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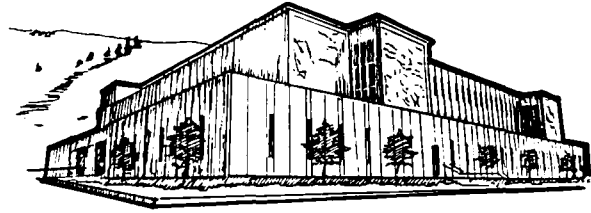
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University of
Montana

The Political Community and Nature
A Look at the 1988 Missoula County Lolo Peak Ballot Issue

By

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B.S. University of Iowa, 1984

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Science

University of Montana

1990

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Environmental Studies

The Political Community and Nature
The 1988 Missoula County Lolo Peak Ballot Issue (141 pp.)

Director: Albert Borgmann *AB*

In late 1987 a citizens group organized in Missoula, Montana to promote the idea of developing a prominent nearby mountain into a major destination ski resort. The idea had been around for more than 20 years, never able to withstand a preliminary study of feasibility until the mid 1980's brought a number of technological breakthroughs in the ski industry. Key to the successful renewed pursuit of this idea, now seen as conditionally feasible, became an assessment of public opinion. Popular support for a ski resort was an essential factor in attracting a potential developer. At the same time a natural swell of resistance arose to the idea of clearing the slopes of Lolo Peak for ski runs.

Seeking a clean resolution of this disagreement the County Commissioners, at the urging of the resort idea's proponents, opted for an electoral ballot issue, timed to coincide with a November general election. Where community conversation of this issue had been a possibility, interested participants found themselves arming for the choreographed battle of a political campaign -- a battle the resort's proponents eventually won.

Through a survey of the political development of the region this paper will show that resolution of this disagreement was a reflection of the liberal political tradition, born of the individualism historically prevalent in the region and evident in the nation's culture. Electoral procedure, while lending the impression of a smoothly working public concealed what John Dewey would label the "eclipsed" nature of that public. It will be shown that this procedure is marked by the traits of warfare strategy and tactical manipulation, revealing a community which has willingly reduced the essence of its political interaction to confrontation. A look at the history of this specific issue will show that a similar reduction is also evident in the discussion of the relation between a community and its natural surroundings. The discussion becomes a comparison of utilitarian considerations, a discussion of resources instead of things, unable to capture the fullness of the underlying issue.

Finally the paper will propose the alternative of a conversation to confrontation, pointing to the civic tradition within which this alternative is grounded, and presenting the possibility of a richer and more involved public interaction as a result. It is a public that overcomes the eclipse which Dewey described, and which Missoula has, on this issue to this point, demonstrated.

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INTRODUCTION

Three miles of highway and eight miles of winding Forest Service road separate the gas stations and mini shopping marts of the 93 Strip in Lolo from the trailhead at Mormon Saddle. Along a steeply climbing foot path stretching two and a half miles from the trailhead, Carleton Ridge hides a view of Lolo Peak. Once over the ridge, a person hardly sees anything but the peak. Its imposing bouldered slopes attract and deceive the eye, making it appear much closer than it really is. Standing on top of Carleton Ridge on a cloudless autumn Saturday morning, a group of about 20 hikers milled about, resting after the trailhead climb. Between bites of fruit, handfuls of trailmix, and gulps of water, the conversation was tending in two directions: a debate over which route would provide the best scramble to the top of the mountain (still over a mile and twelve hundred feet away), and for the first time that day, hesitant comments and questions about the ski area:

"Is there going to be a run down there?" (pointing down the Mill Creek drainage).

"Somebody told me that it'll be invisible from the valley. How is that possible?"

"What did the EIS say about avalanches?"

"They say that Disney wants in to build this thing."

The "thing" being talked about by the group of hikers was still officially just an "idea". More correctly, as they would probably find out behind the curtains of a polling place, it was "the idea of an economically feasible and environmentally sound major four season

resort."¹ In a little over a month they would be casting their vote for or against this idea, an electoral question designed to render concerns about run location, visibility, avalanches, and developer identity temporarily moot. The indefiniteness of this information promoted the hesitancy which often marked conversations about the issue. The first step appeared to be a search for the right questions.

Later, as the group reclined against the boulders that make up the small level area on the peak's summit, the wrong questions were being replaced by the right answers. Hesitancy was gone. It was as if the climb had clarified the issue in their minds:

"It's a stupid idea."

"I don't know. The economy needs help. Maybe we need to sacrifice things."

"It's gross to think of a bunch of slobs riding a machine to get here. They won't know what it's about."

What it seemed to be "about" was a little more difficult to grasp. Part of it seemed to be about the view over the Missoula Valley. Another part of it seemed to be about looking out over the distance of the Selway Bitterroot Wilderness. Also a part of it were water jugs, surprisingly down to their last swallows with half a hike left to go, tired legs, wobbly ankles and sunburnt noses, vertigo, and achieving the right combination of shirts and sweaters against the cool wind at the top.

Notes left at a Forest Service record box at the top of the peak reflect the elusiveness of a sense of "what it's about". People are no doubt inspired by the experience of the climb to take pen in hand,

only to find that words are failing them. "Beautiful", almost all of them say, often then moving on to give an account of the details of the climb:

"Gnats buzzing everywhere."

"Clouds to the southwest."

"Clouds over the Sapphires."

"Windy and cold up here."

"Looks like smoke over to the south."

"Sun blazing down clear and hot. Great."

When you've made the climb to the top of Lolo Peak, all of this seems interesting. Clouds and wind and sun are what matter. They're the things that capture your attention.

"What caught our interest," began Howard Toole, President of the Lolo Peak Economic Research Committee (LoloPERC), "was the mountain itself."² He explained that many of the unique features of the mountain, its vertical rise from the valley floor, its accessible north slopes, its proximity to an urban area, and its sheer physical beauty, combined to present a golden opportunity for the people of the region to explore the possibility of developing a major destination ski resort on its slopes. The presentation was before a lunchtime forum sponsored by a local downtown businesspersons organization -- one of a number of such forums, public meetings and debates at which the notion of developing a resort was explained, discussed, and argued. "The mountain itself" had aroused within a number of people an entrepreneurial spirit and had compelled them

to explore what was often labelled its "potential." Lolo Peak was, to Toole's economic research group, "a huge resource."³

In the mean time, this kind of discussion had been arousing another sort of spirit among residents of the area. Long-held, but seldom openly discussed, the feeling found perhaps its first expression in a newspaper column by Greg Tollefson published January 21, 1988 in the local newspaper the Missoulian. In it he wrote: "The feeling one gets from (hiking on Lolo Peak), sheer joy at being alive, the reassuring permanence of things like mountains, cannot be duplicated and cannot be bought. That would change, at least for me, if there was a ski run on the mountain." He went on to describe a "strange emptiness" at the realization that "places and things that one holds vaguely sacred are not viewed that way by everybody."⁴ This sentiment was shared by others who added to it their suspicions concerning the practical feasibility and appropriateness of such a proposal. Shortly after the beginning of the year the "Friends of Lolo Peak" were formed to give voice to these concerns.

Two groups staking out opposing territory on the same issue -- Missoula County Commissioner Ann Mary Dussault would later characterize the extreme proponents of those two views as "those who want to rape and scrape the mountain" and " those think that it's sacred and shouldn't be touched under any circumstances."⁵ Extreme or not, this easy characterization of complex positions took hold and would soon come to define the issue. LoloPERC and Howard Toole

were "for" a resort. The Friends of Lolo Peak were against it. To the detriment of the political life of the community a dismissal of the possibility of discussion would underlie the management of the issue. Rather than channel civic energy towards finding a mutual and public understanding -- the kind that might have been reflected by a less hesitant discussion among the hikers climbing the peak -- the community would seek to quickly decide the issue by a show of strength. Almost as soon as the issue was broached it was decided that it could be cleanly resolved by an election.

The modern participation of local citizens in the shaping of their community is often structured in this way. When issues are identified by their irreconcilable extremes, decision-making becomes a struggle of partisan adversaries for the right to dictate public policy. The inevitability of conflict and confrontation are perceived as foregone, and to enter into the political realm is to enter into the field of battle. The epitome of the publicly involved citizen becomes the "voter", and the objective of politics is no longer to serve as a forum from which a conversation might arise. Instead, politics becomes the arena in which the struggles that bring people into the public realm are fought. Officials, elected and bureaucratic, mediate the struggle, using the rules of civic and legal procedure to provide it with a manageable order, giving it the appearance of being civilized and the illusion of being desirable.

Yet much is sacrificed in this effort towards a sanitized public exchange. Much of the deeper context, which might have survived a conversation, is stripped away in an effort by interest

groups to translate their views into a majority percentage of the public vote. As shall be shown, when the first step in the politics of community decision-making is boiled down to an exercise in head-counting, the essence of the issue at hand is also boiled down. The issue of defining and maintaining the quality of Missoula's existing community -- arguably the issue at the heart of both groups' concerns -- becomes impoverished and translated into no more than an issue of economics or practicality.

The proponents of a ski resort, able to make broad claims about economic benefit and quick assurances of feasibility would be more convincing in this kind of shorthand-politics. Opponents, for reasons which will be seen later, would find it difficult to attain a similarly convincing representation of their concerns, many of which traveled afield of whether a resort would be economically or practically feasible. What a mountain might be "about", a concern brought up on top of Lolo Peak, is also a topic that modern political language often shows itself to be incapable of handling.

At this point a number of questions arise: What is it about the issue of developing Lolo Peak that makes it such a dramatic example of the shortcomings of conventional politics? How did these politics become conventional and why? What might be done to change things? Does modern political language indeed stifle the essence of an issue? What aspects of an issue might a liberated political discourse take up?

Answers to these questions do not come quickly or easily. They require that the issue be looked at in its full context. The natural, historic, and social stage needs to be set before a detailed account of the events which led to a county-wide referendum can be played out. Like hiking to the top of a mountain, the preliminary steps often seem winding and roundabout, requiring effort which threatens at times to obscure the object of the endeavor. However, once the work has been accomplished, the clarity of an answer shows itself more readily. The possibility of learning what a mountain might be about, or what a place might mean to the political life of a community, comes to light.

The Setting

The Bitterroot Mountains run in a generally north-south direction and lie along the central portion of the border between Idaho and Montana. The eastern peaks of the range are flanked by the populated bottomlands of the Bitterroot River Valley to the east and the largest complex of wilderness in the lower forty-eight United States on the west. The geologic history of the region is dominated by the story of the Idaho Batholith which, 75 million years ago, pushed itself into the existing precambrian belt rocks, thrusting them upward into what is now the eastern front of the Bitterroot Range.⁶ The resulting peaks are among the highest in Western Montana. The canyons which separate these peaks on the east are predominantly narrow and steep, washed by clear, swift-moving streams which come crashing out of the mountains to join the comparatively placid Bitterroot River. The effect is one of a great jagged and impenetrable wall, historically preventing easy access into the range by roads.

One marked exception is at the central region of the range, about eleven miles southeast of the city of Missoula, where a fault helps to breach the Bitterroots and to broaden the Lolo Creek drainage, offering a relatively wide and gradual path through to the mountains and to the prairies in the west. Jutting up to the southeast of where Lolo Creek joins the Bitterroot River is Lolo Peak. With its bare rocky peak reaching an elevation of 9075 feet, it lends dramatic relief to the surrounding valley floors over 4800 feet below. Product of the same forces which thrust the range skyward,

it is also a testimony to the downward pull of the forces of weathering by ice, wind and water, as its jagged and rugged upper slopes give way to rolling timbered ridges and foothills which gently meet the surrounding river floodplain.

On the floor of the Lolo Creek valley, where it meets with the foothills of Lolo Peak are the remnants of the prehistoric Lolo Trail, which climbed up and over the Bitterroot divide into the home of the Nez Perce people. Climbing up that trail the traveller experiences many of the same ecological transitions that mark a climb up Lolo Peak. From lower elevation communities dominated by lodgepole pine and subalpine fir, to communities of western larch, and upward into stands of whitebark pine and subalpine larch. The upper slopes of Carleton Ridge are marked by a rare hybrid of western subalpine larch, lending to them a "considerable scientific interest"⁷ which has prompted their preservation as a Forest Service Research Natural Area (RNA). Ranging through each of these systems are elk, deer, mountain lion, and black bear. Some say that grizzly bear occasionally still rumble across the slopes of the peak and its surroundings. However, the U.S. Forest Service acknowledges no recent sightings as verified. In the spirit of conquest that often marked the white settlement of the area, predators like the grizzly were deemed harmful and hunted out of the region.

Many of the old pictorial histories of the region depict the proud hunters of these extirpated predators. People with names like Frank Williams and Bart Wendover, or state hunter Ben Vogeler, who earned "an enviable reputation for such feats as treeing and killing

six lions in one day with the aid of one hound."⁸ They and their dogs are shown in pictures with the skins earned on their hunt stretched out to cure in the background. Often the skins were mountain lion, coyote, wolf or bear. Unlike the natural communities of the region, which counted on these predators to play their role in the cooperative perpetuation of an ancient balance, the newly arrived human communities perceived them chiefly as a threat to life and property.

This perception contrasts with the one held by the earlier humans who knew the area, the last of whose original settlements in the region are also shown in the previously mentioned pictorial histories. Teepees around a central area whose trodden grasses and fire rings mark a place of encampment. The Nez Perce and the Salish people are often credited with a lineage dating back to the earliest human inhabitants of the region. The hunting interests of the Nez Perce were directed at the buffalo of the plains east of the continental divide. Twice each year from their homes in the prairies of what is now central Idaho they would send large hunting parties down the trail through the Lolo Creek Valley. When they reached the Bitterroot River, at the foot of Lolo Peak, they would confer with the the Salish people, who would tell them if the Blackfoot waited in ambush on the route eastward through Hellgate Canyon. Once east they would hunt buffalo until they had sufficient hides and meat, then, horses laden, they would head west, doubly on the lookout for ambush. Reaching the Missoula Valley, they would fix on Lolo Peak and the valley which would lead them home.

The Nez Perce, the Salish, and the Blackfoot -- the stories of the first people in the region are remarkable for the plurality of their human subjects. Rarely does one hear of a stand-out or a leader who made a name and a story for himself. The stories are of a community of people, interacting with other communities as again and again they enacted the tales which serve as their history. To a large extent this anonymity is due to the fact that the Native American's history is told most often by white people. It's hard for even the most sensitive white settler or historian to pick up the nuances and distinctions which might give rise to prominent individuals within these stories. What arises instead is a generalized account of a community of people, a community whose outward characteristics would lead an observer to notice its collective traits prior to the traits of the individuals who made it up. Father DeSmet, an early Christian missionary, was one of the first whites to observe these people closely. He provides the following description: "Slander is unknown...Lying is hateful to them...No one suffers without his brothers interesting themselves in his troubles and coming to his succor."⁹ This is a description of traits belonging to a people who value their interconnectedness. Honesty (the absence of lying or slander), good will (a mutual and concerned interest), and care depend upon solidarity. Each trait shows the importance, to these people, of the health of the community. It is telling and significant that the history of white settlement in the region is almost exclusively told as a story of

individual people for whom community identity serves mainly as a backdrop.

The first whites to move to the area were prospectors and hunters. Up Lolo Creek and down the Bitterroot Valley they lived a life that marks the contrast of the earlier human inhabitants perhaps most strikingly. They regarded others as acquaintances, but also as competitors for the resources of the land. Replacing the virtues of goodwill, honesty, and care for those in need were traits that reflected a neglect of the health of the community and a new emphasis upon the rights of the individual. Ollie Hamilton, herself a Lolo Creek trapper, captures the unwritten code of these early inhabitants in her recollection of people like Williams, Wendover, and Vogeler: "The outfitters, packers, guides and hunters never got in each other's way. There was always room for everyone."¹⁰ This noninterference -- not getting "in each others way" -- is a virtue so familiar to most Americans, especially western Americans, that it may not seem worthy of notice. However it is a key to a penetrating understanding of the events that would unfold many years later, as the community which descended from these early inhabitants would try to decide whether to consider building a ski resort upon the slopes of the mountain named for an area which had once provided such an abundance of game.

Virtues earn their importance within a social context. Noninterference, as a virtue, gains its significance within an individualistic society. It manifests itself in the familiar idea that

a person may do as they please, as long as it doesn't infringe upon the rights of somebody else. The individual is to be granted the utmost practical freedom to live their life as they see fit. It is not a new idea. The nineteenth century French social philosopher Alexis De Toqueville was perhaps the first to affix the label "individualism" to what was by then a fairly entrenched cultural characteristic. Toqueville describes an American tendency to construct institutions which promote this individual freedom (which I will discuss later) and for individualists to seek a separation or isolation from the rest of society. This tendency, he warned, has the potential to "undermine the conditions of freedom" by eroding "family life, ... religious traditions, and participation in local community politics"¹¹ which serve as the social foundation for this individual freedom.

Robert N. Bellah, in Habits of the Heart, expands upon Toqueville's concept of individualism. He defines two leading senses of the word:

- (1) A belief in the inherent dignity and, indeed, sacredness of the human person...
- (2) A belief that the individual has a primary reality where as society is a second-order, derived or artificial construct.¹²

Individualism, it should be stressed, is not synonymous with selfishness. It endows all individuals with this same inherent right to respect. It is generous, in fact, in its reverence for all individuals. Society, to individualists, exists to uphold the rights of individuals -- to prevent unwarranted "interference" in their lives by others. When it ceases to do so it violates its basic function.

Within individualism, society and social relations are thus viewed instrumentally, constructed to maintain the personal freedom which becomes so highly valued. Individualism has filled the sailing ships which carried immigrants to America and the promise of freedom. It also has fueled what Toqueville noticed was a "restless quest for material betterment" which drove the "geographical and economic expansion of the new nation."¹³ Evidence of this lies in the records of those who settled in the valleys around Lolo Peak.

The book Lolo Creek Reflections, in addition to containing a general account of the history of the people who settled near the base of Lolo Peak, contains a fascinating and revealing collection of essays written by the family members of these original settlers. Sometimes written first hand, sometimes recollections of stories told by grandparents and great-grandparents, the essays are almost always informed by a remarkable fondness for the character of the protagonist and by a pride in their achievements. They are the stories of rugged individuals who escaped the imprisonment of unfavorable economic or social conditions in Wisconsin, Indiana, Iowa, or Vermont. They fought weather, sickness, wild animals and Indians to establish new homes in the Lolo and Bitterroot Valleys. From these new homes they looked to raise their families and to build a fortune. Of the community that developed around these settlers, however, there is little information which is not incidental. The story of the society of these pioneers was derived from its individuals. One story, told by Joan Wheeler Lang, about the

Van Ettan family is especially noteworthy for its detail and its contemplative tone:

Whole neighborhoods pulled up stakes and moved (westward), and when they arrived... the locals probably grumbled about the stress on the neighborhood, even if the neighborhood was measured in thousands of acres...

Many of us have great cause to regret the itchy feet of a great grandparent, particularly when he moved out in search of greener pastures, leaving an original homesite to become the basis of a sprawling industrial giant...

It is an interesting commentary that after all the miles that these families covered to arrive in the west, keeping close and working for the survival of all, once they dispersed into large areas of the western states, distances once again became barriers.¹⁴

Settlers, by this and other accounts were hardy -- undeterred by adversity in their search for a better living situation than their old place had provided. Clearly some attachment is felt by these settlers for the communities they left behind and for the temporary communities formed during the struggle to move westward. But these attachments remain, ultimately and regrettably, secondary to the necessity of individual success.

