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CONSORTIUM ON NEGOTIATION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION
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Collaborative Planning and Ecosystem Management

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COLLABORATIVE PLANNING AND ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT

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I. OVERVIEW OF ISSUES

For many years a handful of ecologists have been extolling the values of ecosystem-wide approaches to managing natural resources. Ecosystem management has emerged as a broadly embraced concept, however, only during the 1990s. Nonetheless, it remains largely underutilized because of the complexity associated with managing entire ecosystems. One technique for addressing this complexity is collaborative planning. Collaborative planning is an open, consensus-oriented approach involving key stakeholders in designing and implementing policies and management strategies.

Like ecosystem management, collaborative planning has been used in a variety of settings without a universal set of standards or definitions. Having a common understanding of what is meant by collaborative planning and how it is to be used, however, is essential for support within sponsoring organizations as well as among potential participants. Equally important is an understanding of what enhances the probability of making collaborative planning successful, avoiding the pitfalls that can render the process ineffective.

The presence of explicit incentives is also crucial to initiating collaborative planning processes. What is the incentive for undertaking a "new" approach to problem solving and the perceived "risks" associated with that approach? The response must not be based on evaluating the new approach in isolation - it must be compared with the likely outcomes of more traditional approaches. In this light, history and experience from the last twenty years of environmental decision making demonstrate time and again the shortcomings of more traditional, legalistic approaches. Due to a lack of inclusion and openness, distrust and lawsuits have proliferated. Trying new approaches carries little risk in comparison (if properly planned and implemented), and encourages new

leadership and problem solving paradigms that build public trust.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss how collaborative planning can be used to address the challenges of ecosystem management. In addition, this paper discusses potential barriers to using collaborative processes, strategies for overcoming those barriers and guidelines for implementing an effective collaborative planning process.

A. Defining Characteristics of Ecosystem Management

Ecosystem management builds on a holistic approach to natural resources management using more than the traditional single species/single resource approach to management. To many, ecosystem management is synonymous with sustainable development. To others, ecosystem management involves the management of natural resources over a larger geographic boundary than typically considered. To yet others, ecosystem management is the balancing of economic and biological resources. Different public agencies have developed their own definitions of ecosystem management to meet the specific needs of their organization and mission. Not surprisingly, working definitions of ecosystem management are highly variable. Systemic assessment, adaptive management and integrated natural resource management are all used to refer to aspects of ecosystem management. Understanding the differences in ecosystem management definitions, however, can help illuminate the complexities and various challenges associated with ecosystem management.

To enhance the likelihood of developing implementable ecosystem management strategies, it is important to identify clearly the basic characteristics and principles of ecosystem management, regardless of differing definitions. Generally, ecosystem management can be differentiated from other approaches to natural resource management, in that ecosystem management should:

1) address the holistic needs of an entire ecosystem rather than the needs of one species/resource

2) manage using concepts of natural succession and natural occurrences such as flooding, fire, etc.

3) define the effective geographic boundaries of an ecosystem based on geology, topography, vegetation, etc.

4) incorporate concepts of sustainability into management practices, which address the human/nature interface.

Two common contexts for the application of ecosystem management principles are the development of strategies for sustainable development and protection of endangered species. These applications represent the complexity of applying ecosystem management where many national initiatives, regulations and organizations beyond those in local settings are involved. They also suggest why it is important to have some common definitions and appreciation for the dynamics of ecosystem management, while considering from local, regional, national and even global perspectives.

B. Defining Characteristics of Collaborative Planning

Collaborative planning has also been used increasingly in the 1990's. The concepts that embody collaborative planning, however, have been used extensively in other contexts for a much longer period of time. Collaborative planning borrows from disciplines related to strategic planning, public participation, team building, negotiation and conflict resolution. Used by different organizations in different settings, definitions of collaborative planning vary.

As with ecosystem management, many agencies and organizations have developed their own interpretation of collaborative planning. The problem arises when the same term is used for different approaches or processes which then results in confusion about the goals, approach or intent of the process. Thus it is important to clearly define and explain the intent of collaborative planning processes. The following attributes characterize collaborative planning:

1) collaborative planning integrates tools and techniques from strategic planning, public involvement, negotiation, mediation and consensus

building processes

2) enhanced cooperation and coordination between/among agencies and governments is essential to collaborative planning, but collaborative planning is more, involving representatives of all key stakeholders in the process

3) collaborative planning is more than traditional public participation, engaging participants meaningfully in joint problem solving

4) consensus-based approaches to problem solving should be the means by which decisions are made.

The working definition of collaborative planning used as the premise for this paper is as follows:

> **Collaborative planning is a cooperative approach to developing implementable plans, policies and programs through interest-based negotiation and consensus building, involving key stakeholders in the decision making process in an anticipatory rather than reactive setting.**

Under certain circumstances, collaborative planning represents something much more - a fundamental shift in how government agencies and various publics interact on issues of public concern, leading to new decision making paradigms. As responsibility shifts from federal to local and regional government officials, or from national headquarters to regional offices or specific units, this takes on even greater significance. Collaborative planning in this context has basic implications to the practice of democracy.

The question that remains is how to conduct collaborative processes that effectively integrate and resolve the ecological, economic and social concerns of sponsoring agencies as well as affected publics. This paper responds to that question by outlining effective strategies for planning and conducting successful collaborative processes.

