation of range conditions and other Forest Service procedures related to permit renewal and monitoring. A mediation committee was assembled and held an exploratory meeting to examine the different conflicts and potential dispute resolution processes that would be suitable.

The committee identified three levels of conflict around grazing issues, including (1) interpersonal and procedural conflicts between rangers and ranchers; (2) substantive and procedural issues requiring the use of the National Environmental Protection Act; and (3) larger public policy conflicts. Among the types of interpersonal conflicts that the committee identified that seemed suited to rancher/Forest Service mediation were

- Preferential treatment
- Communication styles
- Keeping agreements
- Conflicts in expectations of ranchers and Forest Service rangers
- Monitoring after grazing permits are signed
- Perceptions of punitive action
- Personality conflicts
- Differences in attitudes, cultures, and backgrounds of Forest Service personnel and ranchers
- Lack of trust
- Uneven power perceptions

Other issues which involved substantive matters and the application of NEPA, which might require the presence of third parties, including environmental interests, were identified as follows:

- Data collection and interpretation for condition of resources
- Ownership of permit and improvements
- Season of use
- Number of livestock
- Environmental interests and communication about them
- Permit terms and decision making

The group decided that the mediation process should be attempted and ranchers and Forest Service employees identified a conflict that they thought would be suitable, involving three ranchers and two Forest Service employees. One mediation session and a follow up were held, conducted by a staff mediator from NMCDR with assistance from a mediator with the U.S. Department of Agriculture mediation program. The mediation was viewed as a qualified success. The parties came together and talked in a more candid way than they had ever done about the issues they confronted and cleared up misinformation and rumors. The Forest Service reaffirmed their commitment to work with the ranchers. What didn't work as well was that not all of the parties were at the table that needed to be. One of the ranchers that should have been involved didn't feel comfortable discussing the issues in this type of forum. In addition, the ranchers seemed hesitant to press for their needs when confronted with the assumed power of the Forest Service. More might have been done to balance power so that the ranchers might have been more satisfied with the outcome. Caucus sessions might have helped ranchers express their needs more forcefully.

We also learned that grazing disputes can be much more interpersonal than substantive, and that long standing animosities can exist between ranchers and Forest Service rangers. The process can work, but there needs to be adequate education of the parties about the process, more preparation time devoted to interviewing parties face to face prior to the mediation, and more trust built in the process to get all the parties to the table. It is clear that mediation is a potentially appropriate intervention for many types of rancher/Forest Service disputes. However, it would take resources and commitment to fully implement such a program.

For the second type of conflict identified by the group, that is, substantive and procedural conflicts, a mediation process needed to be designed that would incorporate the NEPA process, since these are disputes that require public input. A process was designed with the input of a NEPA specialist and Forest Service employees to be used in facilitating 10 year renewals of grazing permits. The goals of grazing permit mediation would be to

- find common ground on a grazing management plan for the permittee among interested parties, including the permittee, the Forest Service, and environmental interests, plus the interdisciplinary team required by NEPA;
- resolve conflicts in range and riparian conditions on grazing allotments;
- allow participants to exchange points of view and build respect for their different perspectives;
- strengthen relationships between parties;
- avoid the costs of appeal and litigation.

However, there were several concerns about the process which have temporarily inhibited our pursuit of using mediation for annual review of grazing permits or 10 year permit renewals. First, there was some concern that the process might violate the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA). Further, it was presumed that this type of mediation would require public involvement, and in particular, involvement of an environmental activist group that was engaged in

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Members of a local women's group sing at the annual Heritage Festival, where the CCCG polled the community about its treasures.

litigation against the Forest Service. The willingness of such a group to participate in a grazing permit renewal mediation process was questionable. If adversarial methods hold more promise in reaching its goals, there is little motivation to negotiate.

COMMUNITY VISIONING PROCESS

From the start, the CCCG recognized the need for a larger public involvement process to get input from the community at large to help guide the group. Many members of the group also felt that in addition to focusing on conflict resolution, they needed to get community consensus on a vision for the future. In the summer of 1996, a

committee was assembled to implement a community visioning process. With the assistance of Carl Moore of Western Network, the CCCG initiated a series of public meetings in which citizens identified the treasures, threats and opportunities facing the county. Four steps were implemented:

1. In the summer and fall of 1996, Catron County residents were asked to identify what they treasured in the county in two public forums: the annual Heritage Festival and County Fair, where the Catron County Citizen's Group maintained a booth. Over 400 responses were gathered.
2. Twenty CCCG members and other community residents were trained in facilitation skills in preparation for the first round of public meetings across the county.
3. Public meetings to create a list of desired visions of the future in the county were held in the fall and winter of 1996, co-facilitated with the trained community members. Over 200 residents attended five meetings that were held in the communities of Luna, Glenwood, Reserve and at the senior centers in Quemado and Reserve. Students at Reserve High School also participated in the process at a separate meeting. The treasure list was shared and each of the groups developed their visions and goals for the future.
4. The steering committee of the CCCG then synthesized the hundreds of ideas the citizens identified that they want for the future into a list of proposed goals.

