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# Building Consensus for Riparian Users: Toward the Twenty-First Century

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## **Abstract**

*Society's definition of the acceptable use of riparian areas changes over time. Land managers must accept these changes and find ways to help rangeland users work together to develop shared visions for all resources. One approach that has worked for the Oregon Watershed Improvement Coalition (OWIC) is the use of abundance theory and the coalition-building process. Abundance theory focuses attention on the needs of the people and on the importance of understanding one another. This method helps to allay the fear with which many resource users approach one another on resource issues. By using abundance theory and coalition building, OWIC has successfully improved the management and shared vision of Oregon's watersheds and associated riparian areas.*

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to describe certain issues that arise as industrial and amenity rangeland interests come together. Management of rangelands has successfully improved ecological conditions, and rangeland owners and managers are rightfully proud of their accomplishments. However, major environmental interests do not find the changes or rates of change adequate. Range managers' predictions of what society would accept as success were wrong. There is large-scale concern about livestock use and the condition of rangelands in the West.

The evolution of society has always been a result of an accumulation of information. Now technological developments have permitted individuals to acquire information at rates faster than can be assimilated, evaluated, and sorted to fully appreciate different points of view throughout society. Though change is a principle of societal development, it may be that change is occurring so rapidly in some segments of society that it cannot be accommodated by other segments. There is an information overload, and there is unequal access to information. Most societal groups are developing their views in isolation. Some-

how natural resources professionals must come to grips with these issues and find a way to help people function together.

## CURRENT STATUS

### BELIEF SYSTEMS AND TRUTH

The people of the "Wild West" are largely urbanized. People living in cities commonly have no close relatives who live or work on ranches or farms. The family bonds that historically tied rural and urban people together are gone, and with them a major communication link has been lost. Without the intense common understanding that characterizes close relationships of a family, fundamental beliefs and ways of evaluating natural resources issues among urban and rural groups have become increasingly different. Each group has lost information in this evolution of paradigms. Each group analyzes different, sometimes selected, information in a different logical framework and naturally defines the truth differently. This practice has prevented a common understanding of many issues. One result

has been the generation of intense controversy concerning protection and use of natural resources.

The view of one group of environmentalists is reflected in the writings of Ferguson and Ferguson (1983): "Until now stockmen have brazenly challenged the rights and wishes of the American public—they have thrown the gauntlet. At this point, the American people have little choice other than to accept the challenge of a recalcitrant, uncompromising, and coddled minority—the public should boot every last one of them off the public lands. The nation no longer needs them." Godfrey and Pope (1990) explain this as a "negative externality" and cite the widespread dissatisfaction by critics of livestock grazing as one of five factors justifying elimination of public-land grazing.

The beef cattle industry sees the situation differently. In the 1989 "Strategic Plan on the Environment," the National Cattlemen's Association described the issue of the environment as follows: "Environmental issues now directly impact the cattle industry. Environmental activists have criticized the cattle industry for years and promoted legislation and regulation with adverse impact for cattlemen. The general public and key influences are receiving more and more misinformation about the cattle industry's impact on the environment. It is urgently clear that the cattle industry must actively communicate accurate information to the public on these issues. The industry must demonstrate the industry's contributions to environmental protection and must increase producers' awareness of how these issues impact on them."

Even now, the vision of the truth remains different on each of the issues.

## PHILOSOPHY OF RESOURCE USE

Society has made little progress in bringing the visions of environmentalists and ranchers together to find consensus on resource issues of the Western states. This lack of consensus is not surprising when we consider the way we generally do business in the United States. Our laws and policies are based on allocation of scarce resources. Society must be sure everyone gets a fair share of the resources, especially public resources, so laws are passed and policy is made to allocate what we have according to certain priorities. A major assumption underpinning our laws and policies is that there are not enough resources for everyone, resulting in each getting a share that is less than he wants. Inevitably, allocation of a scarce resource leads to conflict and often to

mistrust. This mistrust inevitably leads to fear. There is fear that the representatives of other interests will be more skilled at negotiating their position and that they will get the best allocation of the resources in the end. This perception leads to fear of losing the profitability of watershed-based businesses, fear of losing the sustainability and aesthetic values of a resource, and a multitude of other fears. One only has to observe the relationships of environmental groups opposed to public-land grazing and public-land graziers to illustrate the concept.

Leritz (1987) describes a procedure for successful negotiating. He indicated that negotiating from a basis of scarcity involves three assumptions: There is not enough of the resource, people are greedy, and the best approach is better strategizing. Negotiating from a basis of abundance involves a different set of assumptions: There is more than enough of the resource, people are basically needy not greedy, and understanding is the best strategy. The acceptance of one set of assumptions or the other has a major effect on relationships in negotiations. The former yields negotiations based on fear. The latter yields negotiations based on understanding.