II. NATURE OF ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT

Regardless of how an agency or organization chooses to define ecosystem management, many challenges will be faced in attempting to manage natural resources
from an ecosystem perspective. By its nature, ecosystem management is complex

for a variety of reasons, including:

1) managing by ecosystems often coalesces tensions between economic development and environmental protection, which are based on closely held values and philosophies

2) economic issues associated with ecosystem management can involve entire communities and regions, creating community- and region-wide concerns that must be resolved

3) in managing entire ecosystems, different governmental jurisdictions are often involved (different federal agencies and different levels of government) as well as private landowners, each of which requires cross-jurisdictional cooperation

4) at the heart of many ecosystem management strategies are the issues of land use and land control, which for many is a sensitive issue

5) ecosystem management decisions are typically fact-driven based on scientific and economic information, around which common knowledge may be limited and perceptions of uncertainty and risk are prevalent

6) ecosystem management is often related to other issues such as protection of endangered species, involving other policies and sensitivities that must be addressed

7) support for or opposition to strategies involving ecosystem management is often fractionated, even among similar interests (e.g., recreation v. preservation environmentalists, pro-tourism v. pro-development businesses), requiring greater attention to cooperative problem solving.

Natural resource managers have come to realize that under most circumstances ecosystem management is the best strategy for maintaining or achieving the long-term health of natural systems and the species that inhabit those systems. Since broad-based cooperation is necessary to accomplish these ends, new approaches to involving various stakeholders in the decision making process are needed. Support across a variety of constituencies and interest groups is increasingly important if not necessary to implementing ecosystem management strategies.

Before discussing collaborative planning strategies, some of the major characteristics of ecosystem management are described in greater detail, underscoring the need for collaborative approaches to planning and problem solving.

A. Differing Values and Perceptions

Underlying values held by individuals and organizations create a complex decision making environment related to managing natural resources. In conflict resolution, divergent values are generally considered to be the most difficult differences to resolve. For example, some individuals and organizations believe the highest and best use of a natural resource is for economic development that creates jobs, family security, prosperity and/or profits. Others place the greatest value on preserving natural resources for the enjoyment of future generations and to maintain a viable and clean environment. These different viewpoints can be the result of deeply held values driven by religious or philosophical beliefs. Typically, they are not either willingly or easily modified. Likewise, perceptions of uncertainty and risk add to this complexity. For example, perceptions about appropriate locations, quantities and methods for timber harvesting consistent with ecosystem management perspectives are likely to vary widely in any given setting. Perceptions of risk also play a key role. How much risk is acceptable and what is the risk associated with a specific decision?

In the past, these differing perspectives have been treated as mutually exclusive concepts that can only be resolved by an either/or proposition. Either development or preservation must prevail at the expense of the other. Progress from increased interest in and support for sustainability, however, has led more individuals and organizations to conclude that these issues need not be framed as either/or propositions. Working through these inherent differences in perspectives is now widely considered as possible, yet complex and difficult. Thus differences in values and perceptions make achieving ecosystem management objectives challenging. Considerable attention must be given to both understanding the nature of differing perspectives and developing approaches to resolving them.

B. Competing Missions and Interests

Different organizations and individuals involved with ecosystem management issues often have different missions and interests. For example, the National Park Service incorporates in its mission the responsibility to maintain the resources under its jurisdiction in perpetuity, for the enjoyment of current and future generations. On the other hand, a state natural resource management agency may have as its mission the management of hunting and fishing. Insofar as lands and resources are jointly managed by two agencies for different purposes, or lands managed for different purposes are adjacent to each other, differing missions can create real challenges to accomplishing ecosystem management goals.

Likewise, different organizations and individuals often have competing interests. For example, a controversy emerged during the mid-1990s in a southern national forest when the U.S. Forest Service attempted to implement an ecosystem management strategy. A large timber sale was involved and various state and national environmental organizations took exception to the quantity and method of harvesting that was part of this strategy. On the surface, one would expect environmental organizations to be supportive of ecosystem management strategies. In this particular instance, however, the strategy adopted by the U.S. Forest Service to return to native stands of trees, in part accomplished by the timber harvest, was viewed as an excessive and unacceptable loss of trees in the short term. So while environmental organizations may support ecosystem management generically, the parties had different interests around this specific decision. Thus, the missions and interests of different organizations and individuals must be ascertained so that inherent conflicts can be recognized. Also, the varying interests among local and national organizations must be understood (e.g., local or short-term impacts versus national or long-term implications.)

C. Science-Based Decision Making

Ecosystem management decision making relies heavily on understanding the bounds and workings of a given ecosystem. How is a specific ecosystem

defined? What comprises the boundaries of a given ecosystem? What are the natural patterns of fire, drought, etc. in a given ecosystem? How can these natural occurrences best be managed? What are the interactions among species, geology, vegetation, etc. that are crucial to maintaining a healthy ecosystem? What are the biological needs of an endangered species for survival? The answers to these and many other questions require scientific knowledge of the ecosystem being managed.

The issues are often made more complex, however, because scientists do not always agree on the answers to these questions. Then as laypersons get involved with the issues, the differences voiced by scientists create added uncertainty about not only the depiction of the natural environment related to ecosystems and species, but also the management of these systems. Thus, differences in knowledge and the interpretation of knowledge creates added complexity. "Dueling scientists" frequently fuel rather than resolve uncertainty.

Another important aspect of this issue is that in situations governed by science-based decision making, public preferences are often overlooked. Preferences in this instance refers to those values held by various publics. For example, concerns about future economic vitality may overshadow concerns about short-term economic vitality within a specific community. Some communities may accept a certain degree of environmental risk for the economic benefits whereas others are not willing to accept that same risk. These "values" need to be incorporated into science-based decision making.

D. Place-Based Issues

An inherent but important aspect of ecosystem management is that it relates to a specific place. Associated with that place are site-specific characteristics and issues that may be unique to the location of that ecosystem, from a social perspective. For example, a given location has a history of interactions among people, businesses, government, public organizations and nature itself. Some places are pro-development and other places are pro-preservation. Some places rely on the use or development of natural resources for

jobs, whereas in other places the pristine environment serves as the economic engine. Some places have a history of cooperation among different interest groups and other places have a history of animosity. Most places have a combination of both.

