

The Role of the Local Community on Federal Lands: the Weaverville Community Forest

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In the wake of the timber wars, communities across the American West have struggled to redefine their relationships to nearby federal forests. The timber-dependent model of the pre-Timber War era, with clear timber targets and economic outputs, has been replaced by more nuanced and less clearly-defined model: ecosystem management. This case study research uses interviews with participants in the Weaverville Community Forest (WCF) to explore the role of a community in managing its nearby federal lands. Momentum for the WCF flowed from a small group of citizens who were invested in the forest despite their cultural and ideological differences regarding its appropriate management. The WCF built upon project successes through management on lands identified as unhealthy or dangerous because of wildland fire risk. The WCF and its partners created a scaffolding of support for politically and economically weakened federal agencies to conduct work in the area.

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Community forests have a long history in the United States, though their form differs across regions and by ownership type. Community forests are connected to and cared for by human communities, with the dual goals of “health of the land and well-being of their communities” (Baker and Kusel 2003:1). In the American West, community forests have been reinvigorated after the Timber Wars of the 1980s-90s as one means of overcoming historical distrust between adversarial groups such as the timber industry and environmentalists. Most community forests in this region have followed a model of collaborative community-based input on federally-managed public lands (Charnley and Poe 2007). The policies

guiding management of federal lands shifted from timber-driven management toward ecosystem management in the 1990s to maintain and restore biodiversity and ecosystem processes. In practice, however, many acres in need of restoration and active management have been neglected, in part because of limited agency capacity and ongoing public disputes over how to appropriately manage forests on federal lands (Koontz and Bodine 2008; Thomas et al. 2006). This manuscript presents a case study of the Weaverville Community Forest (WCF) in Trinity County, California, which offers a community forest model as one path to ecosystem management by re-integrating human communities with nearby federal forests.

Federal lands are important in the American West, not only because of their

prevalence across the landscape, but because many rural communities were historically economically dependent on them. Communities had access to the lands through federal contracts for the raw materials that supplied local sawmills. Land management agencies such as the U.S. Forest Service implemented sustained yield forest management, ostensibly to overcome boom-and-bust natural resource extraction cycles by providing consistent, sustainable timber supplies to maintain timber infrastructure and economic stability (Rasker 1994; Waggener 1977). Thus, a relationship between federal lands, rural, timber-dependent communities, and federal agencies predicated on stable timber supply was maintained for at least a generation in the American West in the mid-20th century.

This economic dependence shifted as a result of a number of co-occurring factors in the 1980s and 1990s: depletion of valuable old-growth timber and a turn toward smaller second-growth timber; technological changes that replaced many woods-workers and millworkers with capital-intensive machinery; and dramatic declines in harvest rates on federal lands after the Timber Wars (Layzer 2012). The Timber Wars were initiated because of depletion of old-growth forests and habitat, and they were (at least nominally) resolved on federal lands through the end of timber-driven management and the creation of new forms of forest management centered on ecosystem management. Ecosystem management was defined as managing for “maintenance and restoration of biological diversity... maintenance of sustainable levels of renewable natural resources, including timber, other forest products, and other facets of forest values; and maintenance of rural economies and communities” (FEMAT 1993:ii). The implementation of ecosystem management, such as through the Northwest Forest Plan, was accompanied by a steep decline in federal timber harvest, as well as a decrease in capacity of the federal forest

workforce (which has further declined because of shifting budgets from non-fire work to fire suppression, see USDA 2015). The lofty goals of ecosystem management have been difficult to achieve because of this decline in agency capacity, as well as continued emphasis within federal agencies on single-use management, resistance to change, lawsuits and appeals, and scientific uncertainty (Koontz and Bodine 2008).

Shifting Management Authority: Decentralization

While federal lands belong to all citizens of the U.S., nearby local communities have particular interest in their management. This is evident with fire risk, which impacts property and lives of local residents; it is also evident in job creation and through the diverse ecosystem services provided by nearby federal lands. In order to realize these benefits, some communities have taken it upon themselves to discover or create mechanisms for decentralizing control from federal land management agencies to local offices, and to devolve some decision-making from the land management agencies to collaborative community groups. The ability of federal agencies to relinquish some decision-making authority, however, has been uneven, with efforts at decentralization and collaborative decision-making at odds with agency responsibility to maintain control over resource management (Butler 2013).

