Defending Wild Washington, Chapter 5:

Entering the Political Wilderness: An Overview of Citizen Action

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In the afternoon, I walk from my house in the city of Port Townsend, down through the Fort Worden State Park gate and onto the beach. Wildness surrounds me on this corner of the Olympic Peninsula, at the edge of the Puget Sound metropolis. Oyster catchers squawk, poking red beaks between rocks smoothed by winter waves, finding mussels and clams. An otter rolls off a boulder into the surf, scared by an eagle passing overhead. The eagle lands on a wind-beaten spruce, in forest growing atop the bluffs that isolate the beach from sight and sound of town. Crows pester the eagle, then divert to pick up snails exposed by the low tide, flying to drop them on the rocks to break their shells, dropping to eat them.

I pull twigs from a black deposit exposed in the bluff. They are the remains of willows that grew here in the outwash of glaciers 200,000 years ago, crushed flat as popsicle sticks under the weight of a hundred feet of overlaying gravel and sand, brittle now, turning into coal. Hunching over to shelter a match from the wind, I set it alight. It burns. Wildness connects me to the deep past.

At night the wildness penetrates my dreams. From our bed we hear coyotes yelping in the state park woods, where a forest regenerates to engulf abandoned artillery emplacements. Last month, the park staff posted signs, warning of cougars: Don't let children wander alone. Last year, my wife Marci found a partly-eaten deer under an overhanging branch, from which the cat apparently dropped. At our breakfast table, we watch deer grazing on the lawn. We drape netting over the maples and lilacs in the yard, protecting them from the deer.

These deer, coyotes and cougar move along strands of wild lands that link the town with the forests and mountains, often on a corridor of critical habitat being acquired by our local land trust organization. From the beach I can see ancient forests lying between the snow-covered ridges of the Dungeness and the Greywolf Valleys, within the Buckhorn Wilderness Area and Olympic National Park, where logging is not allowed. Private and state property in the foreground foothills is still being clear-cut in wide swaths, but behind them U.S. Forest Service lands logged or burned in the last century regrow within reserves established by the federal Northwest Forest Plan.

Looking east over the water to Whidbey Island, I see marshes, lagoons and farmed prairies, maintained for 10,000 years by the Salish people and their predecessors. Now in Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve, a trust board of local, state and federal representatives works with private landowners, collaboratively trying to protect the place from subdivision and development.

Mount Baker's volcanic cone rises behind Whidbey, and beyond Baker the white teeth of the North Cascades, their peaks and some of the surrounding forest within the

boundaries of federal wilderness areas and North Cascades National Park, where their wildness is largely protected.

Even as the metropolitan region sprawls with close to four million people (and growing fast), this scene demonstrates hope for retaining wild nature in Washington. We find this hope not only in the region's great complex of established wilderness preserves and their potential additions, but also in dams considered for removal to restore salmon runs, in regrowing forests, and perhaps even, eventually, in recovery of grizzly bear populations and reintroduction of wolves. East, in the expanses of the Columbia Basin and Washington's part of the Rocky Mountains, current still flows through a portion of the region's greatest river, vestiges of its shrub-steppe and forest ecosystems remain, and visions build for restoring the web of habitat that once spanned millions of acres.

The action of committed, organized citizens was essential in designating each and every one of these protected places and in creating all of these wildland regeneration efforts. Without their continuing dedication, the wildness of these special places would erode.

The second part of our book tells the story of how this citizens' movement for wild Washington came to be, what it has accomplished, what remains to be done, and how, working together, individuals can participate in this process. Our method is personal and historical: We tell stories of the people who combined their efforts to change the laws and rules governing wildlands in this state.

Our approach is also analytic, evaluating these stories in their social, economic, ecological, and political context. We explore the movement, looking at its perceptions, premises, underlying values, methods, strategies, goals and objectives, and models of political action. We seek to understand its strengths and weaknesses, in order to make encouraging suggestions for its future. We hope our work provides a map of the terrain useful to those participating in the movement or interacting with it, and those who are not yet involved, but would like to be.