Under most circumstances, the challenges of ecosystem management are different from the challenges of public policy issues that are not related to a specific place (e.g., health care reform, tax reform). Ecosystem management decisions have implications on individuals, businesses and governments in a specific place, and often times disproportionately. For example, land use decisions often affect those immediately within and around the area more than those farther away, or those in control of the land more than those not in control. In other words, land use decisions often affect different publics disproportionately. Furthermore, these decisions increasingly are made by officials in closer proximity to the parties affected by the decisions (as opposed to a more generic policy decision made in Washington D.C.). This can create a higher level of tension between those making decisions and those impacted by the decisions. These are important dynamics of ecosystem management.

E. Political and Multi-Jurisdictional Implications

Managing natural resources by ecosystems creates a cross-jurisdictional dimension to decision making. Under more traditional approaches, the tendency is to manage only those resources under the jurisdiction of a particular government or agency. The boundaries of decision making were defined by the boundaries of a national forest, for example. Under ecosystem management, however, the ideal intent is to manage an entire ecosystem regardless of jurisdictional boundaries. This leads to the need for different jurisdictions and property owners to work together to accomplish the desired ends of ecosystem management.

The challenges emanating from this reality can be significant. For example, a common attitude among landowners in the west is that the government already controls more land than it should. Efforts to oversee the management of

other lands by government agencies as part of an ecosystem management plan may be viewed as just another effort to control more land. Overcoming such attitudes can present a serious challenge to ecosystem management efforts. In some cases, different government agencies may own land within a prescribed ecosystem along with private landowners. Innovative approaches to cross jurisdictional cooperation are often necessary.

Sometimes the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) is cited as an inhibitor to innovative approaches involving non-federal persons in providing advice to agencies. Rather, FACA provides the guidelines that must be followed in engaging broader "publics" in formulating plans or policies. It is not necessarily a constraint. A FACA Committee can provide the mechanism for a full array of stakeholders to be involved in a collaborative process where advice will be given to the government. Differentiating planning from policy making, however, can be important in establishing a multi-stakeholder group, and may forestall the need for a FACA committee. Federal agencies vary widely in their interpretation of FACA and their willingness to undertake efforts to establish FACA processes.

The political implications of ecosystem management also need to be considered. Once different jurisdictions are involved, political forces may play a larger role in the decision making process. While politics can play a role under any circumstances, the likelihood is increased when a wider array of jurisdictions, landowners and interest groups are involved. Potentially, politicians and political strategies can dominate fact-based or interest-based approaches. While this can have negative implications to sound decision making, political leadership is essential to successful applications of collaborative planning and policy making processes. Thus, significant attention must be given to the political aspects of these processes and gaining political support.

III. ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES OF ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT THROUGH COLLABORATIVE PLANNING

Ecosystem management is a holistic approach to managing natural resources. As more is known about what is required to manage natural resources properly for the long term, managing entire ecosystems has become the preferred strategy under most circumstances.

If ecosystem system management practices are to be successfully applied, however, the associated complexity must be effectively addressed. Given the nature of these challenges, cooperative approaches to stakeholder involvement in the planning process is crucial. Collaborative planning is one approach that has worked effectively in a myriad of situations, including ecosystem management. This section discusses the attributes, boundaries and incentives to using collaborative planning.

Although ultimate decision making authority typically resides with the agencies charged with responsibility for the resources, there is still a role for other stakeholders. Interested publics with a stake in the outcome should be engaged in a manner that ensures all substantive interests have been acknowledged and addressed to the extent possible. To exclude the key stakeholders will likely result in resistance at the points of either adopting or implementing subsequent policies. The consequences are legal gridlock, animosity and the expenditure of significant resources to resolve the issues.

Collaborative planning can help minimize these consequences by incorporating elements of public scoping, joint factfinding, mutual education of interests and perspectives, interest-based negotiation and consensus-building. It should be an open process in which key stakeholders are active participants in the planning and problem solving process. Under many instances third-party facilitators/mediators can be used as a way of assuring an open and legitimate process as perceived by all stakeholders. (Third-party refers to a facilitator/mediator who is not directly associated or aligned with any of the potential participants in the process.)

It is important to note that not all issues lend themselves to collaborative problem solving and negotiation. For example, if a key stakeholder group believes that any further loss of redwoods is unacceptable, they would not likely participate in an effort to plan a redwood timber harvest. In other situations, the need for or existence of legal precedents may influence the decision of stakeholder groups to engage in negotiations and collaborative problem solving. Since collaborative planning is intended as an up-front planning process to explore and examine issues, however, the conditions under which it is considered unacceptable or undesirable are relatively few. Nonetheless, collaborative processes should not be assumed to be appropriate for every situation. Without key stakeholders participating, the legitimacy and implementability of outcomes is questionable.

The reasons for using a collaborative planning process are largely substantiated by the complexity of ecosystem management and the necessity to

address a wide array of concerns held by different agencies, communities and publics, as have been previously highlighted. In essence, those publics who are impacted by a decision, who are necessary to implement a decision or who are able to block implementation should be engaged. Several obstacles exist, however, to the use of collaborative planning.