If society can change the negotiation for resources from allocation of scarcity to sharing in abundance, a way can be found to move from limiting peoples' wants through allocation to meeting peoples' needs through abundance of resources. The potential is there. The professional judgment of many range managers is that about two-thirds of the rangelands in the United States are meeting less than half of their perceived potential (Society for Range Management 1989). Obviously, the potential productivity of the Western rangeland is manifold greater than its current level. This potential for abundance can allow ranchers and environmentalists to find common ground and to reach consensus in improving Western watersheds.

This abundance can be achieved through progressive range management that will meet the needs for all rangeland values. Meeting these needs may well require major changes in current practices; but if a sound ecological and economical foundation is maintained, most problems can be resolved. The time and process involved is a function of the skills of the rancher, the land manager, environmental advisors, and others contributing to an objective-based resources-management program.

If society will move from a primary focus on the current philosophy of scarcity, which controls consumptive and nonconsumptive use and retards enhancement of rangelands, to one of abundance that rewards those uses rather than punishes them, it can increase the amount of land currently being improved.

## ABUNDANCE THEORY IN ACTION

### OREGON WATERSHED IMPROVEMENT COALITION (OWIC)

When OWIC was established in 1986, the prevailing view of those who would become members focused on scarcity of resources. During the first meeting, fear for the future was expressed because everyone knew resources were scarce. At the same time, developers of OWIC realized that the resources about which they were concerned were really abundant—if they were managed so that they would develop to their potential. Together this core group of range professionals, the Riparian Task Force, set out to see if there was a possibility for ranching and environmental interests to communicate on riparian issues.

*Formation.* The first step in setting up the initial meeting of the group involved determination of criteria for participation and selection of participants. This selection was done by the Riparian Task Force appointed by the Pacific Northwest (PNW) section of the Society for Range Management. The criteria for participation were that participants be leaders on Oregon riparian issues and that they be willing to discuss these issues with an open mind. While representatives of natural resources professions were included, no representatives of government were invited. Achieving balance among the interests was attempted. This balance created a safe environment and thus maximized the opportunity for each participant to express concerns and ideas.

The Riparian Task Force decided to confine participants to Oregon's mainstream environmental interest groups with a national focus, environmental groups with a local focus, and livestock producers. Leaders of selected organizations were telephoned, and the program was explained. Each group was asked to participate in one meeting to identify any common ground and to help develop some communication about riparian issues. Every group contacted agreed to participate and espoused real interest. Initially the group consisted of representatives from the Oregon Cattlemen's Association (five), Oregon Trout (two), Oregon Environmental Council (one), Izaak Walton League-Public Lands Restoration Task Force (one), Oregon Natural Resources Council (one), and the PNW section of the Society for Range Management (four). Later, representatives from the Oregon Forest Industries Council (one) and Oregon Small Woodlands Association (one) were added since the upper portion of most Oregon watersheds is forested, and forest interests are important in dealing with an entire watershed.

During the first meeting, the participants began to recognize the sincerity of the interested parties. The

fears and needs of each interest group were explained and recognized. It was decided that common ground existed, and the participants agreed to a second meeting.

Members' perceptions were not the same when talking about issues, so the group was kept oriented to the field. Using a field orientation, OWIC members could discuss the issues from a common base of observation. Members agreed to keep the focus of the group on a constructive basis and to focus on the results of good management and how to improve current rangeland conditions. It was agreed not to seek problems but rather to seek solutions to problems. OWIC usually meets for two days, with the first day spent in the field. The purpose is to build understanding among OWIC members on an issue or idea and to provide a basis for future discussion. Every participant is encouraged to speak on some topic at the beginning of every meeting. This structure is important to maintain effective group dynamics. When someone speaks in a group for the first time, it is usually much easier to speak again and to become an active participant in the group. The second day is spent discussing ideas on how to solve problems identified during the previous day's tour and conducting the business of OWIC. This coalition has been actively working since 1986 with an average of five meetings each year.

*Principles of Operation.* Individuals with an interest in developing natural resources programs based on building consensus often ask, "What makes OWIC work?" Evolution of the group has produced several recognized or passively accepted principles of operation:

1. OWIC shares a common desire to achieve the potential of Oregon's watersheds. Products are secondary. If the potential of the watershed is achieved, the products will follow.
2. OWIC has agreed to seek a common understanding, and common goals are shared.
3. OWIC is a private organization. Those members of OWIC who work for a government agency represent the profession of range management on the coalition. This inclusion of range-management professionals is important to enhance the outreach programs of OWIC in dealing with private lands and private interests on public lands. It also permits each member to represent the interest of the resources independent of any governmental policy.
4. OWIC recognizes that most resource damage of the past and present was not intentional. The

conditions of today are, therefore, accepted without placing blame on anyone for resource destruction. What is important is to implement action to improve resources where needed.