Our co-author Ellen Trescott (chapters 10 and 11) worked with Evergreen College student Rachel Corrie for a year in Mount Rainier National Park. Ellen writes of a day their crew worked at Cougar Creek campground:

> The site lies on an old volcanic ash deposit that restricts vegetation growth due to lack of important nutrients. We watched that day as trees were cut, to make room for concrete pads to hold dumpsters. Some tried in vain to count rings on the trees, only 8" in diameter, that had weathered many centuries in their destined yet adverse environment.
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> Driving home that day, Rachel probed our friend and supervisor about the need for such destruction, about the sensitivity and rare condition of the plant communities there. When she received acknowledgement of her concerns, yet admittance that they would never be brought to bear on the project, she began to cry, silently. …She embodied a natural instinct, which she felt was her duty, to defend the priorities of life against a shifting and often nameless destruction.[1]

Rachel's commitment to life took her to speak out for the Washington wilderness and, in ways she saw similar, for peace and justice in other arenas. Early in 2003, Rachel went to the Middle East, hoping to protect people from violence. On March 16 at the age of 23 she died, trying to stop a military bulldozer from destroying a family's home. In the midst of complexity, uncertainty, distrust and fear on all sides, Rachel stood her ground. As she wrote the year before about her caring for her home in Washington State, "I look at this place now and I just want to do right by it."[2]

When I reflect on the efforts of the many people dedicated to maintaining hope that the life-giving beauties of wild nature will continue for future generations, I remember Rachel's priorities. These people have committed themselves to action. With every such commitment comes risk: risk of failure, of error, of embarrassment, of harm to ourselves, of producing results contrary to those intended. It brings the temptations of arrogance and egotism, and with them the opportunity for resentment, conflict and bitterness, if events do not unfold exactly as we wish (and they never do). Activism is scary. And yet action brings the possibility that the path to seemingly inevitable destruction will be reversed and creates the prospect for regeneration.

The authors of this book remember Rachel as we make our own commitment, encouraging the activist life through our writing.

[PHOTO 5.1: Rachel & friends (name friends?) at Mount Rainier National Park. Photo by Ellen Trescott. Permissions needed from Rachel Corrie's family and the two other people included in the photo.]

Activism to protect Washington wildness comes in many forms, which evolve as situations change. This chapter describes a variety of types of activism, as a guide for understanding and evaluating the strategies and tactics described in the chapters that follow. Each of these types of activism has achievements, limits and consequences. And each can be found in the diversity of the Washington wildlands protection movement.

Defining Key Terms

We tell stories in this book about people acting together to influence choices made about the future of wildlands. These decisions are mostly made by society, and often by governments, so their actions are *politics*. The people involved are acting in their role as public *citizens*, rather than as isolated individuals. In Washington, all citizens potentially have some access to this rough and tumble public arena. Thus it is a *democratic* politics. And the wildlands they seek to protect and restore are a shared heritage. As a whole, these lands cannot be preserved by individual efforts, and the stake that activists have in the matter is not defined by their ownership of private property tracts. Wildlands are thus a wealth held in common, part of our *commonwealth*.

Examining these concepts, I draw in part on the work of Harry Boyte, co-director of the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at the University of Minnesota. Boyte has devoted himself to chronicling citizen efforts to empower themselves in their communities across the United States.[3]

Politics

A common theme in the stories told to us by citizen activists is the participants' confidence that their involvement in policy issues can make a positive difference. Holding this view does not imply that outcomes are necessarily always influenced by our actions, or that money and entrenched interests might not rule, regardless of any efforts. But we find that confidence is in itself empowering, much as the contrary perception disempowers. Even if they enter the political sphere without experience and training, people who believe that the system can bend for them often find that it does.

American wildlands protection is premised on the fact that our political system can be responsive to organized, citizen interest-group pressure, especially when core interests of the biggest economic players are not at stake (which, fortunately, they seldom are in Washington wildness issues today), or if a group succeeds in defining their concerns as consistent with those interests.

Boyte defines politics in this positive way:

> The politics of serious democracy is the give and take, messy, everyday public work through which citizens set about dealing with the problems of our common existence. Politics is the way people become citizens….[4]

He quotes Baltimore activist organizer Gerald Taylor saying "politics is really the discussion and action of creating community."[5]

The stories told in the coming chapters reveal that despite limits and inequities, the U.S. political system sometimes does allow people, neither wealthy nor ensconced in high corporate or government positions, to touch the levers of power, changing the course of events. Telling these stories is in itself empowering. By contrast, the discrediting of political activity disables us as citizens. When we bow out of the political arena, decisions are left in the hands of those inside who still play the game, and the democratic process is jeopardized.

The question remains whether the incremental steps possible in our political system, such as wilderness area designation, forest plan implementation, land trust creation, endangered species listings, and land use regulation, will suffice to protect and regenerate the natural wild. What happens may depend on demographic and economic patterns and on resulting concentrations of political power much greater than a citizens' movement can muster. This question underlies some of the debate over strategy and tactics we evaluate in chapter 10.