As discussed earlier, an agency must have the incentive to attempt new approaches to resolving issues of public interest. So must those individuals within an agency who are responsible for such processes. As the limitations of more traditional approaches to public participation are increasingly exposed the incentive is greater to try new methods. Innovative approaches are needed to respond to the greater accountability required by the public in the 1990s. If those responsible for public outreach, however, have concerns about the likelihood of success, or are uncomfortable with a new scheme of doing things, the processes are less likely to be used. Discomfort with new approaches can be a formidable obstacle to overcome. Therefore the "comfort zone" of users needs to be expanded. This is why organizational leadership and support for collaborative processes is essential. Otherwise, the likelihood of accruing the potential benefits from these processes is greatly diminished.

Assuming that the arguments for using approaches such as collaborative planning are accepted, a series of other potential obstacles must be addressed. In large part, misconceptions or myths about collaborative processes stand as obstacles, particularly from the perspective of those in agencies responsible for decision making. Seven "myths" are described below, misconceptions that potentially thwart the use of collaborative processes. Recognizing these perceptions when they exist, and working through the realities of these perceptions, are important steps in moving forward with collaborative approaches to problem solving.

Myths About Collaborative Processes

1. They empower others thereby reducing my power
2. They undermine my authority/responsibility
3. They indicate my inability to solve the problem
4. They put decision-making in the hands of the public and non-experts
5. They result in a loss of control that will jeopardize outcomes
6. They require compromising my values
7. They are too much like a group encounter session

1. Collaborative processes empower others thereby reducing my power. The only way that this can be a valid concern is if power is a zero sum issue. Zero sum means that for one party to gain power another party must lose power. The assumption is that only so much power exists, and the main issue is who has it. Research and experience demonstrate, however, that in the arena of negotiation and collaborative problem solving, power is not a zero sum proposition. While some organizational leaders and others in positions of power work under the premise that sharing power equates to losing power, this is not valid. For example, if a politician or administrator with responsibility for a complex and potentially controversial issue can develop a consensus by allowing stakeholders to be involved in the problem solving process, they will actually increase in power by having a consensus solution to a difficult issue. Obtaining that consensus, however, involves sharing power with the stakeholders by allowing participation in the decision making process. Sharing power often results in each party increasing in power, a clear demonstration that power is not a zero sum issue.

2. Collaborative processes undermine my authority/responsibility. Another common misperception is that engaging in collaborative processes will undermine the authority or responsibility of those charged with making decisions or managing resources. This is a misperception in the arena of public policy and resource management because collaborative processes cannot be designed to set aside legally delegated decision making authorities. When agencies open up the decision making

processes to other parties, the ultimate outcome must be approved, consistent with existing regulations and policies, by the responsible agency(ies). If the process recommends a modification in how specific issues are managed or regulated, then other processes (e.g., regulatory reform) become activated, still under the delegated authorities. Most collaborative processes represent a way in which responsible authorities can enhance decision making through consensus building without abdicating their responsibility for decision making. Collaborative processes therefore do not undermine authority or responsibility. It is possible that a collaborative process may shift the locus of decision making within an agency (e.g., the level at which a policy determination must be made) but that is a different issue and the responsibility still resides with the agency.

3. Collaborative processes indicate my inability to solve the problem. Often, managers and leaders do not want to utilize a collaborative process, potentially including an outside facilitator/mediator, because they believe that such a process only demonstrates their inability to solve the issue. This tends to be particularly so in organizations that operate on more of a command and control basis. Under these circumstances, personnel may feel even greater pressure to exhibit individual leadership and the ability to unilaterally resolve the toughest of issues. For example, in the military everyone must answer up the chain of command. Traditionally, using a collaborative approach to decision-making would indicate a failure to make an executive decision. Experience shows, however, that a different kind of leadership is required with complex, multi-party issues. More and more, governmental agencies that historically have worked under a command and control organizational culture are recognizing the limitations of that philosophy, particularly when dealing with the public and issues of public concern. Properly designed and conducted collaborative processes can in fact demonstrate far greater leadership abilities than trying to solve issues internally and unilaterally without input from the affected publics.

4. Collaborative processes put decision-making in the hands of the public and non-experts. Some natural resource managers want to limit public involvement in decision making processes. The public, it is assumed, generally does not understand the issues fully nor can they be expected to grasp the complexity of the issues. Resource management questions should be resolved by those with sufficient technical and scientific appreciation of the issues and their possible solutions. Experience again demonstrates, however, that this is not a valid perception. On the surface it makes perfect sense that technical issues be resolved by those with technical knowledge. The problem with thinking that only the "experts" should be in the position of controlling the outcomes of public issues, however, is that the public has a significant role to play. Informed publics typically ask tough questions and insert public values into the equation. Experts in geology and structural engineering can identify the best place on a river to build a dam. But in a democracy the public must pose questions about the need for the dam, the impact of the dam on the environment and the benefits of the dam. Furthermore, when trade-offs must be made, the public must have a role in identifying the trade-offs and placing value on those trade-offs. In the public arena, scores of examples exist where a government agency tried to anticipate the public concerns without involving the public in an effective manner, only to be tied-up in the courts trying to validate processes, assumptions and solutions that emanated from those assumptions. Rather than avoiding interfacing with the public, a sound program for involving affected publics in collaborative processes will lead to a more informed public, a more informed decision and a greater degree of public support for the ultimate outcomes.

5. Collaborative processes result in a loss of control that will jeopardize the outcomes. This is a misperception that grows from the overriding desire, or habit, of trying to be totally in control of any situation. Fearing the loss of control is subtly different from the issues of power and authority. One can feel no threat of loss of power or authority and still want to be in control. In fact, one can maintain a certain degree of

control using collaborative processes under nearly any circumstances as an organization or individual convening a collaborative process. But perhaps more importantly, one can experience the value of not needing to be in total control while still having the interests of the organization met. Often, as with power, giving control away results in outcomes that would otherwise not be possible, that meet the needs and interests of all the affected parties more effectively and that are more likely to be implemented. The ensuing result is a net benefit to the organization. A distinction needs to be made between oversight and control. Administrative oversight of a collaborative process is the responsibility of the sponsoring organization, to the extent practical in partnership with the other participants in a collaborative process. Trying to exert excessive control on a collaborative process diminishes the likelihood of success. This dynamic needs to be directly discussed and resolved with those who want to exercise tight control over a collaborative process.

