

# Introduction:

## The American West after the Timber Wars

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Disputes between the timber industry, public forest land managers, federal and state regulatory agencies, and environmental groups from the 1980s through the early 2000s resulted in polarization and distrust across forest communities of the American West. These ‘Timber Wars’ centered on the conservation of old-growth forests and biodiversity, and the declining socio-economic status of many timber-dependent communities. The disputes were complex, with arguments over values, identity, and environmental governance. They involved legal, cultural, discursive, and at times violent battles between adversaries. For this issue of the *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* (HJSR), we explore the dynamics of the post-Timber War American West and how communities and stakeholders have forged ways to diversify their economies and have, often collaboratively, worked to find compromise and face newly-emerging challenges of forest land management.

In putting together this issue, we struggled with nomenclature surrounding the Timber Wars. Even the term ‘Timber Wars’ was a subject of discussion. Some authors capitalized the term, some did not. Some used

quotation marks around every mention of it. We decided to capitalize it because we are treating the Timber Wars as a series of discrete events that occurred in a particular region.

Even within this limited regional view, the Timber Wars were multifaceted and varied according to geography and landownership characteristics. In most places, the Timber Wars were associated with federal land management, particularly the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management, and the development of the Northwest Forest Plan to maintain habitat for a host of species, most famously the northern spotted owl habitat (*Strix occidentalis caurina*). In some places, like the redwood region of Northern California, the Timber Wars also occurred on private lands. Though there were many similarities, such as the focus on old-growth forest protection and forest workers’ livelihoods, strategies of opposition and resistance – from both sides – were very different. Others have written extensive histories of these battles.<sup>1</sup> So, while including some historical perspectives, we do not attempt to rehash the full scope of the historical Timber Wars.

We started preparing this issue with a Call for Papers asserting that the Timber

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<sup>1</sup> A few examples from a very long list would include: **Dietrich, William.** 1992. *The Final Forest: Big Trees, Forks, and the Pacific Northwest*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington press.

**Harris, David A.** 1995. *The Last Stand: The War between Wall Street and Main Street over California’s Ancient Redwoods*. New York, NY: Times Books/Random House.

**Speece, Darren.** 2016. *Defending Giants: The Redwood Wars and the Transformation of American Environmental Politics*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.

Wars were ‘over,’ though that claim itself is contentious. Certainly, national headlines about the Timber Wars have disappeared; we no longer have U.S. presidential candidates debating the topic. Other natural resource and land management issues have become more prominent, shifting the public’s attention away from forests. Meanwhile, managers of both private and public forest lands across the region have mostly ended old-growth logging – whether because most remaining old-growth forests are in protected areas or because they no longer exist – with important social, economic, political, and cultural impacts for the region’s people. But disputes linger over forest management, as many of these articles suggest.

### **The American West after the Timber Wars: Collected Articles**

While the Timber Wars were largely over natural resource management, this special issue of *HJSR* focuses not on the forests but on the people involved in the disputes and involved in repairing relationships after the disputes. The articles are a mix of traditional academic discussions and more personal ‘Vantage Points.’

#### *Vantage Points*

The issue begins with Vantage Points, which were submitted by forest managers and activists. Our first four articles focus on the Timber Wars particular to the redwood region of Northern California, where the Timber Wars have mostly been about private lands management. In particular, the Timber Wars of this region centered on the Pacific Lumber Company and its takeover by Maxxam, which transformed the formerly family-held company and its forestry practices, shifting from a conservative harvesting model to one of debt-driven overharvesting. Greg King, an activist who helped lead the

opposition to Maxxam, asserts that the Timber Wars never existed. Rather, he argues that what others called the ‘Timber Wars’ were a one-sided attack on environmentalists who were trying to get state agencies to enforce the law. Richard Gienger, a renowned watershed restorationist in the region, reviews his history of working with, against, and in spite of state regulators, up to the present day. He ends with examples that reflect tentative optimism, a ‘hope’ and a ‘last chance’ for private forest management in the state. Former Director of California Department of Forestry Andrea Tuttle, in an interview with Erin Kelly, reflects from a state policy maker’s perspective on the political struggles to regulate private forest management, from voter initiatives to legislation to administrative rule-making. She notes that, over the years, California forest management regulations have been changed substantially as a result of difficult negotiations and compromises on all sides. Finally, Mike Miles, a forester with Humboldt Redwood Company, looks at the emerging approaches to conservation on private lands today, in an era when private landowners seek social license.