Meanwhile, a few miles to the north and east, a town had been established and was rapidly expanding. The records of the early inhabitants of Missoula, however, bear a common theme with the stories of the settlers of the Lolo and Bitterroot Valley. They are dominated by the often-repeated names of prominent individuals: pioneers like Major John Owen, and Father DeSmet; town fathers like Frank H. Woody, Henry Brooks, Captain C.P. Higgins, and Frank L.

Worden. The history of Missoula is told as the history of what these men, and a few others like them, did. They become, in the telling of the history of the region, bigger than life; bigger, through their myths, than the society of individuals around them who also worked to establish the town of Missoula. An 1893 local history portrays an inspiring and enigmatic C.P. Higgins, who:

...infused the new settlers with some of the spirit of progress that had always animated him, and the fame of the Bitterroot, Frenchtown, and Missoula Valleys spread over the country. Many young men of worth and intelligence were attracted to this section (of the country) and wealth seldom failed to reward the industrious. Missoula continued to grow and prosper.¹⁵

Another early historian puts it more forcefully:

To speak of Missoula, its commercial or material advantage without mention being made of (C.P.Higgins) would show the ignorance and unfamiliarity of the speaker with his subject.¹⁶

The relevant actors here are great men who, by their example brought others to the region. These others, though not destined for the same fame or notoriety, were nonetheless endowed with an admirable diligence and savvy. Still another large portion of the newly arrived were those who fled the torment of civil war-torn Missouri:

...mainly in order to escape the persecutions to which they were subject by active participants from either side. They did not wish to take part in the rebellion, and so became the prey of both sides.¹⁷

Sometimes great circumstances can do the work of great men. Independence of thought, and the willingness to undergo great hardship to maintain that independence marked these settlers. The greater society around them had begun to prey upon their independence, violating their rights as individuals, and sending them in search of relief. What they found met with their satisfaction.

There was no boom, but a continuing, steady growth that made all feel that a golden era had dawned, and that they were on the road to fair competence, if not wealth.¹⁸

So the picture begins to emerge of a region seeing an influx of settlers, most of whom were motivated to move by a desire for prosperity, a desire to escape the oppression of an old place, or a desire to remain uninvolved with its social conflicts. This emphasis on material wealth and independent thought reflects a tendency to place private interests before those of the greater society, implying a belief in the primacy of the individual. But why all of this talk of "wealth" and "reward" and "prosperity"? And what does this reveal about the way the emerging community is to develop?

The first question is answered quickly. American individualism, as Toqueville noted, requires at least a perceived independence from surrounding society. One needs to be able to "pull up stakes" and leave if persecution or poverty become unbearable. It is, as the British political theorist David J. Manning writes, "security from interference which makes a man free. It is for this reason that freedom is closely related to private property in liberal (individualistic) thinking."¹⁹ The frontier, with its open spaces and

abundant wealth, becomes a great safety outlet. Rather than turning back upon an untenable situation and striving to correct it, these people can choose to leave. America, the "new world", was an outlet for the burgeoning number of individualists in post-feudal Europe during the 18th century. The western United States, with its promise of riches and open spaces was likewise a great ace-in-the-hole.

But what is to be gained by playing that ace? Remember that a great many of the people who came to the west were fleeing an economic or social situation which they found unendurable. In cutting themselves free from their old situation, they were often incidentally severing many of their ties to its culture and tradition. With them they brought their needs and desires, and the bits and pieces of the tradition of their former place that they chose to pack along. Many times these splintered traditions did little to temper individualistic and acquisitive materialism. Western lore is full of tales of those who struck it rich and squandered their wealth on consumption and excess. Their isolation and detachment left them little else to turn to with their fortune. They lacked, in the words of William M. Sullivan "a viable tradition or ideology to mobilize public commitment and support for goals other than private acquisition."²⁰ Indeed, often there was no "public" present upon which to focus a commitment, and the community of nature which surrounded them -- a community with which many were totally unfamiliar -- was often perceived only as an adversary or a threat.

Eventually, however, the west began to fill up. As the great spaces of the mountains and valleys of western Montana began to reach their limit for self-reliant individuals a new escape was needed. It was found in the often mentioned economic growth. As long as growth could be maintained, the region could still provide for an increase in wealth to its inhabitants, thereby eliminating many of the economic (and some of the social) reasons for discontent with surrounding society. Growth in individual prosperity makes tolerance towards one's neighbors easy, while it eliminates much of the need for it. This idea had taken hold in much of America, where the geographic frontiers had long since closed. As long as it was a recipe for success it continued to gain prominence as time passed. Of post World War II American society, Sullivan writes:

The superiority of the "American way of life" was alleged to lie in an unrivalled capacity to arouse and then organize the energies of individuals, energies aroused in the hopes of fulfilling individual's material needs. The result of liberated energies, harnessed through work and commerce, was abundance, and this the proponents of liberalism declared to be the true goal of civilization and the definer of progress. So the history of the liberal tradition in America became identical with national success defined as economic growth, and the venerable liberal ideal of personal freedom, in the sense of security of person...became identified with successful expansion of the American economy.²¹

Writing almost a half a century after the beginning of post war America, Sullivan aptly captures the spirit of the culture of a region of western Montana of almost 100 years ago. Insert "the Missoula

Valley" where Sullivan has written "America" and out comes commentary upon the outlook of the white settlers of the region.

The second question, inquiring into the clues that the history of the settlement of the region gives to an analysis of the subsequent development, is more difficult to answer. Part of the answer is foreshadowed by Sullivan and Manning's use of the terms "liberal" and "liberalism". What these writers mean by these terms is not their popularly accepted notion as opposites to conservative and conservatism. Rather, liberalism, loosely defined, is the political philosophy of a society built on individualism. Its operating principle is the individualist's credo that people should be allowed to do as they see fit. The only limiting factor is the degree to which that behavior interferes with the rights of others. Government performs its most obvious and important function when it acts as an arbitrator between the conflicting desires of individuals. More than anything else government is a necessary evil which keeps society operating smoothly. Thus, to liberal thinking, government is not necessarily the voice of authority. Presidents are not kings. Mayors are not barons. Officials are elected to represent the people, within whom rests rightful authority.

Government is something whose absence is marked by the mayhem of a disorderly society. Things work less efficiently when an effective and properly-sized government is not in place. Government and society are thus viewed by the liberal in a utilitarian manner. As Manning points out:

Social and political relationships for the

liberal are artificial. They are rational constructs designed to counter such imperfection otherwise inevitably experienced by men competing for wealth and position whilst valuing privacy and leisure. ²²

The "artificiality" of social and political relationships, to the liberal, is a beneficial condition. No longer looked upon as something which might evolve naturally or objectively, they command no responsibilities from the individual. People enter into government not from a sense of social obligation, but as a career, or when they are involved in a dispute which needs resolution.

The first task in a liberal government is the protection of life and property of its constituent individuals. Jailhouses are built and sheriffs are appointed before courthouses are constructed and mayors elected. In the early histories of the Missoula and Lolo Creek valleys there are separate tales of vigilante justice being carried out by groups of local citizens. In one extreme instance a citizens group decided to forego the delay of waiting for an out-of-town justice and military unit to arrive and hear the case of an unsavory "road agent." Taking matters into their own hands they hung the suspect themselves. Said a witness: "That was the kind of peace policy believed in by our early settlers."²³ But that kind of policy was uncivilized, barbaric and messy. It was subject to errors and it made for a society which was, to say the least, disquieting to live in. It lasted only as long as there was some question over the the execution of rightful authority in these matters and it ended with the appointment of professional lawkeepers. The sheriff, as such, is a kind of specialist, appointed to keep the peace. He or she is

assigned the task of enforcing laws and ensuring that order is maintained in a community. Again, the idea that a sheriff is an authority is easily understood, but inaccurate. He or she is an expert at the enforcement of laws. These laws, however, come collectively from the individual people of the community. It is they who maintain rightful authority in liberal society.

Other kinds of specialists are soon necessary in a growing community. The need for local and regional levels of government, for example, are implied by the previous comments on authority. How else to determine the collective will of a community's individuals and translate it into law? City and County representatives are elected to enact this "collective will" and to see that proper procedure is followed. This responsibility for decision-making procedure is important, since it determines the way in which social questions will be handled. Procedure gives people rules for plugging into the process. (Are hearings to be held? When? Who may speak?) It also provides for a methodology for final decisions. (Will there be an election, or will officials deliberate and decide?) Like sheriffs, who, armed with their pistol and a generally accepted public respect for their expertise prevent the social mayhem of vigilante justice, the officials of regional government prevent the mayhem of disorderly decision-making. Armed with the power to make many decisions for their constituency, and entrusted with the responsibility for seeing that any remaining public decisions proceed in some orderly fashion, they keep individuals in a liberal

society from bonking into each other as they strive to work out the problems which inevitably arise.

In this way the sheriff and elected officials often function as a scale model of a larger, often maligned yet hallowed institution of liberalism: the bureaucracy. Noted by Toqueville for their institutionalized ability to expand the freedom of a liberal society's individuals, bureaucracies become increasingly necessary as society grows larger and larger and the space between these individuals becomes smaller and smaller. To smooth things out, a bureaucratic layer of specialists is constructed whose task is to protect the individuals by minimizing the disorder in the general society. The sheriff minimizes the threat of lawbreaking. The municipal zoning office minimizes the threat of unregulated land use. The surveyor minimizes the threat of a neighbor's encroachment. Trained (respectively) in law, planning, and property identification, these specialists keep people from hurting each other, building feed lots in each other's neighborhoods, and constructing fences on each other's land.

The situations typically addressed by a bureaucracy are often the kind which yield to easy answers from trained specialists. The training received by specialists allows them to evaluate the conditions of a situation, and based upon a set of rules or past experience, decide upon a course of action. The benefits to a liberal society are enormous. No longer are individuals the slaves to the messy decisions which the increasing interactions of a growing society compel them to make. Just plug the potential conflict

situation into its proper bureaucracy, let the specialists do their work, and out comes a resolution. Bureaucracies also construct procedures to facilitate the often repeated decisions which fall within their area of responsibility. Zoning permitting procedure, applications for licences, and other such procedures are often so effective at maintaining the smooth operation of society that it is easily forgotten that they are merely the machinery of the implementation of the law, not the law itself.

Of all the bureaucracies to become instituted in the Missoula region, none is more prominent than a national one: the United States Forest Service. The situations of conflict which would lead to its need on the local level were familiar to the inhabitants of the region by the turn of the century. More people were placing a greater demand upon the timber and minerals held within the mountains surrounding the populated valleys. A local citizen describes this and conveys an impression of relief at the arrival of the U.S. Forest Service:

During 1899 and 1900 the Federal Government conducted their geodetic survey of the Lolo Area. Homesteaders previously filed gave very cursory descriptions of their locations. The survey made positive identification of a settlers holdings possible... It was not many years before the Forest Service recognized the need for more stringent control of forested areas, and in 1906 the service controlled enforcement of timber management and grazing on public lands.²⁴

Literally all around the people of the region a new level of government control was being installed. Their acceptance of this new level of control reflected both their lack of choice in the matter (the federal government, after all, did own the land), and their perception that some form of orderly regulation would soon be necessary. The days when all controls were openly resented were also long past (as Ollie Hamilton would note),²⁵ a memory of the days when there were fewer people in the region. The timing of the arrival of the Forest Service in Missoula coincided with the general realization that geographic frontiers had closed. People turned to the new frontier of economic growth to provide them, and all newcomers to the region, with the opportunity and prosperity that would satiate their individual needs and desires.

The Forest Service, despite its national basis of jurisdiction, was uniquely sensitive to this kind of local reliance upon expansion. Started in 1905 through the reorganization of the Bureau of Forestry, the young agency quickly established itself under the direction of its founder, Gifford Pinchot. A man described as "more at home on the political field than in the woods",²⁶ Pinchot was nonetheless an energetic and determined chief executive. To Pinchot, the Forest Service was charged with the task of ensuring the "wise use" of its public lands. His credo was that this use of Forest Service land should result in the "greatest good for the greatest number of people."²⁷ The purpose of resource conservation was to ensure that this greatest good, seen as maximum utility, might be attained. This meant the prevention of short-sighted timber and

mineral extraction practices often allowed by owners of private land.

At the same time another mission was initiated, one that would temper the possible local economic effects of the national concern for providing the greatest good. Former agency historian David Clary says: "The Service also sought to protect communities that would become increasingly dependent upon these forests."²⁸ Believing that a controlled timber harvest of sustained yield would be most beneficial to the country, the "highly materialistic"²⁹ Pinchot set out to convince local communities that Forest Service supervision of National Forest land also ensured the conservation of a "valuable asset" and was not "an eastern-bred restriction on their growth."³⁰ Seeing things this way in Missoula was made even easier when Pinchot chose the city as the location of the Service's District I office, simultaneously creating jobs and increasing the influence of the people of the Missoula region on national forest policies.

As a bureaucracy, the Forest Service was populated by specialists. It was an agency designed to figure the best policies for resource management from both the limited local perspective of the timber community and the larger national perspective of a society dependent upon reliable supplies of wood products and minerals. Working out the balance between these two perspectives prior to the Forest Service had often resulted in unsafe and unsound extraction practices at the local level. Clear cuts scarred local hillsides and eroded soils choked local streams. Meanwhile, the unregulated harvest of timber pointed to a future national crisis of consumption

or "timber famine" if "strict technical and political principles" were not enforced.³¹ The Forest Service's mission was to maximize the utility of public lands for the people they served. Success was thought to be a situation in which the quantitative benefits (usually captured by the term "value": dollar value, recreational value, etc.) were obtained for the greatest number of people. Qualitative measurements, such as any spiritual benefits or a sense of attachment to a surrounding place, were too ephemeral for this kind of analysis. Value thus became synonymous with usefulness. The relationship of the individual to the land, mediated by the Forest Service, was strictly utilitarian.

So the Forest Service became a part of an expanding and maturing Missoula. When the headquarters for the surrounding Lolo National Forest were located in the city it was just another step on the long, already well travelled road linking the economy of the region with the industries of extracting minerals and timber from the surrounding countryside. Missoula was home to the companies that bid for the timber on National Forest Lands, and it was home to the agencies which oversaw those lands. As long as the timber held out there was no way that the city could lose. A symbiotic relationship had been established which would last until the period in which the story of a Lolo Peak ski area proposal begins.

A strong current of individualism is thus evident in much of the early history of the Missoula region. It shows itself in the motives of the original settlers and it shows itself in the attitudes

expressed by the early inhabitants of the area. Social impropriety meant "getting in somebody's way" as he or she industriously strove to attain wealth. The dominant political philosophy of these people, liberalism, allowed this individualism to flourish. Government and social organization would ensure that private enterprise would never be unduly repressed. Fueling the settlement, guiding the original organization, and expressing much of the relation of the people to the society around them, the influence of the liberal tradition cannot be denied. At the same time there is another tradition which has also been quietly working its way through the history of the region. Like liberalism, which has its local beginnings in the traits which can be seen in the earliest white settlers, this other tradition too has been present in the region since the beginning.

This tradition shows itself when members of a community enact the things which they have in common. It comes alive in actions which reflect a commitment within individuals for something outside themselves. The manifestations of this tradition in a community can be seen in the histories of the area's schools and churches. These institutions, Alexis De Toqueville noted, were often the first to be established in a pioneer community. Their establishment and support tend to contradict a simplistic characterization of a community as liberal or individualistic. Construction of a school implies a belief in the common welfare of a community, as represented by a commitment to its heritage or its children. Construction of a church implies an affirmation that there

is great value in the practice of a tradition of belief and reverence, and furthermore, that the tradition is enhanced when practiced among one's neighbors. Nowhere in these two endeavors is there a sense of the individualist's "let's not get in each other's way." The presence of others is essential to both because they celebrate what people have in common, a concern for their children, and their faith.

Yet, it is ironic that the establishment of both the church and the school, as recounted in the history of the region, were nonetheless heavily influenced by the sometimes unsettling pull of individualism. The original Lolo Valley school, a log building of one room, was built on land belonging to Fred Gilbert, a local merchant. Gilbert had become embroiled in a dispute with the school trustees and chose to lock the gates to the grounds. The dispute, however, was seen as insufficient reason to deny the children an education, and before long "incensed residents moved the log house north onto property belonging to James Mills" (who then deeded the land to the school district).³² Similar frictions vexed the establishment of a local church, and it saw a three year period in which disagreements forced it to close. Yet it was reopened, and with time the church "became known as the community church, since persons with so many former church affiliations became members."³³ People had overcome the separations of denomination in order to come together to celebrate the common aspects of their faith. In a similar way they overcame the squabbles of individuals to see that the common good of their children's education was not threatened. At times these commonly held values lead to a collective decisiveness in

action which simply overwhelms the individualistic obstacles which threaten them. An inter-trustee tiff over school property rights was bowled over by an incensed public who quickly and effectively resolved it by rendering it moot. A sticky question of denominational preference was dealt with through a recognition of the importance of making the celebration of faith also a gathering of neighbors. None of the bad taste of vigilante decision making was left behind after these actions. Neither was an impartial agency of experts or specialists needed to arrive at these resolutions. These actions reflect a community that knows what binds it together.

These two examples show an awakening civic spirit among the people of the region, a realization that they do indeed possess something in common, and that the sharing and nurturing of that something is important to the lives of individuals. They express, as William Sullivan writes, "the realization that the personal quest for a worthwhile life is bound up with the reality of interdependency."³⁴ It is this interdependency which individualism often seeks to deny, and which liberalism often seeks to constrain within the mechanical devices of bureaucracy or procedure. It is at the heart of what Sullivan calls the tradition of civic republicanism. It is driven not by the notion of individual success, but by the notion that "what makes life worth living is not simple pleasure, but the peculiarly human satisfaction of feeling one's self to be a significant member of an ongoing way of life that appeals because of its deep resonances of beauty and meaning."³⁵ Sullivan is pointing, in other words, to a public tradition that runs historically parallel to the

tradition of liberal individualism, occasionally crashing into it, often sustaining it despite itself. It is important to note here that there is a narrowness in Sullivan's use of the term interdependency, and a regrettable tendency to suggest the feeling of "membership in an ongoing way of life" is merely a "particularly human satisfaction." Before explaining this, however, I need to explain a bit about the methodology of searching for traces of a civic tradition.

The problem with searching for traces of this tradition is its inherent subtlety. It doesn't often present itself with the same distinctness as individualism. In a search for traces of a civic tradition one must often go back to look at the things that were commonly held and which fostered its growth. The common concern for the heritage of a local community gives a clue to the possibility of seeing this tradition in the establishment of public schools. Likewise, a common sense of value in a shared faith gives clues that the establishment of a church might be an example of a community's civic tradition. There are others but perhaps none resonate more clearly and distinctly in a place like western Montana than an appreciation for the place itself. In every historic account of the region there is a pride of place that overwhelms most every other theme. This is a place that does that to people, and rarely do they tire of discussing it among themselves or of telling it to others.

An 1897 account of the history of the then-still-young city ends with a rather embarrassingly excessive flourish:

Missoula sits peerless in her mountain home. She speaks to the blizzard and it disappears; to the torrid breath of summer and it is unknown. She salutes

with a smile the stranger who, entering Hell Gate Canyon for the first time beholds her beauty and grandeur. She extends the hand of welcome to the weary traveller from the east or west.