6. Collaborative processes require compromising my values. It is a common perception that negotiation requires compromise. As such, some avoid consensus oriented processes for fear of having to compromise their principles or values. In fact, consensus building is not about compromising closely held values but about working through potentially different interests. Trade-offs of interests are typically required, meaning, for example, that an individual or organization may agree to a higher timber quota than desired in return for higher set asides for wilderness in another area. As another example, an individual or organization may agree to the development of one site in exchange for preserved wetland acreage at another site. The focus, and trade-offs, involve the interests of the parties rather than the underlying values. The compromise of values is not the intent of collaborative processes but rather the resolution of issues given the realistic assessment of how the issues would be resolved in the absence of a collaborative process. While litigation has been and continues to be the preferred alternative of some individuals and organizations, the uncertainty of outcomes under most circumstances and the toll imposed on relationships should make litigation the alternative of

last resort. The focus of collaborative planning, however, is to work on issues before polarization occurs, in a proactive rather than reactive mode.

7. Collaborative processes are too much like a group encounter session. Some individuals try to avoid the use of consensus processes because they perceive such processes involve overly personal encounters. While the human dimension of policy making is an important part of collaborative processes, well designed processes are deliberative and intended to focus on issues. Joint factfinding, where all the parties jointly gather and assess information, is a common part of many collaborative processes. Technical studies and information exchange often form the backbone of collaborative and joint problem solving processes. The focus of these processes is typically on substantive issues and their resolution. Collaborative processes involve building trust, sharing values and developing personal relationships, but all in the context of problem solving and decision making.

If not dealt with directly and forthrightly, these common misconceptions can stifle the use of collaborative processes. They can also act to undermine the implementation of these processes. By realizing that some of the fears perceived about collaborative processes are basically unfounded and unwarranted, organizations can move forward in realizing the many benefits that accrue from using them.

Another category of obstacles to consider are those related to individuals and organizations who might serve as participants in these processes. These are the obstacles perceived by the various publics who are potential stakeholders in these processes. Five basic issues must be considered.

1. Limited available personnel within environmental and other non-profit organizations. Many non-profit organizations operate with limited numbers of people assigned to specific issues. As such, particularly with those national organizations asked to be involved in numerous "advisory" processes, limitations to participation are often encountered. These

organizations tend to participate only in those processes where a high probability of explicit benefits is perceived. Other organizations which rely primarily on volunteers encounter even more serious problems of participation. Therefore, attention should be given to helping potential participants appreciate why it is to their advantage to participate even under conditions of limited personnel.

2. Unbalanced resources among different participants. Often, individuals and organizations question whether they should participate in processes in which they perceive they will be disadvantaged by an imbalance of resources. For example, sometimes smaller organizations with limited resources perceive they will be at a disadvantage in comparison to businesses with greater resources to participate. To counter this perception, which may be realistic, resources can often be provided to assist disadvantaged organizations participate on a more level basis in terms of technical and financial support.

3. Lack of perceived benefits and incentives. In some cases, stakeholders or those important to implementing potential outcomes do not perceive that the benefits of participation outweigh the costs. In other cases, incentives are not perceived as sufficient to warrant participation. In these cases, effort may be necessary to clarify the benefits that will accrue from their participation, or what will likely happen in the absence of their participation. When stakeholders conclude that the costs outweigh the benefits, and incentives are not sufficient, participation from those parties is unlikely. The consequences of their non-participation must be evaluated and incorporated into decisions about whether and how to proceed.

4. Cultural differences that create disincentives for participation. Often, collaborative processes are designed without sufficient attention to the impacts of cultural differences on participation. Cultural differences lead to varying perspectives about deadlines, organizational representation and other protocols that may be part of collaborative processes. Thus,

greater attention should be given to creating processes that do not exclude meaningful participation due to fundamentally different, culturally-based perspectives. This suggests that effort be given to understanding how best to involve people of different cultures. Without doing so, a collaborative planning process stands to be de-legitimized.

5. Uncertainty about collaborative processes. The mission of many interest groups is built around advocacy for a specific set of concerns or to protect against certain threats. Under either condition, these groups are accustomed to acting as strong advocates for a particular point of view. Confusion often exists around participation in collaborative processes - Will strong positions need to be abdicated? Can an advocacy group have its needs met by such a process? Will such a process undermine the organization's mission? In some cases, organizations have answered negatively to these questions and resist participation. Since these and other concerns can stand as a barrier to participation, they must be understood and resolved among all potential stakeholders, often by evaluating the alternatives to and impacts of not participating.

It is clear that to maximize the probability of success, individuals or organizations convening collaborative planning processes must be attuned not only to the internal obstacles to convening a process but to those obstacles affecting broader participation in the process.

IV. APPLYING COLLABORATIVE PLANNING TO ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT

This section describes the various considerations in preparing for and implementing a collaborative planning process. Collaborative planning represents a valuable tool for dealing with the complexities of ecosystem management issues and, if properly designed and conducted, can help resolve the issues that often stand in the way of accomplishing ecosystem management objectives. The key is

to involve, early in the process, the parties who have a stake in the outcome, who are necessary to implementation or who can block implementation of an ecosystem management plan. Collaborative planning, as the term suggests, is a planning process which should be conducted early in the developmental stages, not waiting until polarization of issues occurs or until a plan is already formulated or ready to be implemented.