5. OWIC focuses activities on developing programs or ideas for programs in which everyone's needs can be met. This tactic involves approaching rangeland use through a philosophy of abundance and consequently a focus on individual needs not wants.
6. OWIC operates from consensus. Every member of OWIC must agree on a course of action or no action is taken. No issue is discussed if the members do not agree to the discussion. By following this premise, the coalition members are able to maintain the actions of OWIC on a positive, constructive track. Members don't agree on all facets of resource use but do operate where agreement is reached.
7. OWIC is kept field oriented. This allows discussions to focus on real situations rather than on abstractions.
8. In dealing with riparian zones and watersheds, OWIC has focused its attention on inexpensive solutions. Members agree that most of the time improvement in management will bring desired improvement in conditions. Structures are expensive and often are not needed. In fact, when structures are constructed without the appropriate land management to sustain the system, they usually fail to do the intended job.
9. OWIC focuses programs on constructive activities that will improve Oregon's watersheds. When Oregon's watersheds have reached their ecological potential, OWIC will have been successful.
10. Role playing has allowed each of the participants to better understand the position of different interests. In the field, a cattleman might be asked to evaluate a situation observed from the viewpoint of a specific environmental group; or an environmentalist might be asked to evaluate from the view of a timber manager. Through this approach, members have been forced to attempt an understanding of the other person's point of view.

In the final analysis, solutions to Oregon's watershed problems will be found by the application of sound ecological knowledge. Implementation of an ecologically sound program will only be possible if it is practical and, therefore, economical. There is no

magic, and there is no quick fix. The land will be improved only through hard work.

## FORMAL STATEMENT OF OWIC

### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

OWIC recognizes the multitude of benefits that can be derived from proper management of watersheds that consist of riparian zones and their associated uplands. Benefits from watersheds include wildlife habitat, fish habitat, livestock forage, water storage, aesthetic and recreational values, aquifer recharge, and others. Also recognized is the absolute need to communicate among the varied interest groups to create solutions to Oregon's watershed problems.

### GOAL

The goal of this coalition is to ensure the long-term sustainability of Oregon's watersheds and to improve communication among the diverse interest groups that affect watershed management.

The approach used to attain OWIC's goal addresses the condition of the entire watershed. OWIC recognizes the ecological relationships among the riparian zone and its associated uplands.

Implicit in the goal is OWIC's desire to develop a healthy, productive environment within its potential, with yield as a secondary output. Yields of all values can be expected to increase if the resource is managed with this in mind. Gains should not be measured solely in a quantitative manner, e.g., kilograms of forage or logs per hectare or number of trout per stream kilometer.

OWIC members view themselves as facilitators not mediators. Compromise and trade-offs are not goals in and of themselves. The concept fostered is that of a healthy watershed, with the resulting effect that everyone benefits. OWIC, through its unique membership, can provide the impetus and support for seeking pathways to develop working programs for sound watershed management.

### OBJECTIVES

The coalition has agreed on four basic objectives:

1. Provide a mechanism for landowners, land managers, and the public to determine achievable objectives for watershed management irrespective of ownership.

2. Promote recognition that watersheds vary in potential and that the quality of riparian zones is influenced by these differences so that solutions to problems and responses of watershed streams are site specific.
3. Help develop management programs that identify objectives that respond to and are consistent with riparian and upland ecological processes operating in a watershed.
4. Promote a greater understanding of watershed-management potentials and riparian processes by private and public interests through an educational program.

#### TASKS

During the course of the operation of OWIC, several tasks have been attempted. Currently OWIC is working on four specific tasks:

1. Sponsoring a demonstration showing that environmental, livestock, and timber interests are working toward a common end. OWIC is working with public and private landowners and managers in the Bridge Creek watershed of eastern Oregon to facilitate changing management to improve the total watershed.
2. Promoting advisory groups and helping local advisory groups solve local problems on a watershed basis. Through these efforts, the philosophy of OWIC will be extended throughout Oregon.
3. Supporting education and research. OWIC has developed educational programs and continues to implement additional projects. Members of the coalition maintain close contact with active research institutions.
4. Exploring incentives to promote watershed enhancement. OWIC has helped develop legislation to provide specific funds for watershed improvements. The major thrust is to clearly define the intrinsic ecological benefits of watershed enhancement, with the belief that these benefits are the basis for economic sustainability.

#### ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF OWIC

The accomplishments of OWIC are significant. During the past five years, a real change in attitudes among members of the coalition has occurred. To some extent, positions of member organizations have also changed. There is trust and respect among the members. Environmentalists, ranchers, and timber

interests share some expressed common goals. Within the coalition, there is honest and true communication. Together members share the confidence that they can help change Oregon for the better.

Members of the coalition continue to teach one another about watershed management from their various perspectives. Together the membership has produced brochures, a common statement of organization, a slide show, and other information to use in teaching members of the parent organizations as well as the public.

In developing the coalition, OWIC avoided developing a bureaucracy. The coalition is private, so it is unencumbered by government policy and regulations. OWIC enjoys excellent cooperation and support from all of the natural resources agencies in Oregon. The coalition is widely accepted in the state and has generated great interest in cooperation to solve resource problems.

Through the efforts of OWIC and in cooperation with many legislators and interested parties, Oregon passed legislation to form the Governor's Watershed Enhancement Board (GWEB). This interagency organization provides incentive funds to encourage improvement of private and public watersheds in Oregon. During the 1989 to 1991 biennium, the state allocated \$1 million for education and on-the-ground watershed enhancement.

The project at Bridge Creek is under way, though requiring considerable time and energy for planning, monitoring, and implementing. Without a paid staff, the coalition members often find themselves short of time to fully assist with the ongoing efforts of the project. The land owners and managers are continuing the project with regular communication from the project committee of the coalition. The OWIC contribution was to stimulate action and provide access to needed technical assistance.

OWIC has developed a good foundation upon which to build. The organization's members have been through difficult times and have attempted to solve difficult problems but have remained together. OWIC has learned that ranchers, environmentalists, and timber managers can work together in constructive ways. OWIC has helped neighboring states, such as California, Washington, Idaho, Utah, Wyoming, and Colorado, to understand, evaluate, and work toward developing similar organizations that reflect the special circumstances in each state.

The success of OWIC in demonstrating that communication and agreement between ranching and environmental interests are possible has prompted its members to address large-scale problems and opportunities in Oregon. Members of OWIC have joined with agency, ranching, and environmental interests in dealing with a difficult range-management problem in the Trout Creek Mountains of south-

eastern Oregon. The Trout Creek Mountains Working Group has moderated a conflict that was heading toward litigation (and no change on the land) and changed the result to one of agreed-upon resource use (and positive changes on the land). The moral is that land can improve only through thoughtful, ecologically sound management. Laws alone will not bring about a general improvement in land condition. People can enhance the land with the right incentives, but there is not enough time or money to sue everyone. The Trout Creek Mountains Working Group grew out of such a problem. The group has been effective in producing profound grazing-management changes on several hundred thousand hectares of a sensitive watershed. These management changes have all been voluntary. The Trout Creek Mountains Working Group is cautiously optimistic that the management changes will produce long-term ecological successes.

The Central Oregon Natural Resources Coalition (CONRC) is another example of a consensus group that brings several interests together to foster a community vision of responsible and proper land use. This group is confident that it will enjoy the abundance of the rangeland resources in central Oregon and will fully meet or exceed everyone's needs. CONRC is an action group—made up of private landowners, land-managing agencies, resources agencies, environmental leaders, and a few technical advisors—that is planning integrated use of an area of several hundred square kilometers. The broad vision is established and all participants are working toward common goals. These goals will mean intensifying commercial uses in some areas, setting other areas aside as preserves, focusing on wildlife as a primary product of some private and public land, and coordinating it all so that the needs of the various groups are met. The group has been operational for more than a year and has completed the first phase of a general-vision consensus. In this consensus document, the participants of CONRC have written their expectations of what the land should be like. The first coordinated resources management plan involving more than 250,000 hectares of public and private land was completed. This plan represents the first action step toward meeting the vision of CONRC for the total area. A massive coordinating effort has brought agreement between environmentalists and ranchers as they plan to achieve the potential of their resources and share the abundance from these resources. Each group will operate differently on private and public lands.

## THE FUTURE

OWIC provides a model forum for building understanding and for networking among individuals with diverse needs and beliefs. Action-oriented consensus groups, such as the Trout Creek Mountains Working Group and the Central Oregon Natural Resources Coalition, are in part logical extensions of the OWIC philosophy.

By approaching natural resources negotiations with a philosophy of abundance and by opening communications among rural and urban citizens with common interests in the land, it is possible to come to a common understanding of site-specific land use. By sharing information and by working from common information, the possibility to work together to achieve the potential of the range increases. Everyone must come to recognize the truth as perceived by others, to understand that truth, and to work together to realize the potential abundance of the West. When this philosophy is followed, plans for the future—based on broad consensus—can indeed meet everyone's needs when founded on a healthy resource.

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