Citizenship

Boyte defines three types of citizenship:

> Three main conceptions of the meaning and activity of citizenship have arisen in our history…Citizens have been understood as: 1. rights-bearing members of a political system who choose their leaders, ideally those of virtue and talent, through elections; 2. caring members of a moral community who share common values and feel common responsibilities towards each other; and as 3. agents of public work who address common civic tasks and create common things.[6]

All three of these kinds of citizenship play a role in the movement for the natural wild, and all contribute to it in different ways.

Citizens of the first type vote, but otherwise mostly stay apart from the rough-and-tumble of the political process. They may write letters to government officials, but otherwise leave the action to their representatives and to the organizations to which they donate money. We will see in subsequent chapters how such relatively passive citizenship plays a role in an increasingly professionalized wilderness preservation movement and has always been important in legislative campaigns. But for the most part, citizens who define themselves in this way are not at the table when decisions are made for specific wild places and processes they care about. The maneuvering, negotiating and strategizing that makes a difference happens without them.

In the second category, citizenship is a private activity that takes place outside of government and the business economy, doing volunteer service in churches, clubs and non-advocacy organizations. Citizens working in this arena are not direct players in the political arena. By assertively defining appropriate action this way, some recent U.S. administrations have attempted to exclude direct participation in public lands policy, and much more, from the American vocabulary of citizenship. Working within this concept of citizenship, land trusts make significant contributions to wildlands protection and regeneration, without rocking the political boat.

Boyte's third category is the citizen who considers him or herself a full player in the decision making game, a public citizen who has the right and responsibility to be part of the governing process, not leaving this work to elected officials or experts. Such citizens consider themselves active builders of their society. Boyte points out, "When we help to build something, we experience it as ours. We gain authority and confidence to act, and a deep stake in governance."[7]

The distinction between paid and unpaid work fades in this definition of citizenship.. As they engage in the rough and tumble of politics, professionals and volunteers may collaborate in informal networks across organizational lines. What they share as citizens is a view of their efforts as important not just to themselves, or their family and friends, but to a larger community of which they are a part and whose future their work empowers them to influence. Caring for a forest, beach or city park can be such public work.

Historically, Americans have been characterized by their brash confidence in their right and ability to participate in public decisions, an unwillingness to defer to bureaucrats and elected officials, and insistence to be part of events at every step.

Democracy

British political scientist Bernard Crick points out that Plato was skeptical of this brashness. Although the term "democracy" is of Greek origin, literally meaning "rule by the people," Plato thought it implied "rule by the rabble."[8] In fact, democratic politics often does resemble a poorly officiated football match, with more than two teams playing at once on an uneven playing field strewn with rocks and logs.

The citizen activist takes this situation as a given and plays the game anyway, hopefully with skill and poise. As Winston Churchill said, "democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried…."[9]

The right and responsibility of the people to rule, of governing by political debate between citizens, goes back to ancient Greek and Roman conceptions of what it means to be human. Crick writes about how "both Roman paganism and later Protestantism had in common a view of man as an active individual, a maker and shaper of things, not just a law-abiding well-behaved acceptor of and a subject to a traditional order." In fact, the Romans, he says, "stressed the *duty* of all who were citizens *to participate actively* in public life…"[10] Democratic citizen activism is deeply embedded in Euroamerican culture.

In a democracy everyone can play the game, but, clearly, not everybody has the training to understand the intricacies of modern ecological science, natural resource management, land use planning, and the like. So inevitably there is a tension in democracy, between the many who exercise their right to rule and the few whose credentials confirm their scientific, technical and managerial expertise. As you read the following chapters, note how powerful it has been for citizen activists to move into the territory claimed by the experts, often outdoing them in their own specialized areas, with significant results.

Commonwealth

The politics of wildlands protection requires organizing to mobilize groups of people, usually those who care about particular places. So it is fundamentally a community, rather than individual activity.

Though sensitive writers point out that we can find wildness in our backyards, both the experience of vast natural spaces and the continuation of ecological processes require more land than we can possess individually. Most remaining wilderness in Washington is government-held. And even those wild lands in private hands gain value from the larger habitat and landscape of which they are a part. As we attempt to allow regeneration of additional wild places, we find that nature's web penetrates across the landscape, disregarding jurisdictional and ownership boundaries. Beyond the practical necessity to treat the wild as a matter of common, rather than individual concern, those of us who value the wild usually see it as the heritage of all life, rather than the property of a few. It is our common wealth.