Then, in the next two lines, the passage delineates the contrast between the sense of place characteristic of a civic understanding, and the sense of materialism characteristic of individualism:

...she is ready to share her wealth and prosperity with the newcomer. She invites inspection of her wonderful resources and defies comparison.³⁶

Clearly the author is reflecting a sincere sense of the uniqueness of the place about which he writes. Also clear is an apparent confusion over whether the value of place lies only in its utility to the people who live there. Is Missoula a good place to be because of its pleasant weather and accessible and plentiful resources, or does it go deeper than that? Is there something here that feeds the spirit as well as the body? The first part of the passage seems to indicate that the answer is yes. The second part indicates an inability to discuss the nature of that "something". It is an inability exemplified by the group of day hikers as they roamed the summit of Lolo Peak, which would also be echoed years later in the debate over building a ski resort on Lolo Peak.

Wendell Berry, on the first few pages of his book The Unsettling of America, discusses a split tendency in the westward spread of white people in America. On one side he outlines the dominant themes of "conquest and displace(ment) of ourselves" -- a dispersal of people resembling the spread of "refugees from a broken anthill."³⁷ Subsequently, however, another tendency arose: "The

tendency to stay put, to say, 'No farther. This is the place.'"³⁸ The first, obviously, is the energetic spread of pioneers working in a tradition of liberal individualism. The second is a testimony to a commitment to a place and the beginnings of a tradition of civic spirit. What's noteworthy is the fact that it involves a subtle switch in the way that a person looks at their place. No longer is it a place. A relationship has developed; it is the place. Clearly the authors of the passage from the local histories cited earlier have made that subtle yet crucial transition. Missoula "sits peerless", is welcoming and protective. The sense a reader gets from their writing is that no other place will do -- that this place has no equal. They have established a relationship to their home which helps to center their lives. A more contemporary author brings this out clearly:

Accept Missoula for what it is, not as Detroit, or New Orleans, or New York, or San Francisco. Accept Missoula and you'll find your values changing. Important things become unimportant. You can live frantically, but you aren't likely to. You'll find yourself living quietly here.³⁹

Common place, like the common heritage of a community in its children and like a commonly held sense of value in a practiced faith, serves as a focus for the workings of a civic tradition. When people acknowledge their relationship to future generations through the establishment of schools, they are demonstrating a moral obligation to these generations to come. When they acknowledge a relationship to their neighbors by gathering together to celebrate the commonly held aspects of their faith, they demonstrate a moral obligation of mutual respect. What motivates this moral behavior is

the relationship between generations and neighbors. When the people of a region begin to celebrate and pronounce the uniqueness of that region -- when it becomes the place instead of a place -- there is an acknowledgement of a relationship between the people and that place. Elements of a moral obligation begin to creep into what might have previously been seen as a purely utilitarian relationship. No longer is it acceptable to think only of what a place can do for you. The confusion of the final passage of the historian's account of the city of Missoula comes more clearly into relief. At the beginning of the passage he extolls the virtues of Missoula, embodying the region and giving it traits which are both gentle and generous. Missoula smiles, beckons the weary, and is pleasant to behold. To the author it is clearly a place like no other. So why is there a need for all this talk of material wealth and resources? It sounds slightly incongruous, disrespectful of the sentiment expressed in the first part.

The question brings to mind the previously noted points about William Sullivan's ideas on understanding a civic tradition. One of the key features of that understanding, to Sullivan, is an acknowledgement of interdependency. In his writings this interdependency is seen to refer to the human community; to neighbors, to generations past or yet to come. Yet to a people who have come to see their relation to a place it is apparent that a tradition of interdependency is also intricately tied to their surroundings. Furthermore, to imply that human status is required for an appreciation of a membership in an ongoing way of life

renders the personified depiction of Missoula not just gushing, but inappropriate.

The people who populated the region before the coming of the white settlers understood this. Their traditional ways of life were constructed to allow them to live in the place they cherished, taking only what they needed from their sources of livelihood such as the buffalo of the eastern prairies. The natural community around them was not a source of threats to be eradicated, but a part of the rich and complex system of which they too were a part. Likewise, an awareness of their interdependence with the natural community was reflected in their awareness of the interdependence of individuals within the human community. This understanding gave rise to social virtues and a deep environmental ethic, lending their culture a steadiness or centeredness which contrasts with the frenetic scattering expansion and dependence upon growth which often marked the later white communities.

We arrive finally at a picture which allows insight into many of the conflicts which would take place as the history of the region unfolded. It's a picture of what at times seems a schizophrenic community, torn on the one hand by a tradition of liberal individualism which founded it and gave it a model of economic vitality by which to grow. Once established it was forced to reconcile a civic tradition of responsibility to others and to its place that often ran contrary to the first.

The story of the attempt to implement a system of planning in Missoula County is an ongoing drama, one in which the tradition of liberalism, which insists that landowners be given the full right to use their land as they see fit clashes with the civic tradition of a commitment (even legally imposed) to sustaining the integrity of the region's social environment. From the early 1960's to the mid 1980's Missoula has seen a debate on this issue which pits the perils of insufficient planning (haphazard growth, inefficient transportation, and environmental degradation) against the pitfalls of eroded personal liberties (often labelled "creeping communism", or "environmental zealotry").

Other more recent issues reveal the same pattern. In 1987 voters in Missoula were given the responsibility of deciding whether South Higgins Avenue was a place to profitably locate a convenience store or the place to start enforcing a zoning restriction that would reflect a commitment to the character of the nearby neighborhood. A similar debate was recently settled over the possibility of deriving economic benefit from a complex of stores in the Rattlesnake Valley. Even the question of whether to allow jet skis to be used on the Clark Fork River can be seen as a contest between the liberal tradition of liberty and the civic tradition of commitment to the wildness and integrity of the river.

In 1988 a Missoulian columnist, Dick Manning, wrote of a run that he took through the city which finished on a bridge over the Clark Fork River in the middle of town. He wrote of the realization that an important part of his life derived from a relationship with

the place in which he lived. Appreciating this relationship between a place and its inhabitants often runs smack into the desire of others within a community to use it, whether to jet ski upon its waters or to convert its mountains to reap financial gain.

The Events

A promotional pamphlet designed to highlight Missoula's promising future begins: "The prophetic eyes of local and state capitalists saw Missoula's immeasurable material resources..."⁴⁰ This passage, written almost 100 years ago by a local historian named H.H. Hook, is clearly dated. Few in the past 20 years would look to the material resources of any region and label them immeasurable. Yet it reads like many other such texts put out by the Chamber of Commerce, historical societies, and local booster clubs. A surprising number of them also use the metaphor of vision. Some people, it seems, are simply endowed with a different capacity to see. Often these people go to great efforts to explain their vision to myopic others. These others see "things": trees, hills, and mountains. "Capitalists", as Mr Hook fondly and rather old-fashionedly labels them, see beyond these "things" and envision a "resource": timber, mined ore, ski resorts. Today we are likely to call these people experts of one kind or another. If they've got money to invest they become developers or entrepreneurs. By their vision they have performed a bit of metamorphosis. What was formerly an "end" has become a "means", to be disposed of once value has been extracted from it. But when does this change take place? When does something turn from a "thing" into a "resource"? Is this change significant, and how does it fit into the emerging pattern of liberalism and civic commitment, or of contrast between a place and the place?

Martin Heidegger, in "The Question Concerning Technology", addresses this distinction between resources and things. "The

essence of a thing", he writes, "is considered to be what the thing is."⁴¹ To perceive a thing essentially, one must be receptive to it, to allow it to impress itself as itself upon one's self. To see things as resources implies that the viewer "challenges" the things around him or her.

Everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately at hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call... (and) whatever stands by, in the sense of a (resource) no longer stands over against us as object.⁴²

Call a tree a quantity of timber, and it becomes that timber, waiting for the moment when it fulfills its function and is cut. No longer is the tree able to impress itself as itself. In looking out over a stand of trees and seeing only board feet one is "challenging" that stand of trees, turning off the receptiveness which would allow what Heidegger would call the "essence" of the trees to come forth. Also making use of the metaphor of vision, Heidegger labels this challenging a kind of "revealing" of what was "concealed".

Revealing through challenging is the talent of the previously mentioned "capitalist." The capitalist places things within a pattern or "framework" which shows them most directly for their usefulness. Utility, or instrumentalism is also one of the hallmarks of the tradition of liberal individualism. As D.J. Manning pointed out, liberal individualism emphasizes, even cultivates the instrumental aspects of social interaction. Government, community, and place must first stand this test of usefulness. The liberal tradition, in other words, often promotes an outlook which places things into the

category of resources, allowing them to be conveniently fit into Heidegger's framework of instrumentality.

The danger of the dominance of this "framework" as a way of looking at things lies in yet another distinction made by Heidegger. To view things within the framework of instrumentality is to see them only as pertinent to something else. Trees, for example, become pertinent only to the need for wood products. As Heidegger points out,

The correct only fixes upon something pertinent in whatever is under consideration. However, in order to be correct, this fixing by no means needs to uncover the thing in its essence. Only at the point where such an uncovering happens does the true come to pass. For that reason, the merely correct is no longer the true.⁴³

"Correctness" is easily obtained through a list of traits and characteristics. The longer the list, the greater the degree of correctness. Truth, on the other hand, is something which one only has a chance of attaining. It comes from the experience of the thing in itself, through a relationship to it. The best description one can give of truth is merely a gesture towards it. By concentrating on utility, we block the potential for this essential truth to come forth. We trade a chance at seeing "truth" for the security of "correctness". The same trade is made when modern politics bypasses conversation in exchange for sanitized procedure.

An example of the potential loss comes from looking at the life of a professional athlete: a basketball player. Perhaps the first moment in his professional life is the one in which an expert, the

scout, witnesses his talents. Word then spreads of his "free throw percentage" or his "vertical leap". More and more he is seen as the embodiment of a disjoint array of traits: speed, agility, and aggressiveness -- all of which pertain to basketball. He is "revealed" to people from within the framework of what is useful. It is unlikely that other aspects of his life will become as widely known and appreciated, making the final realization of what is being overlooked more striking and dramatic. A few years ago an insurance company took advantage of this by running a commercial in which a fictional retiring sports hero was being honored at a banquet. "How would you like to be remembered?" a sportswriter asked from the back of the hall. Pausing for a moment, he surprised the audience with an answer that had little to do with his athletic talents, "As a good husband, a proud father, and a hardworking member of a fine team."

The strength of the advertisement lies in its power to remind the viewer of the full truth of that player's life. Prior to that moment he had been primarily seen as a "resource", someone to be drawn upon to win games. The dramatic impact of realizing that one had previously perceived him only within the framework of instrumentalism comes home. Furthermore, the point emerges that relationships (with his family, or with his team members) constitute the truth of his life. The public language of liberalism, with its emphasis upon material benefit and private actualization is more receptive to the language of resources. The commitment and relationships implied by an appreciation of something (or some one) as "things in themselves" is more the language of a civic

understanding. Speaking of an attachment to a place or a community does not imply any consideration of material benefit.

This distinction between correctness and truth, as the appeal of the insurance company's commercial attests, is something of which everyone is aware. With places like mountains, however, the distinction is sometimes not as clear. It is not terribly unusual for development proponents to stand before a crowd and correctly define a mountain as a "huge resource". Mountains, on the other hand, rarely stand before microphones to give eloquent testimony to their forgotten truth. Yet, as shall be seen, they sometimes do present themselves in ways equally compelling.

1965

The idea of building a ski resort on Lolo Peak is not new. It dates back a quarter of a century to the early 1960's, when downhill skiing was beginning a new popularity due to the invention of lightweight fiberglass skis. Prior to that time downhill skis were made of wood. They were heavy, long, and difficult to turn. Memories of snow covered wetness, long frigid lift rides, and embarrassing, if not painful tumbles down beginner slopes had kept many first time skiers from giving the sport a second chance. New technology produced easier skiing. New-found technological affluence allowed more vacation time. The combination gave new incentive to "challenge" an old resource.

From a basis of relatively small resorts, the industry began a boom which would send it growing and expanding through the sixties

and the seventies. People became interested in opening up new resorts. "Capitalists" were beginning to train their "prophetic eyes" on such quantifiable things as mountain snowpack, vertical rise, and grade. The United States Forest Service, which owned much of the mountainous terrain being eyed by eager developers, was hit with an unprecedented number of applications for permits to build ski areas. Many were requested in good faith by prospective investors who were intent upon building a resort if their permit were issued. Many were not. Buying up the land at the base of a mountain could turn into a profitable venture if value could be added through the granting of a permit after the sale. Many astute but ethically questionable speculators were cashing in on the purchase of bargain basement ranch land by obtaining permits to develop ski areas on the surrounding mountains. Often it was unimportant if the slopes were suitable for a successful ski area. What mattered was the higher price that a permit implied; regardless of south facing slopes, limited snow, and difficult terrain.

In order to stem the tide of these requests, the Forest Service began to take the initiative in determining which areas under its jurisdiction were potentially suitable for development as ski areas. In doing so they hoped to gain the ability to sift through their permit requests to separate the serious inquiries from the purely opportunistic conjectures. Setting upon the task with characteristically dispassionate expertise, they systematically inspected their land. Beginning with topographic maps, technicians would search for suitable conditions for downhill skiing. The initial

phase of this feasibility investigation looked for north-facing slopes with acceptable grade, adequate elevation and snowfall, vertical rise and run length. If a mountain had potential based upon these criteria it was aerially photographed, and timber growth and slope stability were given an initial investigation. If things still looked promising, Forest Service personnel were sent out to perform an on-site investigation.

In early April of 1965, E.C. Slusher and Robert Brandenberger of the Lolo National Forest were helicoptered to the top of Lolo Peak for a visual inspection and ski down the mountain. Their day spent scouting out the slopes of Lolo Peak generated a mound of paper work concerning the possibility of developing the mountain into a large scale resort. At the top of that mound was a form called the National Forest Outdoor Recreation Review #19 (or NFORR19 in the halls of the Lolo Office). It was a form specifically designed to evaluate the potential of a mountain to support a downhill ski area. The NFORR 19 allowed a Forest Service technician to rate, on a scale of one to four (with one as the best), the various criteria for good skiing. Slusher and Brandenberger realized snow conditions on the mountain became unreliable below an elevation of 6000 feet, and assumed that lodge and base facilities would be built at that level. Every evaluation point on the NFORR 19 was given a promising score of one, with the exception of those dealing with base area elevation and slope clearing costs. These scored a two⁴⁴. According to this evaluation Lolo Peak, above 6000 feet, was ideal in terms of run length, general slope and tree cover. Notably absent from the form

were questions concerning existing uses, wildlife, local community opinion, and general environmental impact. "Outstanding possibility"⁴⁵ summed up the official impression of the mountain's potential.

What followed was a flurry of bureaucratic advocacy for a ski area which had, to that point, received only a cursory physical review. The idea looked good on paper, and that was all that was necessary to "correctly" assess its potential as a ski area. The beginning of a purely quantitative case was being made, there was, to this task, no need to uncover "the thing in its essence." Little or no consideration was given to the qualitative concerns outside of its potential as a ski area. Lolo Peak was, for the sake of this study, the "huge resource" that Howard Toole would label it almost twenty-five years later, and statistics were being compiled which were designed to bolster the correctness of this assessment. This purposeful accumulation of information seemed to smother within the Forest Service the possibility that any other understanding of the meaning of the mountain (especially to the people who lived nearby) could be made. Perhaps this was an oversight.

There were occasional indications within the Forest Service of an awareness of the mountain's presence in the everyday lives of the people of the community. A 1965 interdepartmental memo begins, "Lolo Peak, as viewed from the windows of many Missoula homes is an interesting and beautiful sight. Skiers look at it with interest..."⁴⁶ However their acknowledgement of the mountain's ubiquitousness bears no appreciation of its significance. Surely they

knew that more than "skiers" looked upon it with interest. A similar insensitivity to any kind of non-instrumental impression of Lolo Peak is again reflected in a memo which concludes an introductory outline of the project by stating, "Our thinking is that Missoula has a unique opportunity to profit from one of the finest ski areas to be found anywhere. Bringing local people to that realization is the problem."⁴⁷ Bureaucracies such as the Forest Service are born and often sustained within the framework of instrumentalism. Their work, perhaps unavoidably, often bears its mark. As John Dewey writes in The Public and Its Problems:

A class of experts is inevitably so removed from common interests as to become a class with private interests and private knowledge, which in social matters, is not knowledge at all.⁴⁸

Any existing importance or significance of the mountain to the people of the region below was, to the private knowledge of the Forest Service, an obstacle to be overcome. For the idea of a resort to work, people would have to be willing to accept this new view of Lolo Peak -- to incorporate it into a utilitarian "framework". It was not going to be easy.

Part of the difficulty would lie with the layout of the town of Missoula. The southwest section of town, including a large residential area and two major commercial boulevards, is laid out diagonal to North-South section lines. That the reason for this unusual arrangement was for the convenience of the original landowners has been forgotten. The diagonal streets have framed Lolo Peak in the windshields of travelling cars for 80 years. They

transform picture windows in these neighborhoods into views of the region's most prominent landmark. Legend has replaced fact and the common impression is that the section of town was laid out purposefully: a part of the town was built to keep Lolo Peak in people's eyes. These are eyes which will not share the prophetic views of capitalists or the Forest Service overnight.

Neither are those which have seen the view from the other direction. As the group of day hikers found out, Lolo Peak's summit is distant but not inaccessible. Since people have lived in the valley, they have made the effort to reach the mountain's top. They've been rewarded with unique views of the inhabited valleys on the north and east, and the expansive wildlands to the south and west. The impression is at the same time comforting and awe inspiring, enabling one both to pick out their home in the distance and to lose it in the vastness of the surrounding mountain ranges. Two of the essays in "Lolo Creek Reflections" recall a 1915 trip made up the mountain by 12 local residents. One states:

I have said little (in my essay) about pleasure trips and activities...In the early 1900's, twelve of us, six men and six girls took a trip up Lolo Peak. We had six horses to carry our blankets and food... At night we slept in a row on the ground (and) we cooked our meals over an open fire. The next morning we all climbed to the peak on foot. Mr. Dunford, Bessie Irwin, and I were proud to be the first to the monument on top. The peak is over 9000' high and the view is wonderful.⁴⁹

The author goes on to talk of neighborhood baseball games, ice skating parties, Sunday visitors for dinner, and church and school

socials. The other essay which describes the trip (Mr. Dunford's), is equally lacking in details of the climb, or flourishing accounts of the sensation of reaching the top. Yet their inclusion, independent of one another, indicates that such a trip can hold a great significance for the participant. Lolo Peak helps to shape the community for these people, like the ponds on which they skate or the occasions upon which they gather. A trip up imprints in a way that is not forgotten, even years later. Thus, when the Forest Service would later come up with a new way of seeing Lolo Peak, it stands to reason that bringing local people around to it might be a problem.

1966

As time wore on after the initial NFORR 19 review, the technical weaknesses of the proposal also began to catch up with it. Missoula's airport was often closed in the winter because of air-pollution aggravated thermal inversions, and there simply wasn't enough snow at lower elevations. Despite all of the other advantages of the mountain, it would be too expensive and difficult to build a base area at elevations where snow was reliable. Transporting skiers to higher elevations by chairlift involved expense, and perhaps more importantly, inconvenience. Who would go out of their way to ski at a resort where early and late season skiing involved a long, cold lift ride up and down from the skiable runs?