A. Primary Characteristics of Collaborative Planning

As indicated earlier, collaborative planning draws from several disciplines including strategic planning, public involvement, negotiation, consensus-building and mediation. This in part explains why differences exist in defining collaborative planning. At a minimum, however, it is important to note what should and should not be considered collaborative planning, and to define the linkages to the disciplines noted. In general, collaborative planning processes should draw from these disciplines in the following ways:

1) strategic planning - establishing a joint vision; assessing information and resources; defining goals and objectives; creating joint sense of purpose

2) public involvement - identifying interest groups and affected publics; increasing an understanding of public perspectives; increasing pubic awareness of the sponsoring party's interests; creating forums for meaningful public input

3) negotiation - identifying areas of agreement and disagreement; identifying common and diverging interests; developing mutually acceptable solutions built around an understanding of each party's interests; assuring appropriate representation of affected publics

4) consensus building - approaching the process by trying to address the concerns of each party, even if a lone voice; seeking the development of outcomes that are acceptable to each party; identifying at the outset of the process how to deal with non-consensus, if it occurs

5) mediation - using a neutral third party to help legitimize the process and assure participants that the process is not "captured" by the sponsor; allowing the sponsoring party to be a full participant in the process; helping identify participants and appropriate representation; helping frame

the issues and work through differences; helping conduct joint factfinding and problem solving; helping brainstorm options for mutual gain; helping structure implementation plans.

Collaborative planning processes should draw on these disciplines in the ways noted. By integrating the various facets of these disciplines, a clearer picture is drawn of what comprises collaborative planning. At the same time, each collaborative planning process will be different given the issues, the participants and the intended objectives.

Collaborative planning processes should be comprised of three stages: 1) issues assessment and process preparation; 2) joint problem solving; and 3) implementation.

Phase 1 - Issues assessment and process preparation. Before any collaborative process is designed or implemented, a thorough and deliberate assessment of the issues, interest groups, internal and external incentives, internal and external obstacles and objectives should be conducted. Only then can the process be designed, at which point potential participants should indicate their willingness to participate and be involved in establishing meeting protocols.

Phase 2 - Joint Problem Solving. The problem solving phase is comprised of the meetings which bring all the participants together to clarify issues, individual interests, brainstorm options for mutual gain, conduct joint factfinding, evaluate options, prepare plans and policy recommendations, and frame agreements. In the context of ecosystem management, ecological risk assessment is the type of issue which lends itself to joint factfinding and problem solving, and the formulation of policy alternatives.

Phase 3 - Implementation. The implementation phase is the most frequently overlooked element of a collaborative process. At the point agreements are reached on plans, policies or strategies, an implementation

plan should be developed. This provides a mechanism for assuring that agreements are realistic and viable, and details the tasks, resources and deadlines necessary to implement the agreements reached. Without attention to this phase, agreements often languish, leave the desired outcomes unachieved and frustrate the participants.

A common mistake in conducting collaborative processes is to place most of the attention on the problem solving phase. Rather, the assessment and implementation phases are equally if not more crucial to the success of collaborative processes.

B. Initiating a Collaborative Planning Process

To maximize the probability for success, several factors should be considered when initiating a collaborative process. It is helpful to consider these from the standpoint of what it takes to make collaborative processes work. Three issues should be evaluated, internal to a convening organization, to determine whether to proceed with a collaborative process.

1. **Support exists from leaders within the convening organization.** Support of organizational leadership is essential. Collaborative planning requires working with individuals and organizations in new ways. It requires a degree of openness and transparency to which organizations and leaders may be unaccustomed. This may place pressure on both individuals and organizations to perform in new ways, which requires the support of organizational leaders to reinforce. Organizational leaders also need to be in the position of approving potential plans and agreements that come from the process, and implementing them. Without support of organizational leaders, the likelihood of this occurring is significantly diminished.

2. **Incentives are present for both the sponsoring organization and stakeholders to undertake the process.** Both convening and participating organizations need to have ample incentive to undertake the

effort required of a collaborative planning process. This is particularly true of collaborative planning processes. In conflict resolution processes, the need to resolve conflicts acts as an inherent incentive. For a planning process, however, more attention needs to be given to outlining clearly why it is in everyone's interest to engage in such a process. If groups do not have an incentive to participate they will unlikely do so.

3. **An appropriate match exists between process objectives and use of collaborative planning.** This is a crucial point in evaluating whether to use a collaborative process. Often, organizations are not clear about what they want to achieve but think a collaborative process is desirable given the increased popularity and use of these processes. In fact, a more traditional public involvement program may be what is actually needed, or a public education program, or perhaps even a public relations campaign. Great care must be taken to match objectives with the appropriate process. Trying to use a process portrayed as collaborative for reasons or in a manner other than truly collaborative results in negative public perceptions and undermines legitimate collaborative processes. Disingenuous motives are quickly perceived as various publics gain experience with truly collaborative processes. Thus, before initiating a collaborative process, convening agencies should be sure it appropriately matches the process with desired objectives.

Once the decision is made to proceed, based on affirmative responses to the above criteria, the next step is to determine whether a neutral facilitator/mediator is advisable. Examples of situations where an independent facilitator/ mediator might not be required include "internal" processes (as opposed to those involving a range of stakeholders), when the sponsoring agency is not a direct party to the issues or implementation strategies, or when the agency is in the position of a mediator by virtue of their relationship to the parties.