Decentralization, or ‘bottom-up’ management, in which responsibility for natural resource management decisions is re-allocated from centralized government agencies to local agency offices and their partners, has been assumed to ensure more effective natural resource management, as “local ecological specificities can be addressed by local experience and experimentation” (Blaikie 2006:1945). Decentralization transfers authority to lower levels of government within

the same bureaucracy, presumably resulting in more accountability to the local population because of their proximity. As part of decentralization, some authority may be devolved to non-governmental user groups (Meinzen-Dick and Knox 1999). The most common type of decentralized decision-making in the American West, in which diverse stakeholders work to plan and implement management on federal lands to achieve social, ecological, and economic goals, is an attempt to reframe the community relationship to forests.

Decentralization may be difficult as local community members have divergent natural resource objectives and ability and willingness to participate in decision-making. The Timber Wars demonstrated vividly the divisions in rural communities over natural resource management. In simple terms, the Timber Wars pitched environmental groups on one side utilizing federal laws, the judiciary, and direct action to disrupt and reform timber-driven management, versus a timber industry, generally aligned with western politicians, that resisted reform as long as possible. The communities surrounded by federal lands often served as battlegrounds for the Timber Wars, where residents watched both timber-based livelihoods disintegrate and forest ecosystems unravel, and where timber industry workers, environmental activists, and agency personnel lived in proximity to each other.

In rural forest communities across the American West since the 1990s, the model of timber-dependent communities, with employment contingent on extraction of the timber resource, has been replaced by a geographically uneven 'New West,' wherein some rural communities have re-built their economies "on the aesthetic and recreational amenities" particular to many western places (Wilson 2006:54). These 'amenity-rich' communities contrast with other rural forest communities in the West that have seen significant declines in community well-being

with the loss of timber-based employment. This has resulted in distinct 'Wests' with varying employment types, population trends, and age structures (Rasker et al. 2009). Whether communities fit the high-amenity paradigm or not, relationships between formerly timber-dependent communities and their forests have changed; yet, forests remain an integral part of community identity and economic and social well-being across the region (Charnley, McLain and Donoghue 2008; Morzillo et al. 2015). Many communities surrounded by federal lands have displayed remarkable adaptiveness, creating locally-based collaborative groups and non-profit organizations that have sought to redefine forest management on their own terms, and finding common ground and working toward common purpose on federal lands (Charnley and Poe 2007; Wondolleck and Yaffee 2000). For all the difficulties of decentralization, many community groups have demanded its implementation and federal agencies are tentatively supporting the approach through policies and funding mechanisms like the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (Schultz, Jedd and Beam 2012).

Ecosystem management and decentralized decision-making may at times be at odds, or may be separate but 'co-evolving trends' in the words of Steel and Weber (2001). But ideally, ecosystem management can incorporate collaborative, decentralized decision-making, with federal land management agencies working alongside other stakeholders in management decisions. Many researchers and managers have asserted that it includes decentralized decision-making to account for both ecological principles and the economic needs of local communities through "local, place-based projects, programs, and policies" (Hibbard and Madsen 2003:703). This 'grass-roots' ecosystem management both pulls together members of

previously disparate communities (e.g. loggers and environmentalists) and reintegrates land management with economic and social imperatives (Weber 2000). Ecosystem management occurs at multiple decision-making scales; at the local scale is the space where collaborative groups operate (Weber 2000).

As Brosius, Tsing and Zerner assert, “only through the explication of specific histories and political dynamics can we begin to address the problems and prospects of community-based resource management” (2008:160). I use the WCF as a case study to explore the question: what is the role of a community in managing its nearby federal lands? I recognize that not all perspectives of the community (in this case, Weaverville) are represented in the WCF. Others have found that participants in collaborative land management groups may not reflect the broader community (Wilson and Crawford 2008). Momentum for the WCF flowed from a small group of citizens who were invested in the forest despite their cultural and ideological differences regarding its appropriate management. They built upon project successes through management on lands identified as in need of restoration or dangerous because of wildland fire risk and created a scaffolding of support for politically and economically weakened federal agencies to conduct work in the area.