The next step was to take the proposed goals back to the communities for another round of meetings to vote on prioritizing the goals. The CCCG would then act as a catalyst with other community groups and perhaps county government to work on a collaborative plan for implementation, resource identification and procurement to make the goals a reality. However the next steps were put on hiatus by the group because there was disagreement about whether to have another round of community meetings. The group wanted to

work on the specific projects it had already undertaken to demonstrate to the community that it could accomplish something. Further, there was less motivation to complete this process because of the more compelling grazing and timber issues. The CCCG decided to revisit the community visioning process at a later time.

NEW ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

By October of 1996, the group retooled its organizational structure. The steering committee was expanded to include an additional environmentalist and the committee structure was streamlined. Some of the ad hoc committees that had been created were renamed and all were given a point person to communicate with the coordinator. The working committees were now the watershed improvement committee (formerly the timber committee); the economic development committee (formerly the business park committee); the community process committee; the mediation committee; and the youth committee.

The steering committee wanted the committees to do more of the group's work and meet the diverse interests of the group. A number of members had long been interested in community and youth development projects and didn't want the entire focus of the CCCG to be timber and grazing issues.

By this time in the genesis of the group, there were several significant additions to the regular attendees, including Adam Polley, the new county manager; Larry Patton, the attorney who defended the famed Diamond Bar Ranch against the ultimately successful attempt to remove all its cattle; Cricket Cox, property rights activist; Dr. Crandell Young, the new school superintendent; Vic Jenkins, forest consultant to the county; and Lyn Condo, a logger and small mill operator. Attorney Patton commented on his participation: "Law suits should be at the end of the process."

YOUTH PROJECT

Continued interest in getting a youth project initiated resulted in a proposal to a local foundation. A proposed program to bring mediation and collaborative processes to the schools was funded in November of 1996. An expanded youth committee, made up of CCCG members and a number of teachers and administrators, met to plan program implementation. They decided to have high school students trained as mediators and they, in turn, would train elementary school students in mediation, to enable the schools in Reserve to incorporate mediation into the disciplinary policies in the schools. A second component was to provide another group of secondary students with an opportunity to conduct research activities in economic, environmental and demographic areas that would provide information to the group as it conducted its community visioning and planning processes.

One student completed a project on the history of agriculture in the county, demonstrating the change in conditions over the past 20 years. Another project involved the creation of a web page to provide information about hunting and tourism in the county. While the projects were successful, neither the students

*"Law suits should be
at the end of the
process."*

*—Larry Patton,
Attorney and country
resident*

“A diverse group coming up with a desired future condition for an area—this group has to band together. This is the future of public lands management.”

—Mike Gardner

nor their work were fully integrated into the goals and activities of the CCCG. This was due in part to the groups' decision to put the community visioning process on hold, since the resource issues were viewed as having greater urgency. In addition, the students had difficulty attending the evening meetings of the CCCG, and most graduated and were involved with other pursuits. While the group understood the importance of youth involvement in the group, the means to achieve it was not fully present.

NEGOTIATION OF FOREST HEALTH PROJECTS

What many members of the CCCG will point to as a concrete accomplishment is the negotiation of two forest and range improvement projects. In the fall of 1996 the Forest Service proposed several possible logging projects that the group might negotiate in lieu of the H.B. salvage sale. The group went on a two day field trip to survey the sites. The first project, the T Bar Grasslands, entailed thinning of ponderosa pines from a grassland. While this project wouldn't attract lumber companies because of the size of the logs, all agreed that it would improve the condition of the grasslands.

The project that did cause significant controversy and needed to be negotiated was the Apache Forest Improvement Project. The Forest Service proposed cutting 450,000 board feet to thin a 125 acre stand of ponderosa pines that had a very high fuel load and serious mistletoe infestation. According to the Forest Service, tree density had increased two to three times over the last hundred years. Veteran Forest Service silviculturist Donal Weaver identified the goals of the project as (1) retaining the old growth overstory; (2) reducing mistletoe invasion; (3) thinning tree density; (4) increasing forage; and (5) providing forest products for small industry.