When multiple organizations and individuals are part of a collaborative process, it is advisable under most conditions to engage a professional facilitator/mediator. Many other conditions might also warrant the involvement

of an independent facilitator/ mediator. As discussed earlier, an "outside" facilitator/mediator helps assure participants that the collaborative planning process will be open and genuine, and not excessively controlled by the organization convening the process. A mediator can help the sponsoring agency be an active participant in the process while it retains the role of informing participants when the limits of regulations, policy mandates and/or resources are being approached. An experienced mediator can improve communications and build trust where such are needed. Likewise, the mediator can conduct, or help conduct, the issues assessment and then be prepared to help design the process and assure appropriate participation. An appropriate first action is to have the mediator assess the status of the three criteria listed above to assure a neutral perspective on the issues.

After determining whether to use an outside mediator, an issues assessment should be conducted which forms the basis for designing the collaborative planning process. Thus, after the decisions are made whether to proceed with the process and use a facilitator/mediator, the following steps should be followed in initiating a collaborative planning process. If an outside facilitator is not used for some reason, it is even more important that this planning and preparation process be conducted openly, incorporating consultation with the full range of stakeholders. Many collaborative processes have failed due to inadequate planning, the inability to overcome historical distrust or animosity among potential participants, and the absence of a skilled, neutral process facilitator to help plan and conduct the process.

4. **Conduct a thorough process assessment, which under most circumstances is the most important step towards success of collaborative processes.** A detailed assessment of the objectives, issues, incentives, potential interest groups and potential conflicts is necessary before <u>any</u> activity related to the collaborative process proceeds (including scoping meetings). This is necessary also as the basis for designing the collaborative planning process and obtaining commitments of key stakeholders to participate. Under most circumstances, particularly those involving a wide range of publics, the assessment should be conducted by

a neutral facilitator/mediator.

5. **Design the collaborative planning process.** The collaborative planning process should be designed by an experienced facilitator/mediator. The process design should be based on stakeholder objectives, issues, relationships, deadlines, likelihood of conflict and potential sources of conflict, political realities, among other factors. In essence, the design should be based on the assessment. The recommended process could be a short and intense meeting like a retreat, a series of meetings in a short timeframe, a more prolonged process with regular, less intense meetings (to allow sufficient time for trust building, fact finding, etc.) or a hybrid of these.

6. **Determine the willingness of the key stakeholders to participate in a collaborative process, and obtain commitments to do so.** Based on the design of the process, clarifying the objectives and timeframe of the process, potential participants should be asked for a commitment to participate. In order to proceed, all the major stakeholder groups should be willing to proceed, or at a minimum, not object to the process proceeding. Obtaining commitments of the key stakeholders is essential to the success of the process. They should also have an opportunity to provide input on the objectives and issues addressed by the process, as well as the process itself.

7. **Establish an agenda for the first meeting of all participating stakeholders, with their input.** The last step in initiating the process is establishing an agenda that clarifies the purpose of the first meeting, that conveys commitments by the convening organizations and other participants, and that details the intent of the first and subsequent meetings. All participants in the process should have some input into the agenda for the first meeting, as well as subsequent meetings.

The degree of formality associated with any given collaborative planning process can vary depending on the complexity of the issues, the number of

stakeholders, legal mandates, political implications, relationships among the stakeholders, previous attempts to solve the issues, among other factors. Collaborative planning processes can range from a few informal meetings conducted by the convening entity with identified interest groups to highly structured processes guided by a professional facilitator/mediator. A common mistake, however, is to convene meetings before all these issues are fully evaluated. Experience has shown that underestimating the importance of these first seven steps and overlooking the value of conducting an unbiased assessment can be costly.

Many attempts to conduct collaborative processes have been initiated by a convening agency deciding to simply "pull together a few people" with known interests for a discussion. Without a full assessment of the implications of doing so, however, convening organizations many times have unintentionally handicapped processes eventually undertaken, and thus added an unnecessary degree of difficulty to conducting a successful process. As such, a cardinal rule in conducting collaborative processes is to never convene a meeting until all the preparation work, as represented by the above seven steps, is conducted. This will assure that even the more informal processes will have a higher likelihood of meeting intended objectives.

C. Conducting Joint Problem Solving

Once the assessment phase is complete and the first meeting convened, the collaborative planning process is in its second phase, joint problem solving. Good relationships must be forged and numerous activities conducted before joint problem solving occurs. Whether the purpose of the process is to develop some common visions for the future or to develop and implement strategies for dealing with issues of common concern, joint problem solving is required.

The following steps are common to joint problem solving:

1) clarify process objectives for all stakeholders

2) using visioning or other similar tools, identify the interests and concerns of all stakeholders

3) develop agreements in principle on both substantive and process issues

4) clarify common and differing interests related to process objectives

5) identify issues to be resolved

6) based on objectives, issues requiring resolution and an understanding of stakeholder interests, brainstorm possible options

7) identify data/information necessary for evaluation and decision-making, and design and conduct joint factfinding

8) establish evaluation criteria as the basis for evaluating options

9) using consensus building tools, guided by evaluation criteria, develop integrative solutions to meet process objectives and stakeholder interests

10) frame agreements and draft details on how to proceed with implementing agreements.

These are the typical steps involved with joint problem solving. Numerous tools have been developed to assist parties with each phase of this process. Process tools include a wide range of activities designed to enhance creative thinking and assessment such as visioning, collaborative learning, values mapping, force field analysis, preference ranking, and computer-assisted idea generation. The list of these kinds of tools is nearly endless. Other tools include using computer models for simulating natural conditions under various conditions as the basis for assessing alternatives and using single negotiated texts for formulating agreements. Interagency agreements and inter-organizational pacts also can play a role in implementing plans and agreements. The tools must match up with the objectives, available information and desired outcomes.