Methods

This case study research describes the WCF in Trinity County, California, in which over 77% of the landscape is owned federally, and managed primarily by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The WCF is entirely on USFS and BLM lands, and for the purposes of this paper, the community is an unincorporated

town called Weaverville, with a population of approximately 3,200 people.¹ Weaverville is remote and has a relatively low median household income (at \$37,500, versus \$63,783 for California) and high poverty rate (19.4%, versus 14.3% for California as a whole), but it also has relatively high educational attainment, with 88.7% of adults high school graduates, compared with 82.1% across California. Weaverville also still has a vibrant timber industry; across Trinity County, as much as 10% of private sector employment is in the timber industry (U.S. Dept. of Commerce, 2017).

This research began in summer 2015, with 16 interviews of people affiliated with the WCF in Weaverville, California. I subsequently met with several of the same people over the intervening years, and re-interviewed two of the initial 16 people, plus one additional interviewee. Interviewees were purposively selected because of their participation in the creation or management of the WCF and included: four employees of Trinity County Resource Conservation District (TCRCD), four employees of the timber industry, two BLM employees, three USFS employees, two employees of the Watershed Center, one self-identified environmentalist, and one town elder who was involved in the initial WCF formation. Some of these interviewee descriptors overlap, such as the term ‘environmentalist,’ which could be used for multiple people.

Interviews were semi-structured and included questions on the formation of WCF, its governance, and its objectives. Initial questions were designed for a project on All-Lands Management, but interviewees voluntarily brought up historical timber management and the Timber Wars, leading to the current manuscript. Interview length and topics covered varied according to the expertise and interest of the interviewees. Interviews

¹ Weaverville information from U.S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder, 2016 American Community Survey 5-year Population Estimate. California information from U.S. Census Bureau, QuickFacts.

were recorded and transcribed, and all interviewee names were redacted for anonymity.

I also accessed documents about WCF projects, from federal land management agencies and the Trinity County Resource Conservation District, in order to verify and contextualize my understanding of projects and see how the projects were portrayed by participants (e.g. through project applications for funding).

Analysis followed qualitative methods of coding. I used Nvivo software to help organize codes. Initial free coding involved assigning codes regarding the creation of WCF, its objectives, and factors that enabled or constrained its success in achieving its objectives. I created umbrella codes of 'factors of success' and 'challenges.' Under these broad categories, I created multiple sub-categories that captured the most salient themes.

The Weaverville Community Forest

The Creation of WCF: Bringing Together Disparate Actors

The WCF was first pursued because of a proposed land trade in 1999 between the BLM and Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI), an industrial timber company. Because the land in question, approximately 1,000 acres, was in the viewshed of the town of Weaverville, a motivated group of community members objected to the land trade because of concerns over clearcutting and aesthetic impacts on their town. The BLM proposed the land trade because of a number of issues with managing the isolated piece of ground, as described by a TCRCD employee who was central to the creation of WCF:

We were able to... basically just take all the reasons that BLM wanted to trade it, which was that it was really close to town and residences, a small piece of property, a small parcel, a lot

of hazards associated with it, a road that goes through it. We took all those and flipped them and said, 'these are the all the reasons why it should be a community forest and it should be actively managed.'

These residents, mostly self-identified environmentalists, received support from the local Natural Resources Conservation Service office, which provided funding for a professional facilitator. They also received a letter of support from the remaining timber mill in the community. After several years of negotiations – the result of the complexity of land transfer agreements and the lack of a formal mechanism to create community forests on public lands – the local BLM office, with support from the BLM state forester, agreed to jointly manage the forest with the TCRCD. The BLM portion of the community forest was established in 2005, and the U.S. Forest Service added 12,000 acres in 2008, in order to include the majority of public lands in the Weaverville Basin.