The SWCBD objected to the prescription for the project because trees larger than 16 inches in diameter were targeted for cutting. Two trips were made to the site to discuss the issues and different perspectives on the project. On the first trip, after much discussion about forest health goals, it was agreed that the Forest Service would mark for cutting all of the trees in the prescription, but those 16 inch in diameter and above would be flagged. On the second trip, the group would be able to discuss the flagged trees and determine whether their removal would help or hinder forest health. While only 114 trees were flagged, Todd Schulke of the SWCBD said he would have to hold firm on the 16 inch cap, acknowledging that this was a politically motivated position, not an environmental one. He commented: “One thing that's underestimated is how far we're sticking our necks out being out here and advocating some of this stuff. We've got the Sam Hitts [environmental activist] of the world thrashing us...there are some political realities.”

From others' perspective, the cap was arbitrary and scientifically unjustifiable. From an economic perspective, the restrictions on logging were devastating the county. County manager Adam Polley responded: “You're looking at Reserve...You're looking at a group of people losing their living. If you want that on your conscience, that's great.”

Don Weaver came forward to emphasize the common ground that existed and the progress the group was making in bring former adversaries together. He

stated: "To have Todd out here and trying to work with us and at least admit that there's a need for logging of some sort is a pretty big step. We just need to keep working together... We're a long ways from where we were a year ago, which was nowhere."

The Forest Service and others wanted some assurance that the 16 inch cap was not setting a precedent and that other projects would be looked at on their merits. With that assurance, the group agreed to move ahead with the sale. Logger Lyn Condo also emphasized that 7-20 inch diameter trees were economically beneficial and marketable to small operators like himself.

While the group agreed that this was a small project, it was a good start in the building of trust and a necessary project to protect the health of the forest. Cricket Cox commented on the process: "I'm encouraged that we're beginning to get past the rhetoric and getting to the issues. It's been a long struggle." Mike Gardner summed up the sentiment of the group: "Any project where we have the agreement of the community, the chances it could be held up are minimized. A diverse group coming up with a desired future condition for an area—this group has to band together. This is the future of public lands management."

Mike Gardner later commented that this was the first timber sale of the decade that had not been appealed. From a dispute resolution perspective, this negotiation had all of the elements of good process—social learning, mutual respect, agreements in principle, achievement of individual goals and a common agenda, and an open door for future negotiations.

"To have Todd out here and trying to work with us and at least admit that there's a need for logging of some sort is a pretty big step. We just need to keep working together... We're a long ways from where we were a year ago, which was nowhere."

*—Don Weaver,
Forest Service*



Environmentalist Todd Schulke and Forest Service employee Don Weaver shake hands after agreement is reached.

“The conference was for me a terrific opportunity to learn more about what I regard as among the best examples of conflict transformation at work... The Reserve folks (and the other partnerships) are at work at much more than a series of tightly argued ‘settlements.’ This is a community transforming relationships and structures.”

—Conference participant

THE CONFERENCE AND AFTERMATH: JULY - DECEMBER, 1997

THE CONFERENCE

When funding was initially sought for the Catron County project, we thought a dissemination conference would be a good vehicle for sharing the experiences of the Catron County group with other similar groups in the West and with policy makers. A grant was obtained from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for this purpose. While the conference had originally been conceived of as an event taking place after the completion of the documentary film and at an end point in the intervention, both the film and the process were taking much longer than anticipated. It was clear that a conference needed to happen before the end of the funding period, and could serve as an excellent educational tool for the group and the community.

The steering committee worked with us to plan and implement the conference. Three other collaborative groups in the West were invited to participate to share their stories: the Malpai Borderlands Group of Arizona/New Mexico, the Ponderosa Pine Partnership of southern Colorado, and the LEAD Partnership of California and Oregon. The conference was held in July of 1997. More than 120 people from all regions of the U.S. gathered at the high school in Reserve to talk about the challenges, frustrations and successes of collaborative processes emerging in the West. Over 45 Catron County residents participated, joined by 60 other people from 12 states and the District of Columbia.

The conference was structured to enable the groups to tell their stories on the first day, followed by commentary from invited speakers Alston Chase, environmental writer; Luther Propst of the Sonoran Institute; John Schumaker, dispute resolution specialist with the Bureau of Land Management; and representatives of New Mexico Senators Bingaman and Domenici. The second day gave an opportunity for the group to experience collaborative problem solving. Two workshops posed actual resource conflicts in the county, the H.B. salvage sale and a grazing allotment dispute. Participants were asked to analyze the conflicts and to attempt to resolve them through collaborative, not adversarial means.

While the collaborative stories presented at the conference were generally well-received, not all of the conference participants were sanguine about collaborative processes in resource management. The biggest critics were representatives of environmental groups, including Gila Watch, Forest Guardians, and the Sierra Club. They claimed that these processes don't represent national interests and inappropriately rest decision-making about public assets in the hands of place-based interests. There was also concern that the environmental perspectives were inadequately represented in these processes, and that local environmental activities were not equipped to negotiate the interests of national groups.