The Forest Service position of advocacy gave way to a position of careful, diplomatic neutrality. Internal memos hint at this shift, listing the accurate determination of snow depths as one of the

major concerns before the Forest Service. Their over-arching responsibility was transformed to providing "an inventory of the resource."⁵⁰ Further documentation more clearly outlines this new position: " (The) Forest Service is not promoting Lolo Peak... This should be carefully understood in view of the financial problems being encountered by other ski areas."⁵¹ The Forest Service had gone from eager exponent to official keeper of the "resource inventory" in less than two years. Continuing in this role for a few years after, they methodically collected snow data and assembled technical summaries. Initial excitement over the idea was spent.

Spent excitement, however, did not mean that the idea was dead. Too much effort had been put forth for it to merit such a demise. The idea of constructing a major resort on the slopes of Lolo Peak can best be described as lying dormant in the years between the early seventies and the mid 1980's. Occasional eruptions of curiosity arose throughout those years as individual entrepreneurs and citizens' groups would look into the money-making possibilities of an idea that had once sparked so much interest. The curiosity was typically short-lived as the physical difficulties and financial risk of embarking upon such a development became apparent. Jerry Covault, a recreation specialist for the Lolo National Forest, and witness to a number of such inquiries remarks, "They just didn't know how to get a hold of this elephant."⁵² Perhaps out of respect for these occasional inquiries, or out of faith in the inevitability of technological solutions to the mountain's physical inadequacies, the

Forest Service kept the possibility of developing the mountain open. The Lolo National Forest Plan briefly mentions the Forest Service's belief that "Developed sites (for recreation) in the private sector could increase, especially if existing sites expand, or potential development on Lolo Peak is realized."⁵³ In recognition of this, the proposed area was not the subject of timber sales or other management alternatives which would degrade its "potential."

One management alternative that was briefly considered was recommended wilderness designation. During the public review process of the Forest Plan's Environmental Impact Statement, consideration was given to recommending that all or part of the area on and around the mountain be designated as wilderness. The EIS recognized only limited traditional wilderness value in the area:

Although viewpoints from within (the Lolo Peak Study Area, which included Lolo Peak) include vistas of Missoula, Lolo, and Florence, there are too many off-site intrusions for the area to provide any real inspirational value.⁵⁴

In spite of this, many public comments came to the Forest Service favoring wilderness designation. Few, if any, came in opposed.⁵⁵ "Inspirational value" (a term designed to act as a replacement for the unquantifiable term "inspiration") in wilderness areas can be characterized as the possession of certain specific traits. Access to solitude, unique surroundings, and untouched scenery are especially important to a computation of this kind of "value". Much of the area around Lolo Peak has been "touched" through road building, timber cutting, powerlines, and the expansion of nearby cities. You can see

this from the top of the mountain. Yet, the peak inspired numerous comments in favor of its preservation. These comments went into the record and prompted a recommendation for the eventual setting-aside of 3990 acres, none of which would interfere with the possibility of constructing a ski resort.

1986

Part of the reason for this is that during the time the 1986 Forest Plan was being drafted and approved, the idea of building a ski resort on Lolo Peak was going through the beginnings of its latest and longest-lasting incarnation. This incarnation would see the task of advocacy for the idea spread outside the confines of the Forest Service to private citizens. A brand new set of players would be brought into the game, and for the first time the idea would become the topic of discussion, dissent and confusion within the community around the mountain. To thank (or to blame) for this are four primary factors: the decline in strength of the timber industry, an increase in the reliability of the regional airport, the invention and popularization of a device known as the detachable quad chairlift, and a strain of bacteria known as *Pseudomonas Syringae*.

The first two items are region-specific, and independent of any considerations of the ski industry. The Forest Service and the timber industry had provided a reliable source of material wealth for the region since its earliest days. However, since the 1960's it had become increasingly apparent that the rate of harvest had seriously diminished the number of large trees. The mills in the

area, tooled for these large logs, had seen their sources of income shrink and the writing seemed to be on the wall. Private landowners would seek to maximize profit by using up their supplies of salable timber. Meanwhile the Forest Service, charged with taking a longer perspective, would see a tightening in the restrictions to the unchecked acquisition of theirs. Mills, to stay profitable, would have to retool for the more plentiful smaller logs, and would take advantage of the situation by automating their production lines. Predictions of job loss in the region's timber industry during the 1990's range from 1000 to 3000.⁵⁶ Few who lived here could overlook the trend. For many, the resulting logic goes, the response will be a new willingness to accept sources of income that would have previously been rejected. The kinds of jobs typically available at a ski resort, for example.

For Missoula's regional airport, however, things got better and better. While no official records exist, it is generally acknowledged that the annual number of days in which flying in and out of Missoula is impossible have been drastically reduced. Missoula's inversion-prone valley, which has gained notoriety for trapping dense fog and holding it for long periods of time has been meeting its technological match with the introduction of improved landing lights, more sophisticated aircraft guidance, and, in the near future, radar. The forward clear visible distance for which landing is considered safe has been reduced from three miles to one mile, and soon will be down to one-half mile. Memories of the airport being closed in the winter for stretches of up to two weeks have faded as

modern equipment has cut the duration of recent weather-related closings to isolated incidents of one to four days.⁵⁷

The last two factors come from outside the region, representing technological advances in two of the biggest problems vexing the ski industry. The first is the problem of snowmaking in warm weather. Plain water crystals which form at temperatures close to freezing are not very reliable or desirable for making snow to cover ski slopes. Pseudomonas Syringae, a bacteria which can be freeze dried and sold as a powder, can be scooped into snowmaking water. Very small scoops of the bacteria can be placed in very large containers of water where they produce a protein which attracts and aligns water molecules. This alignment allows ice crystal formation to begin at temperatures as high as 30 degrees F. The quality is said to rival the best natural snow, provided that conditions are neither too dry nor too warm.⁵⁸

If either of these is the case, then hope will rest with a second technological advance in the ski industry, the detachable quad chair lift. This lift promises to whisk skiers at previously unimaginable rates past the undesirable lower slopes to the "real" skiing at 6000 feet and above. Prior to the invention of the detachable quad, the limiting factor in chair lift speeds was the rate at which the average skier could mount and dismount his or her chair. Too fast and you'd get a tangled jumble of people and equipment at the top and bottom as skiers hastily hurtled themselves on and off the lift. Too slow and the result was long lift lines and tired, bored, and cold lift riders. The longer and more

heavily used the run, the bigger the problem for its associated lift. The detachable quad permits each chair to become detached from the lift cable, allowing skiers as long as needed to mount and dismount, while maintaining the fastest lift rate possible. Some joke that the new limiting factor becomes wind chill and frostbite from the high speed of the chair. Because a Lolo Peak ski area would have a long narrow base run down which all skiers would have to travel, and because it would rely upon a long first lift ride to get people to natural snow, a detachable quad chairlift would be absolutely necessary. The assessment of the mountain's feasibility had long suffered from the unavailability of this kind of technology. Now available with a price tag of over \$2 million, it becomes a daunting but not unusual purchase.

In a fit of industry-wide keeping-up-with-the-Jones most of the major ski areas around the country are investing in a switch to these lifts. Starting with Vail in 1985, resort after resort has followed suit, lining up to pay for another draw (shorter lift lines) in what has become an increasingly competitive industry. Economists call this competitive consumption. As areas strive, in a competitive market to differentiate themselves, they set up standards which others have no choice but to match. "If we're going to attract our share of the market," says Wallace Huffman of the Sun Valley Corporation, "we have no choice but to invest in the latest technology."⁵⁹ Historically it had been physical conditions, not the market, which had forced those interested in developing a ski resort

on Lolo Peak to look to the latest technology. Until recently, the latest had not been good enough.

Time, however, changes things. With time, a new crew of people had taken positions at the Lolo National Forest. Brandenberger and Slusher were gone (although Brandenburger would go on to become one of the resort's staunchest and hardest working proponents) as were their bosses Barry and Milodragovitch. In the mid 1980's Jerry Covault transferred to the Lolo from Summit County Colorado. He had spent a number of years working there with the Forest Service, in an area where four major destination ski resorts were already located. The "prophetic eyes" of Mr. Covault, when first laid on Lolo Peak, and on the old information about the mountain saw a "tremendous resource for this region."⁶⁰ Concerned about the economic and physical changes that had taken place in Missoula since the idea had been previously broached, he was also aware of the technological advances in the industry which reawakened the possibility of developing a Lolo Peak Resort. "The mountain was a resource for the Community's economic development," he would later state, "a resource that should be looked at like a timber sale."⁶¹ He pointed to Missoula's risky dependence upon the shifting timber industry, saying, " The best thing to do to an economy is to diversify. There's a heavy cost to no growth." He then added, "Refusing to accept change, you should remember, is a kind of greed too."⁶²

In 20 years the philosophical outlook of the Forest Service had changed very little. The liberal fear of an economy which had levelled off still motivated its actions. Questioning the validity of that fear (usually read into a skeptical appraisal of a development proposal), often won the questioner the title of a "no growther". It was a title that would be heard quite often in the months to come, and those that used it disparagingly usually did so in the sense that Covault's second remark implied. "No growthers" were greedy, wanting to keep something that they had come to value (in this case a mountain) unchanged, for themselves. The private orientation of the liberal tradition makes it difficult to perceive of a valuation which does not spring from the self -- one that may indeed have others in mind, or further, the thing in itself. Nor does it need a detailed explanation of the heavy cost of no growth. Resources, once recognized, should be utilized.

Covault took his observations to his supervisors at the Lolo National Forest. Explaining this vision to them, he helped introduce the idea once more to interested members of the community. The stipulation of the Service's supervisors was that the Forest Service act as "evaluators of project considerations."⁶³ The Forest Service had, in recent proposals such as the ill-fated Ski Yellowstone Resort, been burnt by public opinion which saw the agency as the dealer of pat hands to potential developers.⁶⁴ They (and eventually the resort's proponents) wished to prevent any such mistakes in a Lolo Peak Ski Area proposal. The Forest Service, showing remarkable restraint, insisted that the community first come to a decision

concerning "what it is and where it is going."⁶⁵ Until then the Service would remain officially neutral to the development of a ski area on Lolo Peak, "neither encouraging or discouraging a resort."⁶⁶

Espousing neutrality and actually practicing neutrality, however, are two different things. It is common for government agencies as well as private individuals to profess an ambivalence regarding many social issues. "I can see both sides of that issue." Or "I have my opinions but I don't want to force them on you." Statements like these are the hallmarks of an internalized respect for tolerance. It is this tolerance for individual differences which lies at the very heart of liberal individualism. Quite often, however, they actually mean that, to the speaker who uttered them, the difference in question just doesn't matter. Neutrality, ambivalence, and tolerance are easy when the issues are unimportant. To the bureaucratic thinking of the Forest Service, however, regional economic growth, and the identification and maximum efficient utilization of resources are issues of primary importance. The latter goes all the way back to Gifford Pinchot, who charted out a course for the agency that specified the "greatest good" of his agency's resources, for the "greatest number". The former also dates to the Service's founding days. Pinchot's belief that the Service bore an economic responsibility to timber dependent communities is reflected in the subsequent actions of Forest Service personnel. People like Brandenberger and Slusher, who openly advocated the development of a ski resort in the mid sixties, were merely carrying out their founder's mission to look to what they perceived to be the

interest of the communities in which the Forest Service worked. Covault's advocacy, while perhaps more broadly considered, would demonstrate that same sense of mission: "Industry in a capitalist economy is not concerned with jobs or communities. By its nature that's how it has to operate. The environmental movement is only concerned with the environment, not people. So where does that leave the community? Who looks out for it?"⁶⁷ The answer, of course, was the Forest Service. Historically, and with a certain noble self-consciousness, the Forest Service has even sacrificed profit (a common example is the practice of below-cost timber sales) for the continued economic growth of dependent communities.

Thus two things begin to happen. The Forest Service, as an objective bureaucracy created by a liberal society to oversee its public lands, begins putting forth great efforts to insure that their perceived official position is one of neutrality. At the same time, the Service would quickly, and repeatedly throughout the course of the issue, demonstrate that its position was anything but neutral. A long-standing commitment to an economic definition of the vibrancy of local communities compelled these actions. The result is a confusing disparity between actions and words which would often baffle those who would later become involved in the issue.

This was scarcely noticed as Covault, representing the neutral Forest Service, helped to arrange and orchestrate the organized private interest in the idea of a ski resort on Lolo Peak. Covault made initial contact with the planning office of Missoula County concerning the idea. Subsequently communicating with various

private individuals, the Missoula Economic Development Corporation, and the local Chamber of Commerce, he helped to breath new life into the idea of building a major resort on the slopes of Lolo Peak. One person who willingly grabbed onto the idea was Howard Toole. Well known for his political involvement in the area, and related by birth to a former governor, and a former mayor and regional historian, Toole's background and insight were a major factor in getting the idea off the ground. Toole, like others who would later work on the issue with him, was deeply motivated by a sense of concern for the town in which he lived. To him it was essential that this opportunity be looked into and given every chance to take hold. Pitching his scenario to the Forest Service and the Missoula County Commissioners, he wrote:

What I have in mind here is nothing less than a "turn-key" operation, under which after a thorough assessment by local government agencies and planning offices and a campaign for public support, the area can be made available to developers for construction without significant amounts of facilities planning, land use hearings, and the like.⁶⁸

These things -- hearings, planning and the like -- were designed to bring orderly and formalized public and agency review into the process. They are bureaucratic methods of preserving the chance for the opinion of the community to be heard. They were also seen as impediments to potential development.

1987

In January of 1987 a workshop sponsored by the Missoula Economic Development Corporation was held in which all of the interested parties were brought together. The sales pitch was, no doubt, compelling. With new snow making technology, skiers might be able to take advantage of every bit of the vertical drop of the mountain. That translated to perhaps 4700 feet between 8700' and the valley floor at 4000' and was substantially greater than the drop of an average area. With the new chairlifts there should be no problem transporting these people quickly around the vast areas of the mountain's slopes. Possibly 5200 acres could be developed, and the area might handle 10,000 skiers per day. Existing local ski areas might benefit from a large new one, and there was money to be made when tourists start to spend.⁶⁹

The effect was dramatic. The new vision of Lolo Peak had been painted in full color with vivid detail and stunning contrast. Later that month the Lolo Peak Economic Research Committee was formed, consisting of interested private citizens. Meanwhile the Forest Service settled into a more comfortable role as technical advisor and interested onlooker. An interdisciplinary team was set up within the Service to perform a preliminary study of the environmental feasibility of the project, with results to be released later the next year. Jerry Covault began the task of observing and advising the progress of the newly formed proponent's group.

When LoloPERC was chartered it consisted of a small membership, an eight person board of directors, and a President,

Howard Toole. The organization he headed described itself as "a non-profit corporation to study the issue of developing a major resort in the Lolo area."⁷⁰ Study it they did. After almost a year of organizing, making contacts, and gathering statistics -- "preliminary stuff" as Toole would call it -- LoloPERC went public with their idea at a meeting with the Missoula County Commissioners.⁷¹ While other states such as Colorado had seen a steady increase in skier visits, Montana had seen none. While other states had cashed in on the downhill skiing market, Montana had not. Back of the envelope estimates said a Lolo Peak Ski Area could produce 600,000 skier days, 120,000 vacationing skiers, 190 direct ski area jobs, 660 linked service jobs, and \$94 Million in winter sales. Compared to an "average vacation resort", a Lolo Resort would have a greater daily skier capacity (10,000 as opposed to 6374), a larger number of skiable acres (2300 as opposed to 876), a greater vertical rise (4700' as opposed to 2900') and a longer season (150 days as opposed to 127).⁷² The numbers kept tumbling out in a dizzying array that later left many thinking that the market studies had been completed, environmental impacts had been assessed, and that a developer was all set to plant the the first lift tower.

In reality, however, the idea was still in its earliest stages. Toole made a push for a publicly financed feasibility study costing upwards of \$200,000. He had mentioned the possibility of his group funding a public opinion survey. He also spoke, for the first time, of placing a referendum on the following November's ballot to ask the voters of the county if they were in favor of the "idea" of a major

resort. The logic, according to a newspaper account of the presentation, was that a "positive vote on the concept would help any developer steer the project through bureaucratic hurdles."⁷³ Those commissioners who attended the meeting were bowled over. They were, however, less than eager to allocate money to a feasibility study. The idea needed to be played before the general public.

Many needed no more convincing. Most notable in this category was the local newspaper, the Missoulian. In a Sunday editorial written a short while after the presentation before the Commissioners they affectionately referred to the development proposal as something that was merrily "bouncing along". The idea was three times in three column inches referred to as "promising" and the editors closed the piece by grandly wishing the proposal "Godspeed."⁷⁴ The Missoulian had made up its "mind" and in doing so was to set the trend for its reporting and editorializing for the months to come.

All of this was before most people in the county had been given even an inkling that anyone had any plans of any kind for the mountain that lay ten minutes to the southwest. Reactions, from those who paid attention spanned from a disbelieving, " They're gonna do what?", to careful interest. Someone named "they" was out there making big plans.

Anonymous forces like "they" become popular players in liberal politics. Starting out, in this case, as the idea's proponents, "they" would eventually change. The pronoun in later months would become

a shorthand for the complex bureaucracy that would silently see that the community's interests were being looked out for. ("Have they done an EIS?" -- "They won't let the developer build unless he's shown to have the financial resources.") Ironically, this gift of benevolent bureaucratic oversight was identical in its source to the curse of the "bureaucratic hurdle" that proponents were looking to minimize. At the same time it represented the "system" that proponents were to encourage the public to trust as they later cast their ballots. "They" are both the disburdening friends and the mean-spirited originators of "red tape". The dual role is a recipe for public alienation from the decisions which affect their lives.

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Prior to that time Lolo Peak's job had been to sit there and be Lolo Peak. People climbed on it, fished beneath it, lived near it, and looked at it. It was a place where nature lived and people visited. Now, it seemed, some one was out there saying that the mountain had a resume which qualified it for rank among the biggest ski areas in the country. Clues were dropped in a Missoulian article announcing an upcoming public meeting, and again in a later one aptly titled "Public Gets a Peek at Proposed Lolo Ski Area".⁷⁵ Said Toole, unknowingly echoing the 20 year old remarks of E.C. Barry, "We just want to make people understand that the mountain itself is the kind of mountain on which major resorts are built in other states."⁷⁶ LoloPERC had never made a public presentation, but their experience with the Commissioners and the Missoulian had evidently bolstered

their confidence. "We're looking to put this on the ballot...Even if we don't get money the public will still be on the record as in favor of the idea."⁷⁷ All of this was before the public had even gotten a "peek".

The Missoula City Council Chamber is divided into two sections: the front, with fixed tables and chairs is where elected officials conduct their business. The rows of chairs in the rear are where audience members sit. On a Tuesday evening late in the month, an overflow crowd surged forth into the front section of the chamber, turning out to watch as the first public peek turned into an eyeful. LoloPERC had done their homework, and on January 26 they had a slide show, charts, graphs, and endless numbers with which to dazzle their audience. Missoula, they said, was sitting on a gold mine. The "prophetic eyes" of LoloPERC's modern day capitalists had shared their vision with their first gathering of the general public. The idea of soliciting county funds in an era of public purse tightening had been rejected, as had a privately financed opinion survey. Instead they confidently sought a November referendum with which to verify community support. The confidence of the board members grew with the surprising size of the turnout. Reactions, however, were mixed.