The TCRCD is the 'public face' of the WCF, and conducts community outreach activities, planning, and project implementation (WCF 2010). Resource Conservation Districts in California are administered by the state but are intended to serve as a bridge between federal agencies and local communities and landowners. The WCF is governed through the TCRCD board and by an informal, open steering committee of 10-15 people, including members of the public and employees of the TCRCD and the two land managing federal agencies. The WCF steering committee prioritizes forest management projects and coordinates planning between the two federal land managers through bi-monthly meetings. Broader, community-wide meetings occur 1-2 times per year, with updates for Weaverville residents about the WCF and opportunities for resident input.

The steering committee includes people who were on opposing sides during the Timber Wars, and also includes the legacy of human capital and knowledge surrounding forestry: “There’s lots of just interest in it [forest management] and there’s jobs in it, so you’ve got people with knowledge and expertise” (interview, USFS). Interviewees told of long hours and commitment to engaging with the federal lands around them, and the TCRCO along with a nearby non-profit organization called the Watershed Research and Training Center (Watershed Center) have dedicated much of their time toward rebuilding and recreating the local forest economy.

Holding it All Together: Stewardship Agreements

The governing partners (BLM, USFS, and TCRCO) agreed to use federal authorities granted through stewardship agreements (Public Law 108-7 Section 323), which created a framework for the federal government to coordinate management with other entities. Each of the Master Stewardship Agreements (one established with the USFS and one with the BLM) were valid for 10 years. Stewardship agreements emphasize “mutual interest and benefit and the advantages and effectiveness of mutual participation” between the agency and non-agency partners (National Forest Foundation 2014). Importantly, the Master Stewardship Agreements created a framework for collaborative project development, with specified roles for the TCRCO and the agencies. The TCRCO helps to develop annual plans and coordinate contractors and monitoring, while the USFS and BLM retain responsibilities for producing National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analyses and administering timber sales.

Both the 2005 BLM Master Stewardship Agreement (renewed in 2015) and the 2008 USFS Master Stewardship Agreement

specified the following objectives: “fire hazard reduction (including commercial forest products with revenues used for future, on-site stewardship practices), watershed protection, fish & wildlife habitat improvement, sediment reduction, protection of cultural resources, recreation and noxious weed management” (BLM 2005; USFS 2008). Fire management, in particular, became central to the WCF, as it is located in a fire-prone, dry mixed conifer and shrub landscape, interspersed with and adjacent to residences.

The Master Stewardship Agreements are the foundation for stewardship contracting in the WCF. Stewardship contracts differ from traditional timber sales in several key regards: they can include multiple activities, such as trail maintenance, prescribed fire, watershed restoration and vegetation removal; they can be multi-year; receipts from timber revenues that exceed costs are retained for further stewardship work; and contractors for the projects can be selected based on ‘best value’ rather than lowest-cost basis, which means that non-cost attributes such as experience, skill, and location can be considered when selecting contractors (Pinchot Institute 2017). This allows the projects to favor local contractors, in this case the TCRCO and the Watershed Center.

The governance of the WCF thus far has had the two public land-management agencies creating separate agreements with TCRCO and making decisions separately. Landscape-level planning, which would incorporate both the BLM and USFS-administered lands, is a goal of the Master Stewardship Agreements; in the USFS agreement: “mission accomplishment for both parties will be furthered by improving and creating healthy forests on a landscape scale” (USFS 2008). A BLM employee expressed interest in coordinating across the agencies, “starting to look at it from a basin management perspective,” but planning has only been coordinated through the community groups (the

WCF steering committee and TCRCD), and project implementation has so far been limited to one ownership or the other.

Moving Past Distrust and Demonstrating a New Model

In discussions about WCF, most interviewees spoke about the importance of repairing or building relationships among community members after the Timber Wars. An environmentalist said that the participants of the WCF came to trust each other and work together: “it’s like a weight has been lifted from me personally. I feel that way and I think [another interviewee, a logger] feels that way too. We actually like each other. It’s just amazing if you’ve lived through that and to see where it’s at now.” A USFS employee said similarly, “you can’t help but get to know people when you’re at these meetings, and to see – for them to see that we’re just real people. We live here. We raise our kids here.”