One conference participant, from Eastern Mennonite University in Virginia, commented: “The conference was for me a terrific opportunity to learn more about what I regard as among the best examples of conflict transformation at

work...The Reserve folks (and the other partnerships) are at work at much more than a series of tightly argued 'settlements.' This is a community transforming relationships and structures." Most of the CCCG felt the conference was a success and that it brought the county some rare good press. It provided a very positive momentum for the continued work of the group.

GROUP GOVERNANCE AND NEW DIRECTIONS

In the aftermath of the conference, the group again examined its purpose and direction. In the meetings in the fall of 1997, the group considered but made no final decision on the possibility of obtaining non-profit status in order to procure funding for ongoing projects. The group revised its mission statement again, adding the words "to take action on projects," so that it would focus on getting something done in addition to talking.

Gail Phetteplace resigned her job as coordinator to take a teaching job at the high school and was replaced by Bob Moore, a 20 year resident of Glenwood and former Forest Service contractor. In considering future directions, the group had on the table several new projects, including convening an ecosystem management project and developing and marketing small diameter wood products.

As process consultants, our role had evolved during the first two years of the process. We no longer facilitated the monthly meetings, but we provided coaching to the coordinator and the group about process issues and provided resources and training. We monitored the process to insure that the essential stakeholders were participating and that discussions and negotiations were integrating the diverse interests represented in the group.

In assessing the group's work to date, some members held that the CCCG had been a successful forum but the power to implement decisions was not within the group's purview. Others felt that the group was indeed implementing projects, and as one member put it, "we're taking baby steps but we were so polarized before and now we are making progress."

THE GRAZING LAW SUIT

New fissures in the group appeared in November of 1997 when word got out that the Southwest Center for Biological Diversity filed a law suit which would compel the Forest Service to comply with the Endangered Species Act by consulting with the U.S. Fish and Game Department regarding the impact of grazing on the Gila National Forest and several others in New Mexico and Arizona. The net result of the law suit could be the removal of cattle from as many as 70 allotments in Catron County. At the November meeting of the CCCG, the county manager walked out of the meeting in frustration with the law suit and the lack of notice.

By December, tension was high. Bob Moore and I went to Tucson to discuss the potential participation at CCCG meetings of two key SWCBD staff involved in the litigation, Kieran Suckling and Peter Galvin. At a time when trust was being strengthened among members of the group, the law suit was like a slap in the face to those who were encouraged by that trust. In order to clarify the meaning of the law suit and its goals to the group, we requested that Suckling

and Galvin attend several meetings and enter into a dialogue with the group. Since the suit named specific allotments in the Gila, I asked the SWCBD to provide a list and discuss specific range conditions on each allotment. I hoped that by connecting personally with CCCG members, the SWCBD leadership would be more inclined to negotiate issues in the future. They said that they would like to make time in their schedules to attend several meetings to explain the law suit and the larger goals of the SWCBD, but couldn't be regular participants. So far they have not attended any meetings.

Time and priorities played a role in the absence of the SWCBD leadership. Todd Schulke was doubtful that the Tucson staff would take the time to participate. Moreover, the litigation strategy has proven so successful that the motivation to come to the table in Catron County was not high.

At the December 1997 monthly meeting, Todd Schulke, who had not worked on the law suits, was prepared to explain what they meant to the extent he could. He affirmed that the SWCBD wanted the Forest Service to adhere to the requirements of the Endangered Species Act to assess the impact of cattle grazing on identified endangered species. He clarified that the SWCBD was interested in ecological bottom lines and not removal of cattle. He also said that he was part of the CCCG in order to explore alternatives to litigation. No group had declared it would stop suing while attempting to collaborate, so why would the SWCBD ?

Members expressed a need for truth on the table. The SWCBD pledged to do a better job of keeping people updated on their intent and actions. The SWCBD, Todd Schulke reiterated, was supportive of the CCCG's experiment and was interested in working with the CCCG to obtain outcomes not attainable by law suits. Todd Schulke affirmed that he was there to listen, and that the listening process was important. However, the SWCBD's bottom line was the viability of certain species. The SWCBD was not fighting over limited species but had a broader agenda that had to be examined within the context of regional outcomes.

From the county's point of view, cattle industry revenues were \$40,000 per year for the county, and loss of the cattle industry would have serious consequences. According to ranchers, the environmental movement was attacking a way of life, and they were fighting for a lifestyle, not just a job. To bridge the divisions between the environmentalists and the county, we visited with the county manager, listened to his concerns about resource management controversies, and encouraged his continued participation in the group. He subsequently returned to meetings on an intermittent basis.