D. Assessing Progress

Collaborative planning processes are typically complex given the numerous issues and interest groups typically involved. It is sometimes difficult

to assess how these processes are progressing since interpersonal relationships and trust are such important components and often take some time to develop. Therefore, it is helpful to be able to evaluate potential measures of success as the process proceeds. Too often, convening organizations, as well as other participants, become frustrated when progress is not immediately evident. Realistically, however, many of these collaborative processes involve overcoming past relationships which may be strained due in part to more adversarial approaches that previously characterized interactions among participants. As such, time should be considered an ally not a deterrent, as increased understanding of different viewpoints, and the development of relationships and trust progress. Within this environment, to counter the frustration sometimes encountered, the following seven criteria can be used to measure progress:

1) wide-spread and committed participation among all stakeholders, and increased agency coordination and cooperation, are readily evident

2) the interests of all participants are clear, and participants are moving past position-taking as the basis of discussions

3) differences among the stakeholders are being honestly and forthrightly clarified, and candidly addressed

4) participants are demonstrating an increased understanding of others viewpoints and concerns

5) joint problem solving is a reality, in that stakeholders are working on solutions that represent mutual gains

6) new ideas are emerging for dealing with the tensions between development and preservation of natural resources that are characteristic of ecosystem management

7) at a minimum, broad agreements in principle are being formulated, both substantive and procedural.

If some of these characteristics can be observed, progress is being made. If not, increased attention may need to be given to reinforcing the incentives for participation and clarifying why stakeholders should not only continue to participate but make greater effort to work through differences together.

E. Implementing Agreements

The implementation phase of collaborative processes is the phase most frequently overlooked or underemphasized. So much attention is given to reaching agreements that implementation is often given little energy. Yet, without clear delineation of how agreements will be implemented, they may fall apart if the reality of deadlines, re-allocation of resources, developing new resources, establishing new policies, etc. are not clearly addressed. Thus, an agreement should not be considered complete until the issues of implementation are directly incorporated into the agreement. The elements of an implementation plan include identification of:

1) tasks and deadlines, including contingencies that may be part of the agreement

2) individuals/organizations who will be responsible for the tasks identified

3) individual(s)/organization(s) who will oversee implementation

4) mechanisms for evaluating the agreements to assure that they are meeting the intended objectives

5) mechanisms for refining the original agreement(s) if warranted.

At the closure of the joint problem solving phase, the mechanisms for continuing with the implementation phase must be clearly identified and put in place so that no discontinuity exists between these phases of the process. Without explicit attention given at the beginning as well as later in the process, implementation of agreements will likely be undermined. Resources also need to be allocated for implementing agreements and evaluating the outcomes over time.

IV. SUMMARY: INTEGRATING COLLABORATIVE PLANNING WITH ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT

Ecosystem management represents a relatively new direction in the way natural resources are managed. It embodies the principles of sustainable development and builds on long-term, holistic perspectives considered necessary for effective resource management. Ecosystem management presents many challenges because it often requires cross-jurisdictional cooperation, involves potentially significant economic implications, embodies closely held values among various stakeholders, and builds on technically based understandings of how various ecosystems operate.

Collaborative planning refers to myriad approaches that incorporate multi-stakeholder participation in planning and decision making. It builds on the concepts of joint planning and problem solving, addressing issues before polarization occurs to prevent the need for other, more adversarial forms of resolving differences. As such, the use of collaborative planning is an effective approach for dealing with the complex issues of ecosystem management.

It is therefore imperative to understand how best to plan and implement collaborative processes. This will present some specific challenges related to developing and embracing new ways of doing of business. If appropriate attention is given to the constraints and strategies for success outlined, the rewards of using collaborative approaches will be significant by many measures.

To work effectively, collaborative planning must have the support of leaders in all participating organizations, beginning with the sponsoring organization(s), at the highest levels of leadership. This support is essential when the challenges of cross-stakeholder collaborative processes are encountered. Under most circumstances, it is advisable to use an "outside," neutral facilitator to conduct the assessment phase as well as the joint problem solving phase of the process. A facilitator/mediator can help assure that the process is appropriately matched to the intended objectives. This adds credibility to the process and helps create an open, transparent process that is crucial to participation by other stakeholders.

Collaborative planning can deal with framing inter-agency cooperation and

coordination among agencies, particularly helpful among agencies or organizations with little history of cooperation. Collaborative planning can help surface issues, concerns and interests between stakeholders. It can help define commonly held visions and work through differences. It can help facilitate joint fact finding and joint problem solving that focuses on developing options for mutual gain. It builds on the propositions that economic and conservation concerns are not mutually exclusive, and that win-win solutions are possible even with the difficult issues associated with ecosystem management.

For an agency or organization facing issues related to managing ecosystems, four recommendations are proposed for moving forward with the application of collaborative planning to ecosystem management:

1) With the assistance of an experienced mediator/facilitator, convene a meeting of top organizational leaders to discuss new approaches (such as collaborative planning) to involving affected publics and stakeholders in ecosystem management and other such issues. If forthcoming, support should be demonstrated through memoranda reflecting upper echelon support for collaborative processes, policy guidelines indicating how to initiate collaborative processes, internal review/promotion policies that encourage using new approaches, etc.

2) Commit to negotiation/collaborative problem solving education and training for personnel who interface with the public or other agencies/jurisdictions, or who would be responsible for administering or overseeing collaborative processes

3) Identify several possible situations where collaborative processes might be helpful; work with an experienced mediator/facilitator to identify one or two appropriate pilot projects and initiate the assessment/design process for those projects

4) Commit to evaluating the pilot projects as the basis for ongoing learning and improving future efforts involving the public and other agencies/jurisdictions in planning and decision making; use the results to refine education/training curricula, as recommended above.

These recommendations provide a blueprint for beginning the process of integrating collaborative planning principles into organizational activities related

to natural resource management and similar issues.

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