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Some eagerly signed up to help or to donate money to the effort to explore Lolo Peak's potential. A larger percentage

restrained their reactions--both positive and negative-- within the narrow boundaries of uninformed disbelief ("They're not really going to do that are they?"). Meanwhile a portion of those who heard the idea wished to hear little more. To them, Lolo Peak was something other than a resource, a potential source of material benefit. To them, it was very much a part of the community in which they lived. Fred Parmelee, a long time resident of the area describes his feelings in what was to become perhaps the main public forum for the issue -- the letter to the editor:

Ever since the days when I got out of high school, in those long ago years, I look up at Lolo Peak and see that all was right with the world, regardless of the problems and the difficulties we humans have down here. --And somehow that has helped me, and I think that it has helped thousands of others in our valley. Please just leave the deer and the elk alone up there on their lonely trails. And let them chew their cuds in the brush and trees of that primeval land. This spring I will almost be able to see the deer and the elk with their little ones feeding on the open hillsides and what destruction chainsaws and bulldozers can bring to a beautiful natural mountain scene.⁷⁸

His feelings echoed the sentiment of the column by Greg Tollefson:

Fresh snow on the rocky shoulders of what we call Lolo Peak is always something people around here notice. It's always worth a comment over coffee downtown, or a casual remark at work, because the Peak is a sign post of the seasons for many who live beneath it.

Fresh snow may suggest elk are moving down from their high sanctuaries, and northern flocks of ducks and geese could darken the evening sky. Or it might hint at the promise of winter to come.

But lately when I look off in the direction of Lolo

Peak a little knot forms in my stomach, and I start to think of other things, because there is a movement afoot to put a large ski area up there, the largest in the state. It makes me sad.

A few weeks ago when the idea was first reported, I felt a strange emptiness, the kind that comes from a sudden unanticipated loss. Such a feeling elicited by the mere suggestion that a place I know could see change is a bit extreme, I'll be the first to admit. Maybe it was just realizing that places and things one holds vaguely sacred are not viewed that way by everybody. The ski area wouldn't be the first such incursion, nor the last.

I have no doubt that the proposal is well intentioned. The people behind it have feelings about what Montana is and should be that are every bit as strong as my own. And I understand that our stagnant economy needs something to get it rolling. I know that people need jobs and that every possibility to create them should be explored. And I have no particular aversion to ski areas, in fact I ski at them. I cannot offer a better solution. Still something inside says no to this one.⁷⁹

To Tollefson, Parmelee, and many others, the idea of building a ski resort on Lolo Peak was a source of anxiety -- both for the mountain and its natural community, and for the human community which had grown up in view of it. It wasn't long before this anxiety prompted action.

Hannes Jarka, a post-graduate student in philosophy at the University of Montana began the task of reining in the apparent juggernaut of LoloPERC's confidence, and motivating the skeptical out of their complacency. Doing hours of his own research he rounded up information to refute the claims made by LoloPERC. The ski industry, he found, had levelled in popularity and was becoming increasingly competitive. A Lolo Peak ski area would have to

overcome serious physical obstacles to become feasible, including an arid climate, high tree line, low elevation, and avalanche danger. The community would see higher taxes and an increased demand for infrastructure improvements, as well as a disappearance of its traditional character. He uncovered questions of feasibility, economic and environmental impact, and social consequences which he offered up as the flip side of LoloPERC's rosy picture of proposed development. Speaking to groups, setting up tables to solicit help in public areas and making phone calls, he drummed up interest in his work.

The first organizational meeting of what was then the "other" group concerned about a resort proposal was attended by about 40 people. It was a meager show for those who had been to LoloPERC's presentation only two weeks before. Jarka had a chalkboard, and a map -- no slides, few figures, and no sure fire rosy scenarios. In almost two solid hours of presentation Jarka outlined a case for doubting the feasibility and appropriateness of a resort idea. The airport, despite its improved record was still grossly unreliable. Growth in the ski industry had levelled off and many resorts were up for sale. Low elevations would not receive or hold snow, and Missoulians would not stomach the glitz that went with major destination resorts. Few in the audience took notes. Many had been converted before showing up that night. For them no presentation was necessary. What was necessary was to respond to the gauntlet thrown down by LoloPERC in the form of a proposed referendum. Something had to be done. After the meeting Jarka was confident:

"The illusion that the community is unanimously behind (the proposal) has been broken."⁸⁰ That much, undoubtedly, was true.

What replaced that illusion was a picture of an issue that was turning into a battle. People could now look at the idea of developing a ski resort on Lolo Peak and quickly characterize it as an issue divided between environmentalists and developers. Both Toole and Jarka initially resisted these characterizations. Toole wished for his group to be seen as an exploratory committee, not as advocates of a particular vision. Jarka, for his part went to great lengths to stress the exploration of alternatives such as a cross country ski and mountain bike resort. However, in the eyes of the public the lines were drawn, the sides had been chosen, and the arguments sounded familiar. The procedure of an election would be the forum within which the battle between these two sides would be fought.

It was this procedure which was initially and most strongly resisted by the group that would later become the Friends of Lolo Peak. In taking up the challenge of supporting the other side of a proposed referendum, Jarka pushed strongly for a call to remove the issue from November's Ballot. Calling it "an abuse of the democratic process under the guise of democratic decision-making", he felt that it would compel an uninformed and hasty judgement from area voters.⁸¹ An election set to take place prior to any community discussion was a tactical manipulation designed to keep that discussion from taking place. Resisting that referendum, however, would prove futile. The Commissioners correctly acknowledged that both groups had the support to place their own questions on the

ballot via petition. Rather than allow this to happen, they decided to maintain order by overseeing the crucial process of crafting the question to be placed before the public

Debating statistics and general claims was what marked the months of late winter and early spring. A forum sponsored by the Sierra Club was followed by others sponsored by the Lion's Club, the Knights of Columbus, the Lolo Businesswomen and the Environmental Studies Advocates, among others. The people of the region were showing their eagerness to become informed on the issue, and these events were a good show for their audience. Generally they consisted of presentations by both groups followed by questions and answers. Audience members had an opportunity to hear both sides of the issue, and occasionally they had a chance to air their concerns and listen to a response. These events provided LoloPERC and the Friends of Lolo Peak with an opportunity to refine their positions and identify their strong and weak points. They did little, however, to foster a conflict-diffusing constructive dialogue. Both sides went in prepared, and came back assessing a "win" or a "loss". This is the language of a confrontation -- you don't "win" a conversation -- and it had many of the people in the community concerned.

MARCH 1988

Missoula, after all, had seen many such conflicts. The fight over the construction of a SuperAmerica convenience store was hard fought and well publicized. Few businesses would want to undertake such a battle, only to win and come into town with two strikes

against them. "This kind of in-fighting over development," said a local businessman, "gives the community a bad name to new businesses." Likewise the battle for a comprehensive plan for the City and County of Missoula resulted in an official electoral winner. However, that victory turned hollow when the outvoted, yet embittered minority rose up to defeat the plan at the moment of its implementation, lending authority to the complaint of that same person, "It never produces real winners."

Many struggles can serve to unify a community. The previously mentioned ones did not. A decision to build a resort on Lolo Peak was showing itself to be equally divisive, and the political arrangement for working out differences involved nothing further than the flipping of a switch in private. There seemed to be no other place for residents to go to express their opinion and listen to the thoughts of others. In the name of facilitated decision-making, differences were meant to be kept private, where they could do little but fester and trouble. "It drives a wedge between the people who already live here." said another long time resident who had seen this kind of thing before. Many who agreed with this evaluation were well aware that it could quickly turn into a lose-lose proposition where electoral victors had also quietly won themselves an embittered and hardened opposition.

Max Kummerow was in the audience at the first meeting of the Friends of Lolo Peak. His interest in the issue, combined with an advanced education in real estate development, and a willingness to speak in front of an audience made him a natural spokesman for the

group. For a development proposal to be right, he often said, "a project needs to preserve what's good about a community, and it needs to prevent what's bad from getting worse. Winter air pollution is one of Missoula's problems. Its intimacy and proximity to wide open spaces are two of its pluses."⁸² A massive Lolo Peak ski area, he pointed out, would degrade the former while threatening the latter two.

Late in the month, Kummerow was approached by a small group of local business persons and politicians. For many of the reasons previously mentioned they were interested in exploring the possibility of heading off an upcoming confrontation and beginning a dialogue on the issue of developing Lolo Peak. They also approached Howard Toole of LoloPERC, and invited both to represent their groups at a meeting to be held in early April.

APRIL 1988

This was not to be an informational forum. It was instead a chance for both groups to begin a mediated conversation that might lead to a less acrimonious political situation. Members of both groups were to come prepared to answer questions and, as the term implies, to listen to what the others had to say.

Despite a starting time of 7:30 A.M. on a Tuesday, the meeting was well attended. Three each came from LoloPERC and the Friends of Lolo Peak, with the balance of over twenty people consisting of local businesspersons, long time residents, and local politicians. Dan Kemmis, one of the meeting's organizers opened things up by

describing his group as a "community-building group"⁸³, interested in the possibility of getting the organizations on both sides of this issue to agree upon a definition of "what's right."⁸⁴ Things, he said, were shaping up to look like the previously mentioned "lose-lose" situation. He suggested that both groups step back from the issue and be prepared to make a few basic decisions, which might break down the apparent impasse that had developed in the preceding months.

Howard Toole, at least initially, was unprepared to do this. "We don't have an impasse," he began.⁸⁵ LoloPERC, he continued, did not see the need for the process that Kemmis' group was trying to get underway. They were satisfied with the existing forum, and furthermore they questioned the legitimacy of the group that had assembled that morning to "take the decision-making process away from the voters."⁸⁶

Startled, the participants turned to hear Kummerow begin by stating that the Friends of Lolo Peak felt the effort was indeed "useful."⁸⁷ Speaking for himself, he confided that he was ready to concede an election, but that such considerations were not the point. The first thing both sides needed to do was to "give up the answer" and work to emphasize the goals of the community.⁸⁸ He later went on to produce a home-made comparison of decision-making approaches. One approach, entitled the "Conflict-Maximizing Approach" closely paralleled the ongoing process, and included a divided human community, an inconclusive election, and the construction of a poorly considered resort.⁸⁹ The other, which he

called the "Problem-Solving Consensus Approach" started by delaying a referendum and beginning a non-partisan discussion and study of the related issues.⁹⁰ It ended, interestingly, with a community approved resort being constructed in less total time than the first approach. Decidedly slanted towards his group's bias, Kummerow's piece nonetheless made the interesting observation that "the consensus process may appear to take more time in the early stages, but this is misleading. Real work on the project would be in progress from the beginning, especially on the crucial issue of building community support."⁹¹

Toole had softened a bit, but still remained unmoved. He reiterated that his group was interested in the process of public debate and issue resolution. Suspicious and wary of any alternative decision-making procedures, he stated that he was not eager to pursue any change in the election and review process "from what (LoloPERC) has already proposed."⁹² The meeting broke up, with the scheduling of another meeting as its only substantial accomplishment.

The next meeting was less well attended and more informal. In the living-room like setting of the Northern Lights Institute Office, nine people gathered to see if it would be possible for both groups to produce a suggestion for mutually acceptable language for the ballot issue in November. Again Toole wondered out loud over the problems that every one seemed to have with the existing procedure. Technical concerns would be taken care of by the system. "An EIS will happen no matter what," he stated, so what was the need for all this

additional concern?⁹³ Kemmis attempted to explain that an EIS would benefit from the generation of specific environmental criteria from a community discussion. Meanwhile, he added, "the community needs to set a process in motion that would determine social and other criteria."⁹⁴

Two more hours again produced no tangible results. The county, it seemed would see no suggestions for wording coming from the mutual agreement of both groups. It had become apparent that the proponents of the resort idea were quite comfortable with the technical election procedure that had generally been unfolding. The discussion promoted by Kemmis' group seemed out-of-place, unnecessary, and strange. Liberal reliance upon procedure in social decisions showed its corollary, a mistrust of decisions formed by free flowing social exchange. It was "taking the decision out of the hands of the voters," thus slightly subversive.⁹⁵ They were much more comfortable with a "debate over the issues", a time table laid out by rule, and with a reliance upon the opinion of experts.⁹⁶ On this last matter the county government would soon oblige.

Less than a week later the County Planning Office sent out letters soliciting donations from interested parties to defray the cost of bringing a "nationally recognized resort consultant" to Missoula.⁹⁷ Hoping to "inform and facilitate discussion on resort development", the Commissioners had invited Myles Rademan for two days of meetings, speeches and presentations.⁹⁸ "Mr. Rademan," they wrote, "is noted for his honesty and up front approach. He will not gloss over the problems associated with resort development but

neither will he ignore the benefits of winter marketing for tourist dollars."⁹⁹ An enclosed promotional flyer for Mr. Rademan was even more effusive in its description of his talents:

(Mr. Rademan's) style is characterized by the breadth of his vision, his humor, and his use of slides and other visual aids. He speaks about the future, about leadership, about the state of the world, about community, and about tourism and recreation...

His lectures are provocative, searching, motivating and filled with humor and wisdom. He challenges us to think and act in new ways. His style has been termed "reality therapy."¹⁰⁰

All of this would be available to the county and others who shared in the cost of his \$1,300 trip. Unimpressed by the challenge of thinking and acting according to reality therapy, the Friends of Lolo Peak did not donate. Others did and earned the opportunity to personally meet with Mr. Rademan. None, however, would be disappointed.

MAY 1988

Rademan came from Park City, Utah, a small mining-town-turned-resort-center. His talks dealt with general matters such as the state of the ski industry and how resorts affect small communities. Little that he had to say was specific to Missoula. "Consultants tell us things we already know," he told a crowd in a high school gymnasium that had gathered to hear his presentation.¹⁰¹ He went on to surprise the crowd by announcing that tourism would be the "largest source of revenue in the world" by the year 2000.¹⁰² Rademan warned against allegiance to

tradition, telling people they needed to adjust their perspective: "You have to look more broadly at the world."¹⁰³

Part of this new perspective was an understanding that, for better or worse, change is inevitable. A major theme of Rademan's talks would be that Missoula "is in for major changes, whether you do anything or not."¹⁰⁴ With this theme came another: "There's certainly a heavy cost to growth (referring to the heavy international competition, multi-million dollar capital investments, marketing costs, and unstable set of customers inherent in the industry of downhill skiing). But there's also a heavy cost to no growth and you haven't looked at that yet."¹⁰⁵ At this point, however, Rademan's analysis fell short. Looking at a stagnation in growth is precisely what fueled the interest in resort development. Later he would add: "Certainly in today's economy it is foolish not to look at the assets you have, and (Lolo Peak is) one of them."¹⁰⁶

Economic growth and inevitable and incessant change -- Rademan's nontraditional "reality therapy" clearly came from a deep-rooted sense of traditional economic liberalism. Yet the novelty of one other often-repeated comment would stand out against these others: "There can be no community schizophrenia about this thing... Unless there is some consensus locally it will be hard to get developers in here."¹⁰⁷ Both the Friends of Lolo Peak and LoloPERC had thus gained information with which to affirm their positions in the wake of Rademan's departure. He had come to town and talked for nearly a day, during which he was able to please practically everybody. Perhaps nothing Mr. Rademan would say was

as noteworthy as his initial comment about the basic truth of the consulting business.

JUNE 1988

Myles Rademan's trip in May, for the most part, brought to a close the period in which efforts would be made to research information about ski area development. This kind of effort would take a back seat while ballot issue wording was decided upon and a campaign was subsequently waged. The first version of the County Commissioners' proposed wording came out early in the month. Asking for a "non-binding" indication of voter sentiment, it consisted of three basic choices. Voters could cast their opinion either for or against "development of a four-season resort in the Lolo Creek area regardless of the financial, environmental, and social costs/benefits to Missoula County residents."¹⁰⁸ Otherwise they could favor researching previously mentioned types of costs and benefits to be used in the event that a developer stepped forward.

LoloPERC found the wording unacceptable, predicting a prejudice against a "for" or "against" response. To LoloPERC the third option would not yield what they essentially wanted from an election, encouragement for a developer to come forward. Developers would be too skittish of the combination of the mountain's questionable feasibility and unpredictable public opinion to step up and begin to look into a proposal. Convinced that the latter had been taken care of, it might become possible that someone would then

come forth and "put a check on the table."¹⁰⁹ This check would allow the county to go ahead with a study of related issues. Meanwhile the developer could begin the steps of producing a plan for a project which could "steer through bureaucratic hurdles" with a better chance of success.

The Friends of Lolo Peak, on the other hand, essentially favored the draft wording. To them it provided a way of minimizing the impact of what they felt to be a premature referendum: "If the Commissioners decided to offer it in this form we would grumble quietly, but probably not mount much of a campaign for a "no" vote."¹¹⁰ Lacking a specific proposal, they held that the voters of the county should be given the option of requesting more information prior to making a decision. The premature approval of the "idea" of a resort by county voters would weaken the process of project review which would follow a development proposal. This process, often referred to as "bureaucratic hurdles" by resort proponents, included a cost/benefit analysis of a specific proposal and a full fledged Environmental Impact Statement, both of which would require extensive County and Forest Service input, and be paid for out of a developer's pocket. The Friends of Lolo Peak, in other words, were in a position that suited them. Making overtures once more to LoloPERC they arranged a meeting between the members of both groups.

When three of the Friends of Lolo Peak attended the weekly morning meeting of the board of LoloPERC, the objective once more was to pound out a compromise wording suggestion to present to the County Commissioners for November's ballot. They offered the option

of a yes or no question of studying the issue, or a three choice question on the "idea" of a resort (with one option being something like "undecided"). At times things got heated. "You people just want to study the idea to death," accused LoloPERC's Bill Worf after close to an hour of discussion.¹¹¹ Explaining his group's rejection of a third option, he added, "Sometimes you have to choose between two things you don't like. I do it all the time."¹¹² Asked why they felt it was necessary to do so this time, another member offered a wizened reply: "Because that's life in a democracy."¹¹³

Yet the meetings continued. Finally at a short and relatively tense one, underwritten by the sense that the process was being watched with growing impatience, a version of wording was agreed upon. The product of a passed around and heavily marked up draft, the key clause of the wording read:

Should Missoula County begin to develop strategies for responding to public impacts and issues arising from the development of a major destination resort near Lolo...¹¹⁴

It went on to describe the impacts and issues and asked, at the end, for voters to mark "yes" or "no". Accompanying the wording was a statement which described the wording and the process by which it came about:

When the idea of developing a major ski resort near Lolo Peak surfaced in January, some community leaders expressed concern that we ought to be seeking information and community consensus rather than splitting into warring factions at such an early stage.

In a series of often frustrating meetings the

two groups have managed to listen to each other's concerns and to some extent accept the validity of each other's position...

While agreeing that the referendum language is a legitimate and reasonable public policy question to put before the voters, the LoloPERC Committee and Friends of Lolo Peak at present take different positions on the issue. LoloPERC is convinced that the ski area is a real possibility, and that the modest county effort proposed would be a positive step to prepare for a resort. LoloPERC will recommend a "yes" vote. Friends of Lolo Peak are not yet convinced that the odds for a Lolo resort are high enough to justify switching county effort from other projects. Friends of Lolo Peak will take a neutral stance, recommending neither a "yes" or "no" vote and recommending that voters decide for themselves whether the Lolo resort deserves attention from county staff more than other projects.