Most participants’ involvement in the WCF was motivated by a perceived lack of management on the federal lands, in part because of the inability of the federal land management agencies to get projects through necessary bureaucratic processes. Projects were delayed because of disagreements over management practices, but also because of lingering distrust, with environmental groups suing to stop projects. This led to frustration, evident for example from one respondent from the timber industry: “Our perception, since 1990, the public lands have not been managed. They have just been fruitlessly proposing projects that get held up, turned down, sued upon.” But the frustration was also evident from self-identified environmentalists, as illustrated in this quote:

Both sides saw that the old model was not working, the Timber Wars, nothing. They weren’t getting any timber

out. The woods are a mess... it taught us to look for common grounds for common good and work together.

Members of the WCF worked to find areas of common ground in order to make projects more amenable to all participants, as a TCRCD staff member noted, “try and find consensus around what active management should look like on federal land.”

Trust was built in the WCF through more than meetings, but by getting work done on the ground, or demonstrating that projects could be done efficiently and well under the WCF model. This was particularly true because the WCF surrounds the community of Weaverville, and so forest management work is visible to community members. Speaking of one particular timber sale and restoration project, a contractor with TCRCD said: “It’s not like doing a timber sale in the middle of nowhere where nobody is going to see it. This timber sale is a true forest health timber sale. It’s gonna bring logs to the mill, but it’s also gonna make this little 200 acres more fire safe”. Rebuilding trust in forestry was described as restoring ‘social license’ by a logger, who continued: “we’re trying to restore confidence in the community that the land can be managed and taken care of, and that it needs to be... we’re making progress. The argument now isn’t should we manage or not, it’s how should we manage it.”

A frequent example of success, mentioned by multiple interviewees, was a prescribed burn conducted in 2013, the year before a large fire in 2014 called the Oregon Fire. As one USFS employee noted, the Oregon Fire burned to the edge of the prescribed burn then “it looks like it stopped right there.” While there were disagreements among interviewees about the importance of the role of the prescribed burn alone, there was no doubt that its visibility and its apparent role in helping to halt the Oregon Fire created support for more prescribed fire in the area.

Another example of success described by interviewees was a timber sale called the Browns Project, which had been initially proposed over ten years before the creation of the WCF but had stalled. The WCF steering committee approved of the sale in three phases after extensive, time-consuming negotiations. As one logger noted, “there was way more work went into that million feet of timber than you can ever imagine... [but] we’re learning some things about how things were done the wrong way, so that we can do it better in the future.” This idea was described by another interviewee as developing an initially-expensive prototype that becomes easier and cheaper to replicate with further iterations.

Another point of agreement among interviewees was the need for Weaverville to build upon and re-build its forest-based infrastructure and workforce. This was a view unsurprisingly expressed by people within the timber industry: “We have a sawmill that sits there... if something doesn’t happen there we spend a lot of money hauling timber a long ways through a sea of timber just to get to a sawmill that can’t purchase logs locally because there isn’t any.” But it was also expressed by others; an environmentalist said: “from an environmental perspective we can get some hands-on management and make the woods healthier than they used to be; from the timber perspective they can get some logs out of the job to keep the mills running. It’s just a win-win.”

Bridging Objectives and Building Capacity

In order to create a successful community forest, the WCF needed to link the objectives of the local community with federal land management agency objectives. This involved the work of intermediary organizations, in particular the TCRC. While RCDs in many parts of the United States focus on private lands, the TCRC has devoted much

of its time to federal lands because federal lands dominate the land base in the county. The TCRC has become a liaison between the community and the federal agencies. As one TCRC staff member interviewed put it, “I mean we’re a conduit for the community members to get to the federal government and have their voice heard” but it has also become a way to bolster the capacity and capabilities of the USFS: “I said [to the USFS] ‘hitch your wagon to our star. We will work with you to make you look good’... that’s good for the Forest Service because they’re maligned otherwise.”