In addition, two Vantage Point articles address public lands forest management. Shiloh and Johnny Sundstrom write about the Siuslaw National Forest in Oregon, where they worked with partners to build a new type of stewardship relationship between public lands management agencies and local communities. Diana Portner reflects on the collaborative efforts on the Tongass National Forest in Alaska, where diverse stakeholders have forged common ground despite the USFS still harvesting old-growth timber on the Forest.

#### *Articles*

The academic articles in this issue span geographies and topics. They are impressively multi-disciplinary, with scholars

from fields including geography, anthropology, economics, and sociology. This variety reflects the long-standing interest from social scientists regarding forest management and forest communities. In this section, we start with a history from Jennifer Bernstein providing an overview of the events and negotiations that led to the creation of the Headwaters Forest Reserve, with perspectives from three local leaders.

Several authors address social change in communities in the wake of the Timber Wars, marked by decline in the timber industry and struggles in forest communities to maintain infrastructure and economic well-being. Timothy Inman, Hannah Gosnell, Denise Lach, and Kailey Kornhauser explore changes to the timber industry, landscape, and demographics of communities in the foothills of the Oregon Cascades. They conclude with recommendations to improve community resilience and adaptive capacity. Yvonne Everett presents a case of a relatively new natural resource-based economy: that of the cannabis economy of Northern California. She outlines the perspectives of community-based organization leaders in Northern California (who helped the transition from timber-based management to forest restoration) as they address the challenges arising from the cannabis boom.

Mark Haggerty tackles the complex issue of compensation to counties with large federal land holdings, beginning with County Payments from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to Payments in Lieu of Taxes in the 1970s through the Rural Schools Act after the Timber Wars. He proposes an alternative approach, a new endowment-based model akin to state trust funds that would buffer the uncertainty of annual receipts tied to income from federal lands for county expenses such as roads and schools. In a piece spanning work conducted over forty years, Carol Colfer revisits two communities on Puget Sound, Washington, in order to explore social and cultural

changes and profound transformations in local economies and gender relations. She proposes implications from her findings for the efforts of public forest land managers who are increasingly engaging with communities in collaborative processes.

This provides a segue to the next set of articles, which directly address the shifting institutional and governance arrangements of public lands management, wherein federal agencies have developed partnerships with diverse stakeholders in forest communities in efforts to improve forest management and contribute to local economies. Erin Kelly describes the role of one community group in Northern California that is working with federal agencies to steward public forests in the context of declining agency capacity. Leanna Weissberg, Jonathan Kusel, and Kyle Rodgers identify community priorities regarding forest management and community well-being for residents in California's Sierra Nevada. They then describe several stages of collaborative processes in the region that have evolved to address forest health and 'renew' the connections between the USFS and nearby communities.

The final two articles are both comparative case study pieces that analyze components of public lands collaborative processes and governance. In their papers on power (Patricia Orth and Antony Cheng) and trust (Emily Jane Davis, Lee Cerveney, Donald Ulrich, and Megan Nuss), the authors disassemble difficult concepts to focus on their component parts. Orth and Cheng focus on how internal power dynamics and the application of power can differ from one collaborative process to the next. Their findings suggest that, while power imbalances can be problematic, they can also be addressed. Davis, Cerveney, Ulrich, and Nuss help to clarify the 'jumbled' concept of trust and how it functions within collaborative processes. While the authors point out that trust can be an important outcome of collaboration, they

also look into the impacts of trust and distrust on achieving the objectives of forest collaboratives.

Despite the wide range of topics, geographies and points of view represented here, the authors weave a rich tapestry of voices that reinforce one another as they describe changing forest management and community well-being after the Timber Wars. Many cautiously point to the emergence of better forest practices, an emphasis on restoration and sustainable forestry, and increased collaboration among stakeholders, with a greater voice for local communities. While there will be many challenges ahead for forests and forest communities, perhaps the evolving adaptive institutional structures described here will help to ensure greater resilience in the years to come. And perhaps as well, those involved in looming natural resource and land management wars – whether over water, energy extraction, mining, or cannabis – can learn from the difficult lessons of the Timber Wars of the American West.