Both LoloPERC and the Friends of Lolo Peak will work together in the coming months to develop credible information and debate on the merits of the resort proposal so that voters can make a more informed decision both on the preliminary steps proposed in this ballot issue and for the later debates on the resort itself, if a developer should appear.¹¹⁵

At an informational forum sponsored by a local businesspersons' organization (billed originally as a debate) this new sense of compromise between the two groups was given its first public exposure. After presentations the organization's president, a local restaurant owner, offered some concluding remarks: "I've heard extreme talk from people on both sides of this thing," he said. "People against it say that proponents are a bunch of greedy investors. People for it say they're fighting a bunch of no growth tree huggers. It's good to see that the groups involved in this

thing are committed to getting past that."¹¹⁶ Members of the community, in other words, could sense the benefits of this new approach to the issue. Getting around conflict and polarized division liberated more than just those directly involved. Nor had either group suffered a defeat in their acquiescence on their way to a compromise. They had in fact been liberated by their efforts to acknowledge and appreciate the valid points of their opposition. No longer was a belligerent denial of the other's views necessary or even called for.

Procedure and electoral deadlines had not brought this liberation about. Back at the beginning of the process of dialogue it was an attempt to head off the adverse effects of a reliance upon technical procedure. The first electoral deadline put a stop to that initial process. Yet, participants from both groups learned to see the benefits to be gained from open discussion, and when discussion began a second time there was even some talk of merging the two groups. However, the imposition of a deadline was destructive to this kind of progress, and would, at least in part, squander it, as both groups would soon find out.

JULY 1988

Taking the compromise back to their respective membership for approval, both groups found a degree of resistance. To those who were unfamiliar with it, or those who had not taken part in the discussions which led to it, this new wording was a complex source of possible pitfalls. It was hard to believe that the other group

would approve of something that wasn't stacked in their favor. Eventually, however, the suggested wording was generally approved by the Friends of Lolo Peak. LoloPERC, on the other hand, could not concur.

"We've just made a few minor housekeeping changes," assured Howard Toole, professing a degree of distress that the compromise had not made it through his group intact.¹¹⁷ Indeed, when days later a revised copy of the previously agreed upon wording was received by the Friends of Lolo Peak, it was apparent that much of the letter of the suggested wording remained. It had, however, been transformed from a question to a preamble. Tacked on to that preamble was a new question which, to the Friends of Lolo Peak, rendered the changes anything but minor:

Is the idea of a well planned, world class resort
in our County acceptable to you?

YES_____ or NO_____ ¹¹⁸

A letter which accompanied the revision labelled it "the result of tireless effort on both groups' part to seek resolution of conflicting views." Also expressed was LoloPERC's hope that "good planning and good compromises can come from our future meetings."¹¹⁹ No mention was made of an opportunity for the Friends of Lolo Peak to comment on these changes. Nor was any mention made of the fact that copies of the letter and the new wording had been sent by LoloPERC to the County Commissioners.

The change was seen as verification of the suspicions which many of the Friends of Lolo Peak had expressed from the beginning: "Try for a compromise and you get compromised." A ski resort proposal was dead in the water unless a developer could be coaxed to come forward and "put a check on the table." No developer had done so, and proponents were evidently convinced that none would do so unless they could be assured both that the physical and economic problems of the site were not insurmountable, and (perhaps most importantly), that the idea had been pre-approved by the community. The obvious way to get that crucial community approval was through a concept question -- preferably one loaded to garner appeal with terms like "well planned" and "world class" -- while a resort was still just an idea, not a reality. Ideas don't cost anything, and possible problems can be theorized away. It was thus no surprise that proponents would not let go of their desire for a yes or no concept question, regardless of questions about its timeliness, potential divisiveness, or appropriateness. The surprise would come four days later, at a presentation before the County Commissioners by a committee from LoloPERC.

The Friends of Lolo Peak were assured that they were free to attend, as members of the general public. Finding out about the presentation, however, was a matter of luck. A county staffer mentioned the meeting as part of another conversation with Hannes Jarka. Again Toole was reassuring: "It won't be much, just bringing the Commissioners up to speed."¹²⁰ Nevertheless three members of the Friends of Lolo Peak hastily took time off to attend the

afternoon meeting. From their seats three rows back in the audience section of the Commissioners' chambers they watched and listened with local television, radio, and newspaper reporters as the Commissioners were "brought up to speed". Their group, they heard, favored a county funded study of the issue as the first step in the process. LoloPERC, they heard, felt that this step was taken too early in the absence of a developer. The newly revised compromise wording was read and discussed with repeated suggestions that it showed the results of some "sixty combined man-hours of work."¹²¹ (This was made a bit confusing when the commissioners, with evident exasperation, found themselves shuffling through a copy of a new draft of wording, put forth that morning by county planning staff, and a copy of the untouched compromise wording brought to the meeting by the Friends of Lolo Peak.) Ann Mary Dussault later assured that she and the rest of the commissioners would have eventually come to the realization that LoloPERC was not presenting an authentic product of compromise.¹²² Confusion aside, however, it had become clear that the issue was defaulting back into politics as usual, and that the foundation of trust necessary for discussion had been irreparably weakened.

It needs to be stressed that deciding upon ballot issue wording is the responsibility of the Commissioners. Public input, regardless of its source, is officially considered a suggestion. However, when the public meeting had concluded, those in the Friends of Lolo Peak who had participated in attempts at compromise had little with which to explain what had happened. "I guess all's fair in love and

war," said one. The politics of proposing a ski resort on Lolo Peak was clearly not perceived to be love, but it doesn't stray too far from accepted liberal doctrine to see most politics as civilized, carefully choreographed war.

AUGUST 1988

What resort proponents wanted, and what was eventually given to them by the County Commissioners (LoloPERC would later claim, in fact, that the Commissioners had adopted their wording) was an election that would provide a gauge of public opinion, an up or down, yes or no poll of the idea of a ski resort. A third category which might offer voters the option of calling for further study of the issue or more time for deliberation was brushed aside. Similarly the previously discussed possibility of approving preparatory studies to be done by the county was rejected. What was left was an opinion poll, in its barest form. Towards the end of August, the commissioners announced that county voters would be given the option to vote "for" or "against" the "idea of an "economically feasible and "environmentally sound major four season destination resort near Lolo Peak."¹²³

Even those unfamiliar with the issue were startled by the final form of the ballot issue wording. Its vague but reassuring tone assured a positive outcome in November. The Friends of Lolo Peak were as discouraged as LoloPERC was elated. "Environmental soundness" and "economic feasibility" were, after all, givens, if not legal requirements. Their mention in the wording seemed a

gratuitous reflection of bias. The only reassurance available seemed to come from the fact that the vagueness of the terms left them open to later definition.

At a public hearing on an earlier draft of this wording, participants were sternly warned that their comments were to be restricted to the topic of the ballot issue wording, and told that they each would be allowed three minutes to present their position. The Commissioners and a packed hearing room heard five speakers voice their general approval. They also heard eight speakers express objections to the wording, with comments that ranged from advocacy of other wording options to expressions of a general sense of misgiving over the biased tone of the proposed wording. Yet a procedurally required hearing does not require participants to listen to the underlying community discussion. Objections seemed to fall on deaf ears as the evening wore on. "What we were looking for in the hearing," recalled a county staffer from the Rural Planning Office, "was consensus."¹²⁴ When the hearing -- which the local paper would later describe as "acrimonious" -- was over, he recalls that the feeling within the County Office Building was that consensus had indeed been attained.

Listening and discussion, at this stage, were exercises of secondary importance. Public opinion in liberal society, as C. Wright Mills has written, is perceived to be "not subject to the power of kings; they themselves are its first slaves."¹²⁵ Policy derived from a public opinion poll, it follows, is rightly and essentially grounded. It thus makes sense for the County Commissioners to solicit this

opinion. Yet this kind of solicitation presupposes the existence of a suitable "public", and the formation within that public of what can justifiably be called an opinion. This kind of conclusion, as C. Wright Mills writes,

is based upon the hope that truth and justice will come out of society as a great apparatus of free discussion. The people are presented with problems. They discuss them. They decide on them. They formulate viewpoints... But we now must recognize this as a set of images out of a fairy tale.¹²⁶

Mills argues that, in a situation of a healthy "public":

(1) Virtually as many people express opinions as receive them. (2) Public communications are so organized so that there is a chance, immediately and effectively to answer back any opinion expressed in public. Opinion formed by such discussion (3) readily finds an outlet for effective action; even against -- if necessary -- the prevailing system of authority and (4) authoritative institutions do not penetrate the public, which is more or less autonomous in its operations.¹²⁷

The public, in other words, is aggressively involved in a discourse which engages all of its members. Information flows readily and freely, and formulated opinions are given the opportunity to find "an outlet" in policy. That idealized public, to Mills, is being replaced by what he labels a "mass":

The public and the mass can readily be distinguished by their dominant modes of communication: in a community of publics discussion is the ascendant means of communication and the mass media, if they exist, simply enlarge and animate the discussion... In a mass society, the dominant type of

communication is the formal media, and the publics become media markets: all those exposed to the contents of a given mass media.¹²⁸

When blowing off steam at a carefully controlled public hearing is seen as discussion and one of the chief forums for the free expression of opinions becomes the letter to the editor section of the local newspaper (a situation that most residents of Missoula had begun to perceive as common, even laudable) there are clues that the social situation being described is more a mass than a public. The "content" of the media message, to which the disjoint public is exposed, becomes critically important to the formation of public opinion in a mass society. The importance of promoting and attending public forums gives way to the selection of images for an advertising campaign. Political discussion, as in the case of working for a compromise in suggested wording, gives way to tactical manipulation.

At times Mills carries his observations too far, allowing the reader to think that this overall degradation of discourse is the result of a calculated effort on the part of an "elite":

Small circles of men are making decisions which they need to have at least authorized by indifferent or recalcitrant people over whom they do not exercise explicit authority. So the small circle tries to manipulate these people into willing acceptance or cheerful support of their decisions or opinions -- or at least the rejection of counter-opinions.

Authority formally rests "in the people" but the power of initiation is in fact held by small circles of men. That is why the standard strategy of manipulation is to make it appear that the people, or at least a large group of them, "really made the decision." That is

why even when the authority is available, men with access to it may still prefer the secret, quieter means of manipulation¹²⁹

The people of Missoula County would not generally discover that they were to be deprived of an opportunity to postpone a decision until more information was made available. Further, they would not be given a choice between alternatives which would not commit them to an endorsement or outright rejection of an "idea". These critical decisions came with the power of initiation. Mills, as I will discuss later, mistakenly makes an implicit denial that this kind of disburdenment from decision-making is often exactly what people desire. Ultimately, people must shoulder the responsibility for the disappearance of publics. Yet Mills' usefulness in predicting the nature of politics in a mass society remains intact. Mills sees public community discussion giving way to the manipulation of opinion through media content. Decisions become privatized, based upon information presented to the members of a community through newspaper, television, and radio. The selection of what is to be presented, and what is to be withheld lie primarily with the groups involved with the issue. Mixed in with the presentation is a calculated style: the cultivation of an image, often to the denial of substance. Mills, at least partially, predicted it. The following months would see Missoula living it out.

Image grooming had been going on for some time in the issue. Prior to the adoption of ballot issue wording, however, it had not been pointedly designed to garner support. In the aftermath of the attempts to arrive at compromise ballot issue wording, Max

Kummerow wrote an account of the episode which attempted to explain his group's contention that they had been dealt with in bad faith. Published in the Missoulian under the title "Tactic Turns Trust to Dishonor", the piece outlined the attempt at dialogue, the last minute switch, and LoloPERC's presentation before the County Commissioners.¹³⁰ "Consensus building in Missoula," he wrote, "will have to wait."¹³¹ Hard sought after by the "environmentalists in the Friends of Lolo Peak" who were "genuinely concerned about reducing community conflicts," it had been spoiled by the "consultants, accountants, and attorneys in LoloPERC."¹³² This writing, in addition to portraying a series of events, conveys an image of a particular set of people. The Friends of Lolo Peak were regular folks, concerned with the environment and the community, who, like everybody else, would rather "spend their spare time fishing."¹³³ Shocked and disappointed at the recent turn of events, they were also sure that others would feel the same.

LoloPERC, predictably, did not. In two letters to the editor they tried to mend the damage to their public image. Backed into a corner they fought back with subtle falsehood and partial truth designed to discredit the Friends of Lolo Peak. Accusing Kummerow of "overzealous misstatement of the record" the letter went on to claim "at the first public meeting regarding the draft language LoloPERC presented the commissioners with the compromise language and with LoloPERC's proposed language. The Friends of Lolo Peak who were fully represented at this meeting even spoke on behalf of the language and presented their own revision."¹³⁴ The

boldness of those claims would be apparent only to the few who were intimately familiar and concerned with the details of issue. The full truth that "representation" was actually unexpected presence in the audience, that LoloPERC did not present compromise language, and that the "revision" which the Friends presented and spoke on behalf of was the untouched product of the meetings of both groups was unimportant. The subtle falsehood of their letter's story would be too complex to contest before a voting population uninterested in such minute details. And the letter's publication allowed LoloPERC an opportunity paint an image of themselves as the victims of uncalled-for and slanderous allegations, an image more rightly deserved after the letter's publication by Kummerow.

Public sympathy however, would not be enough. In another letter to the editor, LoloPERC's Mars Scott strove to fix the "wrong picture" that the public had been given of his group: "(LoloPERC has) no financial interest in this project and all members have spent countless, selfless hours working on this proposal."¹³⁵ What's more, he added: "We have asked them to become a part of our group, they apparently are more comfortable as a voice in the wilderness. We will continue to work with them as we can, but we believe that we are just as concerned as anyone about maintaining quality of life in Missoula."¹³⁶ LoloPERC was repainting their picture. Understandably, they wanted an image of generosity and civic concern to arise. Combined with previous attempts to portray the Friends as belligerent hardliners, it was sure to succeed in the important task of winning votes.

SEPTEMBER 1988

Even the Missoulian got into the act, albeit with more subtlety. From their position of editorial authority they issued an opinion which stated:

Anyone who understood the process a developer must go through to develop something like an internationally competitive destination resort on national forest land in Montana wouldn't worry about November's referendum being misconstrued as an official seal of approval. No such project would get off the ground unless a developer could prove his project were environmentally, financially and technically sound, and compatible with local land-use plans. Unfortunately too few people understand or trust the system. For some the stakes in November's election may seem higher than they really are.¹³⁷

The implication was that anyone dissatisfied with the election or its wording did not understand the process or the system. It allowed the paper's editors to portray opposing concerns as exaggerated. Those who agreed with the Missoulian and had no reservations about the upcoming ballot process (a group which, for reasons such as general apathy which will be discussed later, would consist of the majority of the population) were permitted to consider themselves to be among the few who "understood" and "trusted the system".

The important terms here are often repeated: "image", "portray", "painting" and "picture". Clearly, and with increasing frequency, the discussion was being skewed away from matters of substance. The issues, as Mills might have predicted, became the "image" that was being "portrayed". Which group was telling the

truth? Which was more knowledgeable? Less belligerent? More like us? As Paul Corcoran writes,

(I)dentification is a form of persuasion aimed at gaining a desired response from an audience, even if it does not require the resolution of controversial propositions or the mastery of new subject matter. The objective is the acceptance in the listener's mind of the coincidence between conventional values and the speaker (or group), or, conversely, the lack of coincidence between these values and the speaker's opponent.¹³⁸

That there was no general objection to this kind of calculated issue-dodging shows a kind of lazy acceptance, within the people of the region, of a crippled state of public discourse. Identification was easier, one could choose which group one identified with, never have to master more complicated subject matter, and be assured that there was a trustworthy bureaucratic system in place out there to take care of the technical details. Open and candid discussion of the issue was being buried under a mound of slanted data (carefully delivered) and distracting side issues.

OCTOBER 1988

The real campaign refined this situation, but did not improve it. According to LoloPERC's Bill Worf, a large part of the rationale for presenting the issue as a yes or no question on the idea of a resort was to gauge the "philosophical opposition" to the idea (rather than attempt to understand it).¹³⁹ It is, however, difficult to conceive of a campaign composed of media messages and image cultivation which can adequately address questions of philosophy.

Proponents instead produced two clear types of reasoning as the issue went into its final month. The first was that a strong quantitative case could be made for the project according to their collection of numbers and figures. The second was that qualitative concerns could be dealt with by cultivation of image and by a reassurance of the benign nature of the election.

With over \$12,000 to spend, resort proponents launched a campaign that used billboards, television, and newspapers to spread the data they had prepared to demonstrate the benefits of a ski area. It would bring up to 10,000 skiers each spending \$120 per day. It would have 4700 feet of vertical drop and 5200 total acres. None who had followed the issue were unfamiliar with these figures except that often they were now presented with painstaking care to allow them to seem reasonable and acceptable. Ten thousand people, for example, was described as the number that would fit into the University's Washington-Grizzly Stadium. Further, they claimed, that number would only be on the slopes for 16 days a year. Fifty two hundred acres is less than the projected timber harvest on the mountain.¹⁴⁰ The need for verification of these figures and for more detailed information was reassuringly acknowledged and dismissed. LoloPERC, like others involved with the issue "agree(d),... these and many other issues need to be carefully studied."¹⁴¹

The first of these careful studies, the Lolo National Forest's Interdisciplinary Team Report, had been in the works since early in the year. Requests for preliminary results were met with bureaucratic foot dragging until the document was publicly released

on October 21, eighteen days prior to the election. It was first heralded that same morning in a LoloPERC newspaper advertisement touting the results of a Forest Service study which concluded that "No Known Environmental Barriers" existed to resort development.¹⁴² The careful accuracy with which these words were chosen shielded the fact that the study had taken only a cursory look at possible site-specific environmental problems. Indirect effects of development such as air pollution and groundwater contamination were not considered by the report -- falling into the category of "cumulative effects and impacts to private lands."¹⁴³ Nonetheless, resort proponents were jubilant. "It doesn't look like there's anything that can't be mitigated with proper planning," commented Mars Scott.¹⁴⁴

Indeed, according to the assessment, it didn't. The report was put together as the summarized product of detailed reports by agency specialists. A Forest Service soil scientist who studied the area concluded that "if sensitive areas are crossed with ski runs and trails with widths as little as 100 to 200 feet there is approximately 85% probability that slump will occur within 15 years of development."¹⁴⁵ He was summarized in the report: "Slope stability will be a significant concern during review of a site specific proposal."¹⁴⁶ Likewise boundaries of the existing Carleton Ridge Research Natural Area were described a bit differently in the summary report. Currently sized "to preserve the minimum area necessary for research purposes (and) avoid conflict with potential ski area development", the Deputy Regional Forester (and co-chair of

the Northern Region RNA Committee) "strongly recommended" that the boundaries be expanded into Section 23 (which lies to the west of Section 24).¹⁴⁷ The layout of Section 23 makes it an inevitable site for an important ski run in any developed resort, yet the report glossed over this possible problem. Confidently claiming that there "is potential to modify the existing RNA boundary on the west line of Section 24 to do something more compatible for both uses," the summary did not go on to explain how trimming one of the most critical boundaries of a Research Natural Area might be a compatible action with its designated purpose of protecting that area.¹⁴⁸ Further, when an agency biologist studying the effects of development on elk populations cited a recent count in the area of between 100 and 125 animals, he went on to carefully point out that this number was of "counted elk... actual numbers are no doubt higher." Yet he was summarized in the study by a section which stated that elk population "counts show 100 to 125 animals using this range."¹⁴⁹ These kinds of careful omissions, selective concentrations, and structured writing were designed to allow only one side of the story to get through. Despite stated neutrality, the Forest Service was again showing itself, in the writing of this report, to favor the economic growth potential of a proposed ski area.