Most interviewees spoke to issues regarding inadequate capacity in the USFS as a result of budget and staffing constraints. After rounds of consolidation of ranger districts, the decline of timber revenues, and the growing fire suppression budget at the expense of other programs, personnel reductions had significantly slowed down the environmental analyses necessary to conduct projects. However, the BLM, with even fewer staff, was seen as more effective. As one logger interviewed put it, “when you deal with the BLM it’s like, ‘let’s go out here and get something done. If there’s questions, let’s work ‘em out.’” While the BLM was described as generally willing to devolve responsibility to the WCF Steering Committee, the USFS was described as less willing. One person who had helped develop the WCF said, “the main thing that we had with BLM was the trust,” whereas the Forest Service was “always afraid of getting sued... terrified of trying something that’s out of the box.” This was largely attributed to the more “hierarchical” structure of the USFS, with some staff at the forest and regional level unsupportive of collaboration and decentralization, as well as the more inflexible NEPA process of USFS. An employee of the USFS noted this, saying, “we have this perception that BLM, they’re able to fly under the radar with their NEPA.

They're able to do so much more than we could."

Interviewees from the USFS acknowledged some of these problems but also pointed to the WCF as a way to overcome them, particularly through partnership with the TCRC and the Watershed Center. Speaking about coordinating prescribed fire, a USFS employee said: "So that's really where our partners come in. That's where RCD and Watershed really help us because they say, 'Okay, we'll go contact SPI... We'll go contact so-and-so over here and so-and-so over here, and we'll see how they feel about letting fire go on the land.' So we did our part and... then they worked on getting that part."

The TCRC and Watershed Center have implemented projects and both groups have written grants to supplement funding from their federal partners. As an example, the Watershed Center has leveraged lessons from the WCF to develop the Weaver Basin Community Protection Project, which is situated approximately on the same footprint as the WCF but includes private lands within the basin as well. According to an employee of the Watershed Center, "you can put our [private lands] units and the Forest Service units on a map and it's directly linked up." The Project has approximately 12 private landowners, including two large-scale forest industry landowners, who are working strategically to address fire risk across the basin. Though bureaucratic hurdles have emerged, such as the need to do NEPA on private lands because of federal funding, as of December 2017, the planning is complete.

Discussion

Implementing Ecosystem Management: Re-integrating the Community

For the ecological benefit of ecosystem management to be realized, its social and governance components must be realized, and these include the integration of stakeholder input and benefits to rural communities (Koontz and Bodine 2008). Weaverville has maintained its strong cultural ties to its federal forests and has built upon those to create a vision of forest restoration and management that brings together the disputing sides of the Timber Wars in order to help move past them. In this, Weaverville has demonstrated high adaptive capacity, or the ability to respond to disruptive changes, and high governance capacity in the form of leadership, motivation, and the ability to proactively govern social-ecological systems by working across scales, from local to federal (Fabricius et al. 2007). This was demonstrated by the vision and persistence necessary to create the WCF in the first place; the experimentation with different funding arrangements and problem-solving to get to a system that maintained federal ownership but included community power; the creative use of stewardship agreements and funding mechanisms; and the expansion of the community forest over time, including the recent inclusion of private lands in landscape-level planning and management.

The working forest arrangement of WCF is in contrast to a recreation or tourism-based relationship between communities and forests. Around the time of the completion of the Northwest Forest Plan, some researchers envisioned rural western economies centered on service industries and passive management of federal lands (e.g. Rasker 1994). But this vision has proven useful only in select geographies, where amenity migrants bring

investment and human capital to rural communities, underlining the uneven socioeconomic gains of the New West (Gosnell and Abrams 2011; Wilson 2006). High-amenity communities have attracted residents through built recreation infrastructure and ‘quality of life’ considerations, and have displaced some former residents through rising costs of living; in contrast, Weaverville is an isolated community with a limited recreation and tourist infrastructure. The WCF has redefined its relationship to the forest based on more than consumption-based uses such as tourism and recreation; it is a place where the landscape is still working, but under a different model.