COMING APART AND PULLING TOGETHER: JANUARY - AUGUST, 1998

In the early months of 1998 the uncertainties of the grazing law suit cast a shadow over the trust and fragile gains of the group but the promise of the timber projects provided some forward momentum. The group took up the possibility of identifying forest thinning projects that would improve the health of the forest as well as create marketable timber for harvesting. A number of local loggers joined the group to discuss these projects.

The Forest Service identified a list of potential forest health projects of a similar nature to the Apache sale within a 120,000 acre area identified as the Negrito ecosystem that would have the capacity of yielding 90 million board feet of timber over an eight year period. Working in tandem with the CCCG as the vehicle for negotiating potential projects, the Forest Service hoped to create a sustainable yield of timber projects to keep local loggers in business. When word of projects of this magnitude reached the Tucson leadership of the SWCBD, fresh divisions grew between the SWCBD and the CCCG. The SWCBD's Internet newsletter excoriated the Forest Service for the magnitude of its timber extraction projections. Todd Schulke stated that his group was operating on a "narrow line of common ground" and that this volume of timber was way on the other side. He pointed out that even using the terms "timber sale" and "board feet" created a lot of mistrust from his perspective.

The Forest Service explained that this volume was merely a projection of possible projects, but that the NEPA process would drive site specific projects. Todd Schulke acknowledged that the SWCBD had overreacted because of past directives of output coming from the Washington office of the Forest Service. The tensions finally eased after the group vowed to communicate more effectively about the issues and intentions of the agencies and organizations represented. Group member Don Weaver suggested that "Next time there's a question, let's sit down and talk about it before we sling mud." Mike Gardner added, "When we get out on the ground, we might find some common ground."

ESTABLISHING CRITERIA FOR FUTURE FOREST HEALTH PROJECTS

Constructive work began on the timber issues by the Watershed Improvement Committee. Included in the committee working on timber issues were four local loggers, a rancher, one of the county commissioners, several Forest Service employees, and Todd Schulke representing the SWCBD. It met in April to define criteria for identifying a forest health project and to use the criteria in finding an appropriate site for the next project. The criteria that were established determined that any project undertaken should:

- be located in previously roaded areas only
- serve the needs of local operators
- reduce density of timber
- be part of an integrated and long range treatment plan
- serve an economic need and be economically viable
- guarantee that investments will be worthwhile

- keep small mills operable
- provide sufficient volume by size groups

After defining the criteria, the committee used resource maps within the Negrito ecosystem analysis area of the Gila National Forest showing a range of factors, including tree density, mistletoe infection levels, and threatened and endangered species locations. After applying the criteria to several different areas of the ecosystem, a 5000 acre area called Sheep Basin was found to have the longest period of time since prior forest treatment. It had moderate to high tree density and moderate mistletoe infection areas, and no threatened or endangered species. While there were other areas that were in greater need of treatment from



an environmental perspective, and still others that offered a greater ratio of larger diameter trees (9-16 inches) to smaller trees (5-9 inches), the Sheep Basin area satisfied all of the criteria compared with the other options. The committee planned a field trip to the area.

In June about 15 CCCG members went to five locations in the Sheep Basin area to discuss the potential for timber removal. The group soon acknowledged that this next project would be far more complex than the Apache project, since the ecosystem needs required a comprehensive watershed improvement project. A

complex of needs were evident, including protecting mature trees, controlling mistletoe, integrating fire into the treatment, dealing with range issues and cattle removal after fires, and confronting the impact of a large elk presence in the area. Other players, including the New Mexico Game and Fish Department, needed to come to the planning table.

THE GRAZING CONFLICT DEEPENS

The progress the group was making in timber projects was being overshadowed by deepening divisions in the grazing issues. By April, an out-of-court settlement on the grazing law suit was made between the Forest Service and the plaintiffs, the SWCBD and Forest Guardians, in which the Forest Service agreed to remove cattle from the most vulnerable stream sides in the Gila National Forest and other forests in Arizona. Ranchers and others in the group felt betrayed by the Forest Service and some viewed this agreement as the

beginning of the end of ranching in Catron County. The Forest Service maintained that if it hadn't agreed to cattle removal from riparian areas, it might have been compelled to remove all cattle from the allotments named in the law suit.

In an attempt to channel the heightened divisions in the group toward a common purpose, the April, May and June meetings were devoted largely to identifying critical range issues and discussing group actions that would bridge the differences among the CCCG members. Working in small groups, participants identified the following broad categories of issues that most concerned them:

- Impact on rights, lives, and livestock economy
- External forces, unfair politics, management without representation, management by judicial system
- Laws and regulations
- Social equity
- Ecosystem condition
- Wildlife issues (threatened and endangered species, elk, and wolves)
- Livestock
- Need to know data and underlying agendas
- Inadequate science and information
- No incentive for good management
- Relationship between good management and open space

As process designers we were challenged by the growing anger among some members of the group, by the inherent inability to resolve national issues at the local level, and by the splintering of views and values caused by the grazing agreement. Short of getting the SWCBD and Forest Guardians involved in formal negotiations with ranching and county representatives, which was highly unlikely, we found ourselves at a perplexing juncture.