When the Forest Service trains its efforts on a study of environmental feasibility, it is often assumed that the technical nature of its specialization will produce objective results. When they claim, in other words, that "no fatal flaw has been

identified"¹⁵⁰ the typical response is belief, not a willingness to look for omissions, glossed over problems, or to search for sections which reduce real concerns to bizarre technical considerations. Yet anyone concerned, for example, with the fate of wildlife in the area would not find that the development might affect their numbers. Rather they would discover that game animals would be "impacted if hunters were allowed to ride ski lifts, because of an expected increase in the number of hunters."(emphasis added)¹⁵¹ Those concerned with fish populations would find that "Mill Creek fisheries could be impacted by winter water removal."(emphasis added)¹⁵² Someone interested in the effect of development on hikers, skiers and campers would find that "The majority of recreationists accessing Lolo Peak and Carleton Lake are day users."(emphasis added)¹⁵³ Further, the many who take in the view of the mountain as part of their daily life might be comforted to discover (in a section entitled "Visuals") that:

The Lolo Forest Plan would allow a ski area to visually dominate the landscape, but would require it to borrow from existing form, line, color and texture. A ski area designed to meet these requirements would avoid straight linear patterns. Lift towers and related clearing should be located so that clearings are varied or so that trees screen the clearings. Towers and chairs should be painted colors that blend with the surroundings.¹⁵⁴

Many people, upon reading this passage briefly wonder about the meaning of borrowing form, line, color and texture from a mountain. Some, in perhaps logical continuation of thinking, wonder whether skiers will be asked to forego their traditional day-glo

pinks, greens, and yellows in favor of colors that "blend with the surroundings" -- asking a question only slightly more ludicrous than the passage which prompted it. What's important to note, however, is that this and the previous passages are constructed to both acknowledge and disarm objections. The threat to game populations is spelled out in the Forest Service's report, but it is done in such a way that it defies the reader to envision it. The verb "impacted" is a deliberate choice. Its vagueness and passiveness making it preferable to other options such as "threatened" or "diminished". "Recreationists accessing" an area purposefully does not conjure up images of real experience portrayed by the activities of people hiking, skiing and camping. Further, when residents of the surrounding valleys gazes up at Lolo Peak, are they (as the report implies) doing so merely to reflect on a favorable combination of "form, line, color, and texture"? Acknowledgement leads to the dubious conclusion that preservation of these aspects will retain the essence of Lolo Peak's "Visuals".

Intended to be "useful to the voters" as a source of objective information, the final Forest Service report, in selecting a diminished scope of study, in masking the conclusions of its component reports, and in using the kind of language previously described, instead reveals writing purposefully designed for political persuasion.¹⁵⁵ George Orwell, in an essay titled "Politics and the English Language," points out that in recent times "political speech and writing are largely the defense of the indefensible... Thus political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question-

begging, and sheer cloudy vagueness."¹⁵⁶ By describing a situation in ways that make it difficult to visualize, the brutality of the situation can be overlooked. Orwell used as examples acts with a stark and obvious brutality -- examples derived from countries at war, or governments involved in the suppression of a portion of their population. However, the more subtle brutality of wiping out a population of native fish by depriving them of the water they need to survive through the winter is just as gratuitously covered up by calling it "impacting fisheries". On an even broader level, the brutality of defining Lolo Peak as an asset, and constraining discussion within the economic parameters within which this assessment makes sense, is masked throughout the language of the Service's historic dealings with the issue. This kind of language has been labelled "loaded" -- marked by the capacity to block thought, black out reality, trigger automatic reactions, and perhaps most importantly, to destroy the possibility of discussion. It is very useful in the creation and perpetuation of a war mentality. When politics is also seen as war, the utility of loaded language is increased.

Given this definition, it is easy to see this language and style in the final campaign. Advertisements by proponents comparing the number of people skiing on a mountain to those attending a football game blocks the thought of 10,000 people rushing through the city to inhabit the Lolo Valley. Similar claims that wildlife is actually helped by ski resorts ("ski run clearing in other areas has been proven beneficial to wildlife") black out the reality of a disrupted

ecosystem.¹⁵⁷ Proponents, claiming that the purpose of the ballot was to allow public involvement offered a revealing explanation of what they felt to be the limits of that involvement ("The ballot is to determine if the Missoula Community would support a resort before determining if and how it could be done."), pointedly oblivious to the impossibility of divorcing questions of "if" and "how" from the public discussion of the "idea of a resort."¹⁵⁸ Perhaps most evident, readers of LoloPERC's campaign literature were told that a ski resort was just part of a deeper "Real Issue":

If the community votes AGAINST further study of the concept, the inescapable conclusion will be that many people are anti-growth and against economic development.¹⁵⁹

Few automatic reactions are more easily manipulated than the bias within the liberal tradition towards economic growth. That a negative outcome might not be perceived "inescapably" as a collective anti-growth sentiment is neither important nor necessarily logical. The possibility is all that is necessary to lend strength to the claim.

Perhaps the most concentrated energy at blocking thought on the issue was put behind the effort to downplay the significance of the election. Voters were repeatedly reminded by project proponents that this election was nothing to worry about. Again and again they read that the vote was "nonbinding" and "only a vote on the idea of a resort development."¹⁶⁰ Hand in hand with this assurance went the claim that the vote was "not a request for tax dollars" and "does not raise taxes for Missoula residents."¹⁶¹ These claims, among other

things, conceal the fact that a positive vote would cause the County's Rural Planning Office to "spend approximately \$50,000 in one year on the resort issue."¹⁶² Indeed taxes would not be raised. Instead, this money would come from planning project reallocation. Voters, in other words, would be binding themselves to a reallocation of county funds away from ongoing planning in other areas where real growth was making it a necessity. It was technically correct, and critically important to proponents' public appeal, to stress that LoloPERC would not be receiving any public funds. It is perhaps a measure of their success that many voters were further led to believe that no questions of fiscal importance were involved with the issue.

In the end, proponents were joined by even more supporters in their effort to portray a vote for the idea as merely a vote for continued investigation -- "for further study." A LoloPERC advertisement which claimed:

A vote for keeps Missoula's options open and doesn't commit us to anything.¹⁶³

Sounded much like a Missoulian editorial (curiously titled "Vote Yes on Lolo Peak Study"):

A vote for the question is a vote to keep Missoula's options open. It simply means you're willing to consider the merits of a project, should a serious proposal ever surface.¹⁶⁴

Which echoed the reassuring tones of a Chamber of Commerce appeal:

The election will be a valid expression of the people's willingness to *consider* a potential ski area... (A) yes vote would only send a message... The Chamber

encourages individuals who are willing to consider a proposal in the Lolo Peak area to vote yes even if they have reservations about certain specifics.¹⁶⁵

The vote, of course, was not about studying or considering the idea. That option was rejected by both the county and LoloPERC during the wording debate in the summer. The vote was about approval or disapproval of the idea of a ski resort. Studies, like the one put forth by the Forest Service, would only follow indirectly as part of the machinery set in motion when voters first gave their approval to the much broader issue of an "idea".

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Given this kind of campaign it stands to reason that the group of hikers ascending the mountain less than a month before the election were confused and hesitant when it came to talking about the issue. None knew what the county would do with the outcome of the election. The things they wanted to know, where it was to be built, who was going to pay for it, what its environmental effects might be, were still the subject of conjecture. Against what seemed to be a wealth of information about economic gain, skier days and vertical drop, stood confusing reassurances that the state of being partially informed was acceptable, even beneficial. It was, after all, a poll designed to gauge philosophical reaction to an idea. It was non-binding, and people were voting for a study.

Yet it must be stressed that this campaign was not unusual. These attempts to comfort and reassure the county's voters were not directly intended to mislead. Rather they were designed to block

thought on the issue and stifle the inquisitive discussion whose time had not yet come. In the atmosphere created by these carefully structured assurances, objections to the idea as well as any real discussion of the referendum went nowhere. Both seemed unnecessary, even premature. Further, whether the removal of loaded political language from the campaign and doing away with questionable tactics would have made a large difference in the electoral outcome is doubtful. The real point is that on an issue of local importance control of the discussion had left the hands of the people to whom it mattered. Once again, Paul Corcoran's writings on the political use of the media rings true:

(T)he intention (of a political media campaign) is not to stimulate thought but to prevent it; not to communicate information, but to trivialize it, not to persuade but to placate and entertain, not to move but to enlarge quiescence; ultimately, not to use language at all.¹⁶⁶

Corcoran writes of politics on a national level. It is particularly distressing that local indifference allowed his predictions to be borne out on the community level in Missoula.

The Friends of Lolo Peak were also busy during the campaign. However, with only \$400 to spend, their television, radio, and newspaper coverage was limited to news items and equal-time bound feature stories. Money was spent on yard signs urging people to vote against the "costly fantasy" of a Lolo Resort, and flyers were passed door to door. In these flyers they worked in bits of their own loaded rhetoric ("LoloPERC, the group behind this misguided

fantasy") and went on to urge voters to consider the possible effects of a resort proposal.¹⁶⁷ They warned county voters that a positive vote would indeed have binding consequences and attempted to raise the issue of concern for the community's relation to the mountain itself:

Lolo Peak is Missoula's most visible wilderness focal point... The immediate presence of Lolo Peak binds our community together through common reflection on wilderness.

To deface Lolo Peak with mogul runs, high speed chair lifts, condominiums, and chalets for the wealthy would destroy its orienting and enduring character. Lolo Peak has an inherent right to remain undeveloped.¹⁶⁸

Expanded beyond the confines of a door to door flyer, many in the group felt that it was the strongest point they had to make. Yet few in the voting public would learn of that point. Despite the fact that numerous volunteers spent the days before the election distributing over 12,000 of the flyers to the doorsteps of people in the county, many went into the election never realizing that there was an organized opposition to a positive vote.

In the end, the referendum fell far short of its goal. A number of people were sold on the trustful complacency pitched by LoloPERC, the Missoulian, and the Chamber of Commerce. Others grew more angry and frustrated as the intensity of the billboards, television, and radio advertisements increased. Still others never had any doubts. Here was an opportunity to promote the utilization of another of Missoula's "resources", and to speed the arrival of the

day when the community would see its next era of economic growth and security.

Most reactions, however, had one thing in common. They reflected a lack of a good public understanding. In general, people had a sketchy grasp of the details of the issue on which they were about to vote. Everyone had heard of the idea, and everyone had an opinion which they were prepared to transfer into a vote, but what the results of that vote would entail, few could answer. The ramifications for public policy were a mystery. This situation, in which voters are active but disenfranchised, and in which serious individual input is stifled, is precisely the situation deplored by Corcoran. It makes the active participation that Bellah, Sullivan, John Dewey, and others call for with the hope of tempering the effects of liberal individualism seem fanciful. And the sanctioned procedure which helped to bring the situation about showed itself to be an inadequate means of discussing the publicly held commitment to a thing described by Heidegger and demonstrated by Tollefson.

On election day over 34,000 residents of Missoula County turned out to cast their vote. Nearly 22,000 cast their vote in favor of an economically feasible and environmentally sound resort while almost 13,000 voted against it. The overall 62 to 37 percent division reflected a stronger appeal for the idea in the Lolo Valley and a weak general approval in the towns on the northern edge of the county. Far from producing community consensus and a sense of direction, the vote instead created then measured the degree of

division that exists on the issue. To the limited satisfaction of many of the Friends of Lolo Peak, it provided no clear mandate for pursuing the development of the peak. Also (and rather ironically), because of the slantedness of the wording towards a positive vote, it translated into a situation where almost 4 out of 10 people in the community were on record as unconditionally opposed to a resort. The remaining six fell into a wide span ranging from skepticism to blind acceptance. At the same time, proponents were provided with overall results which allowed them to keep the ball rolling on their project. The county government began work to construct a planning process to be implemented should a developer step forward. LoloPERC, meanwhile, reorganized and reconstructed their charter to portray themselves as "watchdogs" of future development.¹⁶⁹

Questions continue to arise concerning the election, as opponents wait for the shadowy figure of a developer to appear, and proponents, such as Missoula's Former Mayor Lovegrove, look anxiously at the results and wonder what can be done about the county's "no growth element."¹⁷⁰ The shallowness of the former Mayor's question is typical of much of the post-event interpretation and analysis. Meaningful questions about the adequacy and appropriateness of the election fall further to the background in its aftermath. These, however, remain as the most important ones. Lessons remain to be learned from the events which led to the election results in November, lessons which perhaps might lead to a sensitive resolution of this issue as it continues to unfold.

Conclusion

In many ways the collective decision made by the voters on November 8 was perfunctory, the outcome, once wording was chosen, was not in doubt. Proponents, eager to cite the need for "public involvement" as their rationalization for supporting a referendum, would emerge victorious.¹⁷¹ All that was in question was the margin of that victory. Public involvement, however, was limited to checking a preferred box, for or against. Concealed behind the illusory neatness of that private binary choice was a real decision making process, whether it was proper to place the issue on the ballot at all, and how to phrase it. These preliminary decisions were as close as the community came to a "discussion of what it is and where it is going." The actual campaign was marked by a stifling of real discourse and produced, for all of its effort, a measured division of the community. The results of the election, far from being conclusive, provide no clear direction, but rather frustration on both the part of the idea's proponents and opponents.

Liberalism often seems to offer no better way to make choices. Individuals cannot be coerced into taking more of an active role in social decisions, and the privacy of the final decision making process, epitomized by an anonymous choice behind drawn curtains, is a privilege rightly protected. That the choice itself is severely limited, and that the process leading up to it is severely flawed is often accepted as regrettably necessary: "That's life in a democracy." Such a mindset closes out the possibility that real alternatives exist. Never considered is the fact that division isn't an

unavoidable by-product of decision-making -- that, in fact, greater unity may instead arise. Left undiscussed is that economic stability needn't be bought at the price of social and environmental integrity. This impoverished view of social interaction and of the relationship between people and their environment is pervasive, yet not insurmountable. Ironically, the nature of the issue of building a ski resort on Lolo Peak points to this. Stepping back to analyze the issue allows a clear picture of what went wrong, and why. This allows for the development of an alternative vision which provides theoretical hope and practical recommendations.

C. Wright Mills writes of a transformation of the public in modern politics. To Mills the public has become lost, replaced by a mass which bears and executes the responsibility for decision-making in liberal society. John Dewey similarly refers to a public which has become "eclipsed," and "so bewildered that it cannot find itself."¹⁷² Evidence of this bewilderment, brought out in Dewey's theory, is reflected again and again in the reality of the Lolo Peak ballot issue. He cites a growing apathy among voters, reflected in this issue not just by a low electoral turnout but by a general lack of knowledge of the details of the issue. He cites the growing influence of interested "bosses" or middlemen who "fill the void between government and the public" as a part of the machinery with which electoral choices are designed. "As if," he writes, "the ability to choose between two (sides) were a high exercise of political freedom."¹⁷³ He further cites a willing abdication of authority to technical specialists whose rightful expertise "is not shown in

framing and executing policies but in discovering and making known the facts upon which the former depend."¹⁷⁴

Not only was the latter reflected in the pre-election reliance upon the expert judgement of the Forest Service and consultants like Myles Rademan, it continues to be the case, with the people of the county in the position of waiting for experts (some of whom have already shown their bias) to determine the "economic feasibility" and "environmental soundness" of any specific proposal. To the extent that the public is shut out from this solicitation of expert input and subsequent policy-making, society, Dewey says, will suffer,

No government by experts in which the masses do not have the chance to inform the experts as to their needs can be anything but an oligarchy managed by the few... Enlightenment must proceed in ways which force the administrative specialists to take account of (the public's) needs.¹⁷⁵

These observations, however, are merely a description of symptoms. Apathy, voter alienation, and reliance upon experts are merely signs of the eclipse of the public. That eclipse arises from particularly modern sources.

First there is the complexity of the many issues before a modern community.

The ramification of the issues before the public is so wide and intricate, the technical matters involved are so specialized, the details are so many and shifting, that the public cannot for any length of time identify and hold itself. It is not that there is no public, no large body of persons having a common interest in the consequences of social transactions.

There is too much public, a public too diffused and scattered and intricate in composition.¹⁷⁶

Thus there is a need for expertise. However this expertise must be held in check -- constantly beholden to the public it was designed to serve and inform, not to rule. When procedure dominates decision-making and reliance upon "the system" of experts displaces responsibility for active community guidance, there are signs that specialized expertise has overstepped its bounds.

Secondly, the eclipse of the public is caused by the modern existence of numerous "competitors with effective political interest" among members of the general public:

The increase in number, variety, and cheapness of amusements represents a powerful diversion from political concern. The members of an inchoate public have too many ways of enjoyment, as well as work, to give much thought to organization into an effective public. Man is a consuming and sportive animal, as well as a political one. What is significant is that access to means of amusement has been rendered easy and cheap beyond anything known in the past. The present era of "prosperity" may not be enduring. But the movie, radio, cheap reading matter and motor car with all they stand for have come to stay. That they did not originate in deliberate desire to divert attention from political interests does not lessen their effectiveness in that direction. The political elements in the constitution of the human being, those having to do with citizenship, are crowded to one side.¹⁷⁷

Dewey wrote this in 1926, well before the popularization of television and the construction of intricate systems of credit which make "recreational shopping" a reality. His comments are thus dated by the modes of diversion and consumption which he omits, but they

are no less incisive in their overall message. It should also be noted that the privacy involved in each of these "diversions" is a key factor in their popularity. In an individualistic society, television allows for the amusing passage of time while making no inordinate demands on the consumer. He or she is not obliged to acquire a skill or share in the activity with others in order to partake of the enjoyment of a TV program. All that is needed is that they enjoy and learn to partake of the abundant commodities of consumption which technology has made available -- a task with which the introversion of individualism encourages people willingly to comply.

This begins to explain the problems with Mills' analysis of the modern political situation. When he assigns blame for the degradation of public discourse, he implies that there are strata of "elites" consciously working to keep the greater public distracted by political sleight-of-hand and consumption. Dewey, to his credit, denies that the distraction of consumption is deliberate, but even this does not go far enough. Taking up with consumption is entered into voluntarily. Infatuation with its private distractions is what compels the public to seek the disburdenment from obligations for social interaction that experts, procedure, and mechanized modes of interpersonal discourse can offer. In other words, while the Lolo Peak ballot issue exercise showed the degree to which the public of Missoula county has become "eclipsed", it should not be assumed that this condition was forced upon the people of the region. The enticements of consumption are considered a fair trade for the

distractions it creates, which Dewey, in turn, portrays as the source of the public's problems.

The enticement of consumption also explains the infatuation with the notion of a major destination ski area on the slopes of Lolo Peak:

The thing to be remembered is that this cheapened and multiplied access to amusement is the product of the machine age, intensified by the business tradition which causes provision of the means for any enjoyable passing of time to be one of the most profitable of occupations.¹⁷⁹

Dewey predicts, in other words, the bold claim about the economic importance of tourism that Myles Rademan would make over sixty years later. Specifically, Dewey is saying that more profit can be derived from the production of the enjoyable passage of time through a ski resort than any other combined use of the mountain's resources. Lolo Peak has limited potential as a source of timber. As a wilderness attraction its ability to encourage consumption is even less. Yet as a ski resort, surrounded by a base area of condominiums, restaurants, hotels, shops, and bars, its potential is almost limitless.