Participants in the WCF are working to change how the nearby federal forest is managed but also to reconstitute the beneficial relationship between the forest and its community, from one of timber dependence to a more nuanced relationship based on repairing human relationships and restoring the forest. The Timber Wars caused a major disruption in the power to control management decisions on federal lands, and residents and communities of the American West are still wrestling with how to navigate the post-timber war decision-making context on those lands. Ribot and Peluso argue that the ability to benefit from natural resource management rests on “socially acknowledged and supported claims or rights” whether through law or custom (2003:156). The WCF is claiming the community’s right to manage and benefit from nearby natural resources on federal lands, which helps to explain one interviewee’s words when he said that the projects of the WCF were re-building the social license of logging. Interviewees involved in the WCF recognized the divisiveness of the Timber Wars and strove to overcome this divisiveness through negotiation and prioritization of forest management projects. The acrimony of the Timber Wars was at least partly overcome by WCF participants, in line with

the claim of Bullock and Hanna that community forests can provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and knowledge, and “mutual understanding and trust may follow” (2008:80).

A new relationship between a community and its federal forests has thus arisen after a period of neglect or dissociation, but it is still predicated on the forest’s ability to provide economic return, ecosystem services, and employment. I have used the term ecosystem management for this ‘new’ relationship, though the concept of ecosystem management has been the underlying policy of federal lands management for almost 25 years. Ecosystem management has always been somewhat ill-defined, or defined in different ways by different people, and this fuzziness led some to predict that “debates over definitions, fundamental principles, and policy implications will probably continue and shape the new paradigm in ways not yet discernible” (Rauscher 1999:174). The Timber Wars disrupted a well-established decision-making system on federal lands: while timber-driven management had clear economic benefits, well-defined goals measured in board feet, and straightforward top-down decision-making processes, ecosystem management has at times struggled to find its footing. Both researchers (e.g. Thomas et al. 2006) and community members in places like Weaverville have noted with dismay that active management after the Timber Wars – including to reduce wildland fire risk – has been insufficient on federal lands. However, the disruption to the old timber regime has allowed for access to decision-making from new voices and new organizations.

One solution of the WCF to overcoming the post-timber war management impasse has been to develop a partnership that brings the capacity, skills, and experience of a select group of committed local citizens to support, prioritize, and at times cajole federal land

management agencies in planning and implementing management projects. In the words of a TCRC D employee: “I would say that the steering committee nominally represents the community. It really is comprised of folks who were really captivated by the idea of a community forest and joined the cause early and remained advocates,” dedicating time and resources to getting projects done in the forest. Many of the difficulties of larger projects, including coordinating across scales and data inconsistencies (Lurie and Hibbard 2008) are minimized when only working with two agencies and in a limited geographic scope. This tension, between “inclusivity and effectiveness” has been previously identified in community forest efforts (Teitelbaum 2016:7).

Many of the stakeholders involved with WCF expressed support of its relatively small, contained footprint. While many federal projects and funding sources have pushed for ever-larger scales of management and planning, the WCF has maintained a focus on the Weaverville Basin. This can be contrasted with the county-wide Trinity County Collaborative [Collaborative], which is both geographically larger and has more participants. One interviewee who is involved in both efforts said that the Collaborative was “more diffuse... it’s hard to scale your impact... you’re spreading out impacts across a bunch of different communities and landscapes.” The WCF focuses on one watershed, it has distinct boundaries that are affirmed through agreements with the agencies involved, and it has a relatively small group of people who meet regularly and have gotten to know each other well. However, it is notable that the WCF helped lay the groundwork for the Collaborative, which secured three years of funding through the Joint Chiefs’ Landscape Restoration Partnership starting in 2016 and has developed a framework for county-wide restoration through meetings over a period of 5 years. The Collaborative

has extended the vision of the WCF both geographically and in terms of participation.