At the May meeting several of the group members brought up the prospect of civil disobedience in response to the removal of cattle from riparian areas. After some discussion, Bob Moore got the group back on track by revisiting the group's mission and reminding participants that contemplation of unilateral action had to be taken outside of the group without the CCCG's influence or endorsement.

THE SOUTHWEST CENTER FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY LEAVES THE TABLE

By June, Todd Schulke stated that he had very little support from the SWCBD for continuing with the CCCG because of the grazing controversies. The response from members of the CCCG regarding civil disobedience actions made it difficult to remain active in the group. He stated that SWCBD needed to start distancing themselves from these processes. In addition, he was also resigning from the SWCBD as a staff person (though he would remain on the board) and beginning a new job with the Southwest Forest Alliance based in

Santa Fe. He didn't expect the SFA to give him the latitude to participate in the group because of time pressures, although he had initially made a request that they allow him to continue. However, Todd expressed his interest in continuing to keep in touch with the group and the Forest Service and provide input on the forest health improvement projects. Interest in small diameter timber sales that would benefit forest health and small loggers remained high.

In prior discussions with Todd on his participation in the CCCG, he had stated that the CCCG had avoided many of the pitfalls of the Quincy Library group, one of the first collaborative groups on timber issues based in California. He observed that environmentalists participating in other groups gave in to the pressures to cave in on their values and positions. Todd acknowledged feeling those pressures but was able to hold firm.

So after over two years of involvement, the CCCG lost the formal participation of the SWCBD. Through the ups and downs of the group, Todd continued to attend meetings and field trips, negotiate points, express his views, explain the policies and actions of the SWCBD and seek common ground with members of the community which he had fled not many years before. The loss of his participation to the collaborative process, and to the social capital that was being built, was significant but not fatal to the group's ability to continue an authentic collaborative process. While Todd stopped attending the meetings in June, he continued to remain in communication with both Bob Moore and Mike Gardner. Bob Moore kept him informed of timber project developments in order to get the input of both the SWCBD and the Southwest Forest Alliance prior to finalizing any decisions.

RALLY AT THE COURTHOUSE IN RESERVE

Meanwhile, anger about the grazing issues turned to direct action. Several of the group members helped plan and participate in a rally at the county courthouse in Reserve in July to coincide with a county commissioners meeting. Estimates vary but somewhere between 20 to 50 people gathered to request that the commissioners pass a proclamation that the Forest Service and the environmentalists were acting against the ranching community. The commissioners responded with an alternative, weaker version of the rally participants' request. Another rally was scheduled in Silver City to the south.

What was of greatest concern to some of the members of the CCCG was the misperception on the part of some county residents that the CCCG had organized the rally. After Bob Moore received numerous phone calls inquiring about the rally sponsorship, he felt compelled to issue a press release to papers in Magdalena and Silver City which stated in part:

The rally is not sponsored by CCCG, but rather by a group of citizens who are frustrated with how current land management decisions are being made... The CCCG is comprised of individuals and organizations representing an array of interests with some members supporting the upcoming rally and others who do not... CCCG's mission is to serve as a forum to enable people with different views to openly and honestly discuss issues that concern our community; to find common ground in order to take action on projects that ensure an economic, social and

environmentally sound future... Once the rally has passed, we will sit down at the table with heightened awareness and work on advancing wise management decisions for our natural resources through the process of collaboration. Over the past three years, CCCG has made strides that clearly demonstrate the value of the collaborative process. We need to keep working together and leverage our past accomplishments to promote direction for future accomplishments.

After the rally the group pulled together to plan a collaborative learning experience on riparian issues. The Regional Forester, based in Albuquerque, agreed to visit the county with members of the Forest Service regional wildlife and range staff to address some of the issues the CCCG had raised in its earlier meetings. A field trip was planned to visit sites to discuss good riparian management, the impact of elk on stream sides, and upland watershed management. This field trip was the most ambitious of those sponsored by the CCCG, since all of the state and federal land management agencies were to be represented. The anticipated outcomes of the session were to identify some pilot projects, gain interagency cooperation, and create some common ground among the diverse interests.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Another productive step was taken through the leadership of the group coordinator Bob Moore by obtaining a rural economic development grant from the Forest Service to conduct a feasibility study for a small diameter mill in the county. Bob was charged with evaluating the local forestry resources, research potential products and markets, assess appropriate mill capacity and technology, and address the benefits to the community and the environment. By the end of the summer of 1998, the CCCG had withstood internal divisions and had charted a positive course for the immediate future.