This raises the point that the activity of skiing, in fact, is secondary in importance to the occupations created by the purchasing and consumption that accompanies it. Few deny that the majority of these jobs will require low levels of satisfaction and skill. Even the Chamber of Commerce's David Owen, one of the staunchest proponents of this kind of development, would label its resultant employment to be no more engaging than "a second source

of income, or work after school."¹⁷⁹ This is not to be lightly dismissed. With increasing frequency modern society is replacing occupations that involve the engagement of a skill or a craft with jobs that offer little justification aside from a paycheck. As greater society levels itself to the point where all occupations are viewed this way, Hannah Arendt points out that employment soon loses its sense of grounding within tradition, or of significance within a larger social or historical context. This affects the whole of society, with time and energy within such a society "never spent in anything but consumption... (T)he more time left to (people in this kind of society), the greedier and more craving their appetites."¹⁸⁰ She goes on to paint a grim picture of the results:

That these appetites become more sophisticated, so that consumption is no longer restricted to the necessities but, on the contrary, mainly concerned with the superfluities of life, does not change the character of this society, but harbors the grave danger that eventually no object in the world will be safe from consumption and annihilation through consumption.¹⁸¹

Indeed it is difficult to imagine a more vivid confirmation of Arendt's theory than a "signpost of the seasons" being eyed as a "huge resource" ready for consumptive transformation to a ski area.

But this point, where the brutal transformativeness of modern society becomes clear, is also the point at which an alternative becomes evident -- an alternative which holds within it the compass to locating Dewey's eclipsed public. "Attachments," he writes, offer a foundation upon which to fix a public:

Only deep issues or those which can be made to

appear such can find a common denominator among all the shifting and unstable relationships (of the modern age)... (attachments) are bred in tranquil stability; they are nourished in constant relationships. Acceleration of mobility disturbs them at their root. And without abiding attachments associations are too shifting and shaken to permit a public readily to locate and identify itself.¹⁸²

Attachments rise above the transient affection associated with consumption. They provide a stable source of guidance for the members of a community in dealing with the numerous and modern issues which regularly press before it. Attachments need to be cultivated, "bred in stability" and "nourished in relationships", but they cannot be contrived:

Intellectual instrumentalities for the formation of an organized public are more inadequate than its overt means. The ties which hold men together in action are numerous, tough and subtle. But they are invisible and intangible.¹⁸³

You can nurture attachments but not consciously create them. They are "tough" but elusive. It is, however, an elusiveness which offers clues.

One clue is to look to sources of lasting relationships, those which transcend the shifting and instability of modern ones. A relationship, for example, between the people of a community and the place in which they live. In this kind of relationship is a constancy which carries across generations and social and ideological fluctuations. It lends commonality not only to those living in a place but also to those who lived before and those yet to come. Out of it springs an attachment upon which a public might be

fixed -- from which arises the "ties which hold men together in action." It is not a new idea. Hannah Arendt is more explicit:

(T)he term "public" signifies the world itself, in so far as it is common to all of us and distinguished from our privately owned place in it... To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time.¹⁸⁴

Modern "mass society" to Arendt has become unbearable because the world has "lost its power to relate and separate" the people who live in it. This, however, points to a problem with Arendt's metaphor, not the world. In Arendt's usage, "the world" refers primarily to human-created entities. Left out is the natural world that surrounds, and inevitably shapes, the inorganic one. This kind of omission leaves little to wonder about why this created world has lost its power of relation. Attachment, according to Dewey, is not created, it is not the product of instrumentalities. Rather it arises of itself -- naturally -- and is cultivated by those who experience it. The world has not so much lost its relating power as those within it have lost their ability to recognize its source.

Yet that source is still recognized at times. When it is, it stands out clearly, as in the following passage:

We are told by those in the curious business of foretelling that this year will bring recession, aftershocks of the tremblor in the stock market, upheaval, wars and rumors of war. Probably it will. We are told that these things will somehow worsen our lives, and probably they will.

You and I though shouldn't be afraid. You and I are

lucky enough to draw the forces of our lives from more than this maelstrom of events. For us (the) beginning of a new year is different. We are in a place where it is possible to unwrap this package of 366 fresh new days with more optimism than the rest of the world is allowed.¹⁸⁵

The author, Missoulian columnist Dick Manning, is speaking of an attachment that he and the people of the region share with their place. He goes on to describe a January run that took him past significant spots in the city, ending with a walk over the Higgins Avenue Bridge in the center of town:

Last summer I crossed the bridge one evening as the sun's rays careened off the river to splash Jumbo and Sentinel in a gold glow. I will always remember that evening on a bridge when I came to believe that it was possible to love a place.

It was that revelation that makes it possible now, at least for a minute or two, to ignore the rest of our world's gloom. We have this place that can touch our hearts. We have the people here. We have the placid wisdom of a river's flow to help us order our lives.¹⁸⁶

An attachment to a place that resonates within the individuals of a region, tying them together and weaving itself into their common experiences. At the same time this relationship lends a stability which transcends Dewey's "shifting and unstable relationships," replacing it with the "wisdom of a river's flow." The description is an echo of the historian's "Accept Missoula and you'll find your values changing... Important things become unimportant."

The description is also a hint of the sentiment that lies barely beneath the surface of some of the earlier-quoted sources of opposition to a ski resort on Lolo Peak. A letter appears in the local

newspaper that describes the writer's experience of looking up to Lolo Peak to "see that all was right with the world regardless of the problems and difficulties we humans have down here."¹⁸⁷ A columnist describes the way in which the season's signs on the mountain are shared between those in the surrounding community. Lolo Peak, like the river in Manning's column, is a symbol for the attachment of the people of this region to their place. It's an attachment that is critical, for it helps to center both their private and social lives, allowing for the "location and identification" of a vigorous public -- the kind of public that can get around the bewilderment and eclipse that Dewey described and the Missoula community, at times, exemplified.

Nurturing this attachment, allowing it to take hold and grow within the people of a region is a process that Dewey says requires "stability" and "constant relationships". It defies simple methodology or "instrumentalization". You can't, in other words, write a "how to" manual for community attachment to a place. You can, however, gesture to it and celebrate it. When twelve people who had lived their lives below Lolo Peak took two days to climb it, it turned into an experience that two would record, independently, seventy years later. When Greg Tollefson writes of climbing Lolo Peak, and the things he sees, feels, and hears at the top, he also speaks of the "generations of Western Montanans" who had done likewise. Mere reflection upon the mountain and the things that live on it allows a sense that there is something which transcends the temporary gloom which often grips members of the human

community. Each of these reactions bears a social component. They are, in a sense, celebrations, achieved through the familiarity of a life lived beneath the mountain, or the experience of a strenuous hike up the mountain, or the knowledge of the wildlife on the mountain. There's no guarantee that experiencing a place in this way will result in the attachment which has been described. However, one can be fairly certain that this relationship cannot be bought more cheaply and easily, or privately -- through lift rides to the top of the mountain, for example. As Dewey points out " acceleration of mobility" disturbs public attachments at their roots.

Identifying and describing this attachment should not be confused with providing methodology for its attainment or cultivation. Neither the river nor the mountain, as sources of attachment or orientation were contrived. Tollefson's friends who discuss the mountain over coffee downtown didn't decide, as a group, to watch Lolo Peak for the season's changes. It just happened. The mountain made them choose it as a topic of conversation. Similarly the river compels the people within the community to notice it, to become aware of the way in which it "orders their lives." To learn from the placid wisdom of the river or the permanence of mountains, one can do no more than to be ready to experience it on its own terms, through the practice of fishing its banks, walking upon it, or just quietly contemplating. It must be done in a way that permits the thing in itself to impress itself as itself as part of an experience. Attachment is bred in this kind of quiet stability which allows it to come forth.

Still it might be asked whether these attachments could not be experienced and shared in a thing like a ski resort. Won't people lifted to the top of the mountain witness the inspiring beauty of the surrounding countryside? Won't the people of the community at its base still be able to experience its orienting power? The construction of a series of lifts on Lolo Peak would encourage greatly increased numbers of people to travel its slopes. However, it is virtually certain that the quality of their experience would be greatly diminished. The theologian Paul Tillich captures a common modern emptiness in the exposure to nature when he notes the "exuberances of his contemporaries", who, for example:

...rush in their cars to some famous view and exclaim "How lovely!" -- referring, no doubt, not to the view, but to their own appreciation of beauty. What blasphemy to the glory of nature! And consequently of the divine ground, the glory of which sounds through the glory of nature.¹⁸⁸

To those who experience a place like a mountain in this way there would be no feeling for the significance of cloud location, sun intensity, and wind that others who had come before them had felt.

Introducing chair lifts, midway lodges, snowpackers, and snow making into the experience of nature can nullify it. That the experience is unmissed by many in modern society merely proves another of Tillich's points:

Many of us have lost the ability to live with nature. We fill it with the noise of empty talk, instead of listening to its many voices, and, through them, to the voiceless music of the universe. Separated from soil by machine we speed through nature, catching glimpses

of it; but never comprehending its greatness or feeling its power.¹⁸⁹

Speed, carelessness, and the distraction of the human-created technology which surrounds modern life combine to estrange people from nature, preventing an opportunity for them to become aware of the "divine ground" in which truth is revealed in the things around us. The loss, to Tillich's thinking, is overwhelming.

The loss, however, would not only be to ski tourists. Those in the region below would have traded the mountain in its natural state for the employment opportunities of a resort would also be deprived. From the trade they would earn jobs which require little skill, and which, aside from money, typically produce a low level of inherent satisfaction for the worker. Even if successful, to Hannah Arendt, there is:

the danger that such a society, dazzled by the abundance of its growing fertility and caught in the smooth functioning of a never-ending process, would no longer be able to recognize its own futility.

The futility, she continues, of a society which:

does not fix or realize itself in any permanent subject which endures after its labor is past.¹⁹⁰

Heidegger too warns of a society which perceives itself surrounded only with things of its own making, or resources waiting to be utilized:

(The) danger attests itself in two ways. As soon as what is unconcealed no longer concerns man even as object but does so rather exclusively as resource, and man in the midst of objectlessness is nothing but the orderer of the resource, then he comes to the brink of a precipitous fall; that is, he

comes to the point where he himself will have to be taken as resource. Meanwhile man, precisely as the one so threatened, exalts himself to the posture of lord of the earth. In this way the impression comes to prevail that everything man encounters exists only insofar as it is his construct. This illusion gives rise in turn to one final delusion: It seems as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself.¹⁹¹

To claim that the people of Missoula County will be doomed to "a life of futility" or that they will come to see themselves only as resources merely because a ski resort is located south of town is to overstate the problem. Yet the social tendencies which lead these authors to their dire predictions are evident in the proposal to change Lolo Peak from its current condition to a ski resort. Further, the loneliness and futility that Heidegger and Arendt write about, along with the growing social insensitivity to deeper meaning that concerns Tillich are all common complaints and problems that vex members of contemporary society. Their predominance causes people to turn to the distractions of consumption for relief. Carelessly, or perhaps desperately, building a resort on Lolo Peak does not mean that the regional community will be sealed in with these problems. However, it would be another brick in the wall which separates that community from possible solutions -- the wall which, likewise eclipses the public from itself.

To find itself the public must foster the commitments which give rise to the attachments which pull it out of its eclipse. These attachments, to a place, for example, are fostered by practice. Small practices such as observing wildlife, fishing, hiking and camping which require from the participant a degree of skill in execution,

allow the familiarity of a commitment to come forth. These practices draw people out of themselves into an experience with another thing, in its own right. They also draw people together to share in the knowledge on which practices are based. A person who becomes interested in bird watching is drawn into an experience with birds in their environment, and simultaneously drawn to people with more knowledge (friends, or classmates and teachers for example) to allow that experience to be expanded and celebrated. The practice builds relations and allows for the establishment of objective standards, or definitions of quality. Quality in birdwatching, for example, makes sense within the context of an established practice. Further, specific practices pull the separate communities engaged in them together into the political realm to seek their maintenance and preservation.

This striving for preservation can take two forms. It can be a reluctant entry into politics that stresses the most efficient means possible of achieving objectives. Places, and the practices which bring attachment to them can and should be protected through legal, economic and strictly practical arguments. Yet in that case the technical aspects of political interaction are never transcended. Often the result is the worst kind of politics -- the politics of confrontation and division, of quantitative debate rather than qualitative discussion. An alternative is to strive for a general understanding of the value of the attachment fostered by the practice. This requires the "practitioners" to show others that value, or to expose others to it so that they can see it for themselves. As

Dewey says, it defies systemizations or methodology, coming instead via the give and take of discourse or conversation. You can't make someone appreciate hiking with charts and graphs. The case for this kind of practice can only be made through the testimony of those engaged in it, or perhaps the eloquence of the place or object itself. One can describe the experience of climbing a mountain. One can paint pictures of it, write poems about it, and live a life that speaks to the power of that centering practice. But there is no guarantee that these things will foster an equal appreciation in their subject. The best that can be done is to invite others to participate in the practice that enacts an attachment to that place, hoping the eloquence of the place will make the value of the attachment apparent.

This approach contrasts starkly with the efficient practicality of the first approach. It requires great efforts on the part of those who wish to preserve their attachment, and, equally important, a receptiveness on the part of those being appealed to. What emerges is a picture of a politics which owes much less to rigorous technical procedure and much more to the free interaction of society's constituent members. Conversation is valued over confrontation.

In Missoula many people have obviously formed an attachment to Lolo Peak in its natural state. It's an attachment that is easily understood and commonly held, whether one is a proponent of a resort or not. It's also one that defies a simplistic reduction to a comparison of economics or practical feasibility. A mutual understanding of this fact contributed to the beginning of a

conversation over the issue. Perhaps this conversation could have led to a more meaningful resolution of the issue. That point, however, must remain a topic of conjecture. Procedure, immediately opted for by county government and relied upon and taken advantage of by resort proponents, put an end to that process. As the issue degraded into conflict the notion that it could not have been handled in any other way became dutifully accepted, even by resort opponents. Though the strength of this acceptance is mild, it is reinforced by a fear of the unknown: "If not an election, then what?" As Robert N. Bellah points out, this weak consensus behind the acceptance of procedurally governed conflict is no reason for its perpetuation:

It is evident that a thin political consensus, limited largely to procedural matters, cannot support a coherent and effective political system. For decades that has become ever clearer. We have been afraid to try for a more substantial consensus for fear that the effort may produce unacceptable levels of conflict.¹⁹²

Clearly allowing and encouraging a conversation to evolve might have been less tidy than a hasty election. It takes a degree of bravery on the part of public officials to allow something like a discussion to evolve and bear fruit. But, as Bellah continues:

(I)f we had the courage to face our deepening political and economic difficulties we might find more basic agreement than we had imagined. Certainly the only way to find out is to raise the level of public discourse so that fundamental problems are addressed rather than obscured.¹⁹³

The need, within a community for economic stability cannot honestly be ignored. Likewise the importance of a sense of attachment is something which even the most cynical would not deny. That people were effectively asked to choose between the two is evidence of politics gone sour. There is basic agreement on many of the issues involved with the idea of a ski resort on Lolo Peak. In this issue disagreement and division was cultivated by ballot issue wording and enforced by procedure. The suppressed underlying agreement, while perhaps not comprehensive enough to support a political system, surely could have supported a "coherent and effective" discussion of the issue, had it been given a chance.

The benefits of such a discussion would not have been issue specific. When politics is opened up in this way it changes. No longer is it a realm entered into only reluctantly, when issues force participation. Unleashed from rigid technical procedure it becomes an ongoing community project. Freer form allows more opportunity for input and greater chance of meaningful give and take. Politics itself becomes a practice. People enter into it and learn the social skill of patience, listening, and restraint from experienced others. Their learning is rewarded by the achievement of participation in the unique development of a community. These rewards promote increased involvement as people come back again and again for the sheer satisfaction of being involved. A deeper understanding of mutual concerns arises, allowing for a better sense of commitment to others and to the surrounding place. Participants are rewarded with the satisfaction of being a part of something ongoing,

worthwhile, and outside of themselves. As William Sullivan writes, politics becomes truly participatory when,

(I)t can be seen as a positive, indeed necessary activity conceived of not as the advancement of preformed, private interests, but as a shared process of social construction.¹⁹⁴

One of the most promising results of that process of social construction is a possible mending of division over the definition of quality in a community. As the debate over a Lolo Peak ski area progressed, two conflicting notions arose, one of quality as economic prosperity, another of quality as a function of place and tradition. It is difficult not to appreciate the merits of both arguments. It is lazy, therefore, for a community not to strive for an understanding that is sensitive to both notions. Choosing ballot issue wording which forced the voter into the selection of one of these choices over the other merely fed the artificial polarity of the situation. When the people of a community are permitted and encouraged to engage in its politics as practice, it is conceivable that agreement can evolve on basic issues such as quality. Local elections can then be utilized more rightly as a tool for policy guidance.

This is the kind of politics which can handle the task of determining how a community feels about itself and where it is going -- the task that the Forest Service had hoped the election in November would handle. The pity is that the chance for the community to try out a more participatory form of governing itself was set aside. It would have been a fine opportunity for Missoula to

try a more promising way of decision making, one that it will surely need as events force the community to more decisions in the future.

The hope, however, is that the opportunity on this issue is not lost. Since the election, the Forest Service and Missoula County have been working together on a Memorandum of Understanding for further official progress of a Lolo Peak ski area proposal. As part of the agreement the County will share responsibility with the Service for official review of proposals and subsequent studies. Tasks such as selecting criteria for study in an Environmental Impact Statement, choosing study contractors, and suggesting alternatives will be performed by a joint review board composed of county officials and members of interested groups, individuals from the general public and other government agencies. This opportunity for real community input and discussion should not be squandered by the desire to make the official review process clean and conflict free. The commissioners, hopefully, will be bold enough to allow the voice of project opposition to be present on this review board and responsible enough to allow that presence to be more than a token. This means that input from such a group would be listened to and considered, not just heard, as in the past, and quietly brushed aside.

This also means that a burden of responsibility will weigh on those opposed to this project. If the presence of opposition in the decision-making process is the result of the beginnings of an awareness within local officials of the importance of attachment and commitment, then it is the responsibility of that opposition to constructively, eloquently, and convincingly present their case. The

eradication of the aspects of Lolo Peak which make it a source of attachment would signal a failure on the part of the people of the region to work for the lasting health of the human and natural community. The replacement of a wild mountain by a ski resort would be a distressing testimony to the vacuous and parasitic allure of consumption. Faced with this, the people of Missoula are compelled to look seriously and creatively at this issue.

Resort opponents will be compelled to present an alternative vision of the social and economic future of the community. This might include a discussion of the options made more viable in a community which has begun to "identify and locate itself." A community which begins to derive benefit from the interaction of its members will be less reliant upon the individual distractions of consumption. Added to this, the pursuit of practices which foster an attachment to place provide real satisfaction and enrichment, without necessitating the frenetic expansion of individual purchasing power. The engagement of practices, in other words, provides for a new vision of a community's economy -- one more sensitive to the aspects of life which provide quality and less reliant upon an ever-increasing prosperity.

This, however, is an idealized hope. The reality of the issue makes it probable that any progress which will arise will be limited. The community discussion of whether to build a ski area on Lolo Peak can, at best, be a step in the direction of Missoula learning to work as a community with a vibrant, open, tradition of civic participation. At the very least, however, it should be an occasion to

show that polarization need not be an automatic product of community decision making. People in the community could at least learn that it is possible to see and appreciate the complexity and full significance of issues before the public, and to take subsequent political action that shows a sensitivity to that breadth of vision.

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