Uncertainties of Decentralizing Decision-making in the WCF

The WCF demonstrates that decentralization of decision-making is about more than just applying local expertise in order to gain local benefits. It is also about local support for projects that may be controversial, underfunded, or simply lost in bureaucracy, and shoring up diminished federal capacity in order to plan and implement projects. In Weaverville, a great deal of human capital has been leveraged to create and maintain the WCF: there is a legacy of knowledge and expertise associated with the forest – of land managers, loggers, and environmental activists – along with the commitment and drive necessary for mostly-volunteer efforts requiring patience, dedication, and compromise.

In creating the WCF, the community does not have ownership of the land, which is in contrast to some community forests, including two community forests of neighboring Humboldt County, where industrial forest lands have been carved off to create a municipally-owned forest (Arcata Community Forest) and a county-owned forest (McKay Community Forest). Instead, the WCF created a partnership between locally-based organizations (TCRC D and Watershed Center) and federal agencies at multiple scales. Partnerships have developed at the local level, through frequent and sustained discussions, while agency bureaucracies at the regional and national scales have provided supportive funding and policies, and lent support to local employees’ decisions.

The WCF therefore depends on consistent renewal of the Stewardship Agreements between the federal land managers and the TCRC D, the participation and capacity of locally-based intermediaries (TCRC D and Watershed Center), and the volunteerism and

commitment of local residents. Because the federal agencies have retained formal control over the resources, if federal policy mechanisms fail or are discontinued, then the local community forest will fail as well. This has created some uncertainty, but it also has allowed for the resources of both the federal agencies and local community to be coordinated to implement projects on the land. It has maintained the federal land management agencies as partners.

Community-based collaboration is imperfect, with at times unstable funding, inconsistent policies (including, at times, un-supportive federal agency personnel), and reliance on the finite resources of rural communities. The WCF has utilized tools created through federal legislation to access decision-making and affect how and where management is conducted. This includes using stewardship agreements and stewardship contracting, as well as the Wyden Amendment, which allows the Forest Service to partner with other governments, private entities, or landowners to implement restoration on either public or private lands. Though adept at using these tools, the WCF has still suffered at times from inconsistent funding sources and unclear policies regarding decentralization, and insufficient funds allocated for the federal agencies that are ultimately responsible for decision-making. For example, fluctuations in funding have impacted the ability of the community to build and sustain a skilled workforce in restoration. While stewardship contracts generate retained receipts, in which excess timber sale dollars are reinvested in the forest, as one TCRCD staffer noted, "it's touch and go, relying on retained receipts," particularly after the financial crash of 2008. The WCF illustrates the need for consistent, supportive federal funding and policies in order to decentralize land management decisions.

Conclusion

Management on federal lands changed dramatically in the wake of the Timber Wars, and although federal policies effectively stopped timber-driven management, they have been more ambiguous in advancing ways to actively manage forest lands under ecosystem management. The WCF demonstrates that ecosystem management can be carried out on federal forest lands with the support of nearby community members and relevant intermediaries. This decentralization of decision-making means creating flexibility at federal land management agencies in order to allow for local communities to find common ground, work through disagreements, and help to design and prioritize projects. Some have argued that more local control and calls for flexibility from central governments can be tools of industry to better capitalize on harvesting resources on public lands (McCarthy 2005). However, in the case of the WCF, participating community members and organizations like TCRCD and Watershed Center have complemented the ability of federal agencies to manage public lands. In this sense, the state is not discredited as McCarthy fears, but in fact supported to meet its obligations. The TCRCD and Watershed Center are supplementing USFS and BLM capacity to plan and implement management, helping to create ecological and economic benefits for the community.

While I have asserted that the WCF has successfully begun to re-integrate the community with federal land management, its model is not necessarily transferable to other places. It is dependent on the capacity of Weaverville residents to engage with federal partners; in other words, there need to be willing and able community partners to allow for place-based decision-making. Across the American West, human, social, and political capitals are unevenly distributed. This une-

venness (or diversity) of communities is important to examine, in part to discover how communities can develop the capacity to engage with federal partners in the first place, and to determine how federal and state policies can best support community partners.

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