“We need to keep working together and leverage our past accomplishments to promote direction for future accomplishments.”

*—Catron County
Citizens Group*

LESSONS LEARNED

The insights gained from our extended involvement in the Catron County process are consistent with those in other accounts of community collaborative processes. Some of the lessons recounted here may add to the growing body of knowledge on these processes.

- **Duration.** These processes take much more time than anticipated. They can become long term changes in decision-making governance rather than short term dispute resolution interventions if groups are committed to participating over a long period of time and have the resources and will to do it. Another example of a long term project is the Applegate Partnership in southern Oregon, which has been meeting weekly for six years.

- **Multiple issues and process approaches.** The nature of the Catron County case is complex. It has not focused on one particular land use conflict but on multiple issues, conflicts and needs. The process has been organic and as neutrals we have been experimental and adaptive in the process directions we have pursued. Some have been successful, others not. There is no blueprint for addressing this type of community conflict but it is important to remain flexible and let the group guide and set the agenda.

- **Outside facilitation and process design.** For the Catron process to work, it was important to have outside neutrals assisting in facilitation and process design. Although a number of collaborative groups have emerged without the help of dispute resolution practitioners, their assistance and oversight can help groups achieve sound process practice. Some CCCG members remarked that without this assistance, the group would not have been able to sustain itself.

- **Recognition of the scope of what is doable.** The number of federal policy issues that were outside the power of the group was a constant frustration for the group and contributed to feelings of powerlessness. It is important to encourage groups to recognize and act on what they can accomplish.

- **Inclusiveness.** It is critical to have all of the appropriate stakeholders fully participating in these processes. Environmentalists involved in appeals and litigation are essential at the table. If groups and interests are not represented, then decisions made by collaborative groups can be undermined by those not represented. Moreover, the opportunity for collaborative learning and building social capital is profoundly enhanced.

- **Environmental participation.** The participation of environmental groups is dependent on their viewing consensus processes as avenues for achieving their environmental protection goals. The challenge is in getting local, regional and national representation. A critical constraint is the lack of experienced and skilled environmental activists in rural communities with the capacity to participate over a long period of time.

- **Local convenors.** The success of the convening of the CCCG was due to the actions of local convenors, since they have credibility to bring the parties to the table.

- **Local capacity building.** Building local capacity is important for the long term success of interventions of this nature. Developing local leadership and facilitation skills, enabling social learning to take place, and helping groups develop some form of governance or decision making that will be sustained is

critical. Moreover, having a local coordinator to organize and manage the group's work was critical to the ongoing work of the CCCG, not only because it increased capacity to get things done, but also because outsiders are never trusted as much as local community members.

- **Trust and relationship building.** Trust can only be built over time through shared commitment to the process and experiences which strengthen relationships, like field trips, pot luck dinners, and the mutuality of grappling with issues and reaching concrete outcomes.
- **Project focus.** Focusing on specific on-the-ground projects will help groups negotiate conflicts and move away from ideology and positions.
- **Funding and other resources.** Obtaining funding to support long term assistance in facilitation and process design was essential to this intervention because of the extent of the hostilities.
- **National and community interests.** Both community and national interests must be addressed in collaborative processes seeking to influence decisions about public lands management.
- **Agreement on the science.** There is a need to find common ground in the science of ecosystem health, identifying scientific principles that all parties can agree upon to help inform decision making.
- **Community health.** Tying community health, economic development and ecosystem health to a larger vision of community will help consensus groups achieve a collective and long term goal.

There is a need to study the range of consensus groups that have emerged to begin to assess the processes and outcomes. If best practices can be identified and described, new communities that will undoubtedly initiate these collaborative strategies will have the benefit of the collected wisdom of those that came before. Catron County, like its counterparts in other rural communities in the West, is struggling to find what Don Snow terms "a politics appropriate to the stewardship of nature and community." Maintaining healthy communities and creating a sustainable economic base while practicing sound ecosystem management is its challenge.

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AFTERWORD

CARL M. MOORE

About a year after Melinda Smith and Ben Daitz began working in Catron County, I joined them for the specific purpose of introducing and facilitating the community-wide visioning process. While leading that portion of the Catron County effort was my specific responsibility, the three of us have worked as a team in assisting the Citizens Group since the spring of 1996.

One reason I welcomed the opportunity to work with them was that Catron County provided an excellent example of an “alternative governance” project. Western Network, my former organizational affiliation, received a Surdna Foundation grant to study such projects. The criteria that designates an initiative as an alternative governance project were all met by the Catron County Citizens Group, including:

1. The goal is to accomplish something for the community—meet a need, solve a problem—that the local government can not, will not, or should not do.
2. The initiative is likely to be interdependent with government even if it acts outside government. This is especially true for the implementation of initiatives.
3. There is geographical continuity; the different stakeholders participating in the initiative have a “place” in common.
4. The group is ready to act; they are motivated to achieve results. The problem or need may not be new, but the group is ready to act on it. The motivation may be that the alternative to not forming and acting—e.g., threat of a law suit, potential for a failed referendum—is even less desirable.
5. The group is willing to try a new (or borrowed) approach, to take a risk in how they work together.
6. The group is more inclusive than most other interest groups in the community.
7. There is at least some balance between the instinct of the group members to act out of self-interest and the collective motivation of the group to act for the betterment of the community.
8. The group has leadership—people enabling the initiative to go forward.

Two criteria unique to third party involvement, both of which were present in the Catron County case, are

- The group is willing for “outsiders to assist them in the accomplishment of their goals; and
- The volatility of the conflict does not jeopardize the intervention.

The Catron County project shares several other qualities common among other alternative governance projects, including the following:

- **Place.** Catron County is similar to the other places studied: it is larger than one municipality, the people participating care first about their particular place, and typically there is a shared critical natural resource.

- **Participants.** In all the alternative governance places studied it was not possible to achieve full participation by all parties that had a stake in the outcome. In Catron County it has been difficult to gain broad participation from the Hispanic community and from organized environmental advocates, especially those who reside outside the county. Key to success in Catron County was getting one representative from one outside environmental organization to participate—Todd Schulke representing the Southwest Center for Biological Diversity.
- **Purpose.** Concern over the preservation of a rural lifestyle motivates participation in alternative governance initiatives. That is explicit in Catron County. During the community-wide visioning one of the most frequently mentioned treasures in Catron County was the lifestyle it permits. If an alternative governance initiative is inclusive, it is more likely to include participation by groups with fundamentally different interests—there is likely to be tension between the desire for some participants to achieve a public good (e.g., to protect species) and for others to preserve (or do) something locally. Some individuals and groups appear caught between something as abstract as a public policy and their concern for a particular place. For example, Forest Service employees in Catron County agonize over their responsibility to national guidelines and to the particular forest over which they have stewardship and the impact of their decisions (in light of the national guidelines) on the local people who are effected by them. An alternative governance initiative can evolve into a purpose other than the reason for it coming into being. The original objectives in Catron County were to reduce stress, create dialogue, educate. The emphasis now clearly is on economic development.
- **Process.** Catron County, like the other alternative governance places studied, has made decisions by “consensus,” even though to do so was not formally adopted as the standard. The use of a consensus decision-making process was due to the influence of the facilitators. In some cases it may be a welcome alternative to more formal, controlling decision-making processes. People acclimate quickly to collaborative processes. Improving interpersonal relations by meeting frequently - a hallmark of such efforts - and doing meaningful work together, has the effect of improving communication. The participants in the Citizens Group became increasingly willing to deliberate with others who were very different from them ideologically.

The video about the process, *Whose Home on the Range?*, illustrates how different the body language is now from what it was like in the beginning. Signs of increasing openness are: who people sit next to during the pot-luck meals before meetings, telling jokes and teasing each other, testimonials about how surprising it was that relationships evolved as they did: “I never thought I would spend time with...,” “Who would have thought...” stories. On a number of occasions when contrasting ideas caused heat, members reminded each other of the importance of inclusion and of dialogue.

The New Mexico Center for Dispute Resolution, even though external to the community, has been key in sustaining the initiative. But, as is true of the other alternative governance communities studied, that can only happen if the community is motivated by an apparent opportunity or by the need to act (even if it is ill-defined). Catron County certainly had a felt need to act.

Melinda Smith has modeled effective process design as an external facilitator in the following ways:

- Raising sufficient resources to enable the Citizens Group to hire someone local to coordinate and facilitate the process.
- Providing the local coordinators with direction, training and support to give the coordinators confidence in the performance of their responsibilities.
- Arranging for some members of the group to participate in workshops on collaborative problem-solving.
- Getting Todd Schulke, the representative from the Southwest Center for Biological Diversity, to come to the table, and, most importantly, to return to the table when he did not feel welcome.

What is the likely future of the Catron County Citizens Group? This raises questions yet to be answered about all alternative governance initiatives. When is its work completed? When will it have done enough? How does it “go out of business”? If there are reasons to “stay in business,” how will it be sustained? Might it be absorbed by an existing institution or is there a chance that it can have an independent life? If a third party is involved, how does it withdraw? What are the most productive things it can do to help the group function independently?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The work of the Catron County Citizens Group could not have been accomplished without the generous support of the following foundations:

The Surdna Foundation

The Beldon Fund

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

The production of the film, *Whose Home on the Range?*, which accompanies the case study, was supported by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

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