In American history, Harry Boyte says, people have used the term "commonwealth" to describe our shared participation both in democratic governance and in caring for the place where we live:

> The word suggested an ideal: a commonwealth was a self-governing community of equals concerned about the general welfare--a republican or democratic government, where citizens remained active throughout the year, not simply on Election Day. And commonwealth brought to mind the touchstone, or common foundation, of public life--the basic resources and public goods of a community over which citizens assumed responsibility and authority."[11]

Though the movement for the natural wild most often works incrementally through the existing political and economic system to achieve piecemeal results, powerful notions at its core have the potential to challenge a selfish and cynical approach[12] and thus enable it to support an empowered, positive sense of politics and public life.

Approaches to Leadership

The following chapters feature the stories of leaders, but they are also about people working together. In her great work on the human condition, Hannah Arendt writes about how this relationship between individual and group effort is inherent in our notion of "action." She points out that Greek and Latin each have two altogether different words for "to act," one meaning to set in motion and to lead, and the other to achieve, to finish and to bear. "It seems," she says, "as though each action were divided into two parts, the beginning made by a single person and the achievement in which many join by 'bearing' and 'finishing' the enterprise.…"[13] As we examine various activist strategies, it is worth looking for the relationships they embody between individual leadership and group collaboration, noting the consequences both for the people engaged and for the land.

This book focuses on the essential role played by citizen activists who volunteer their time and energy to advocate for wildlands protection. The many people who join together in this effort are often called the "grassroots" of the political movement. Working over more than half a century, well-organized efforts to mobilize the grassroots across the state have succeeded in convincing Congress to pass wilderness legislation and, to a lesser extent, in altering federal agency policies. Community grassroots groups raise money to purchase threatened habitat and recreation areas and influence local government's land development decisions.

We will see in coming chapters how this volunteer, grassroots citizens movement has professionalized over time. As membership and budgets grew, larger groups hired administrators to manage what became internal bureaucracies. When lobbying efforts became more sophisticated, some groups added professional lobbyists and publicists to push for legislation. As legal options and environmental laws increased in complexity, some groups brought on lawyers full-time. When science-based support for complex policy decisions became more important, other organizations specialized in data collection and analysis by technically trained staff.

All the way back to Plato and the Greeks, grassroots politics, empowering the many, has been in tension with control by the expert few. Defining the relative roles of citizen volunteers and professional activists has become a critical question for the Washington wildlands protection movement, as both the movement itself and the issues it addresses have increased in complexity.

Looking at Pacific Northwest forest issues in their book on environmental conflict, Steven Daniels and Gregg Walker write about what they call "the fundamental paradox" in American public policy creation.

> Citizens demand technically sound decisions, but as situations become more complex, fewer people have the technical background needed to either meaningfully contribute to, or critique, the decisions. By the same

token, these complex situations often touch people's lives in fundamental ways.[14]

Approaches to Conflict

There are many ways to be an activist working to preserve and regenerate wild places. Each activist strategy has its consequences, both for the people who engage in it and for the land. Each reflects the personalities and preconceptions of the people involved, as well as the situation in which they find themselves. As Dante says, "…in every action what is primarily intended by the doer … is the disclosure of his own image…"[15] When we look carefully at the types of activism within the Washington wildlands protection movement, we gain insight into the motivations and goals of its diverse groups. We see what enables each of them to be effective, and what limits that effectiveness; where they make a unique contribution, and where their vision is blind.

When people work to protect wild Washington, they tell themselves a story explaining what they are doing, and why. Based on the facts as they perceive them and their previous life experience, this story helps them understand what is happening and how they should behave. They may consider themselves as soldiers in a battle, performers in a play, or dancers on a stage. They may seek heroic victory, conquest, simple survival, conflict resolution through cooperation with those of other views, or a variety of other solutions. They may see humans as managers, needed to re-create the wilderness, or as meddlers, who should keep off of wild terrain and out of the way of natural processes. The way people understand their situation--the metaphors they use to describe it--makes a big difference in their choice of action. As we read about the history of the movement in the following chapters, we can look for the causes and consequences of metaphor choice. We can be curious about what might happen if people used alternative metaphors when they made decisions on goals, strategies and tactics.

Wildlands protection today encounters new challenges and opportunities that are calling forth additional metaphors, in addition to those used in the past. Some ancient forest activists, for example, say they find themselves in a "paradigm shift"[16] resulting from changed attitudes in rural communities and among field-level agency personnel, becoming more supportive of ecosystem protection, increasing the potential for various sorts of new alliances and collaborations.

Another motivation for new stories and new metaphors is the changing character of the lands available for preservation. Scattered, sometimes small tracts as well as both existing and potential corridors are getting increased attention for their ecological and recreational values.[17] These places are less amenable to the boundary drawing and territorial defense strategies traditionally employed in legislative campaigns to designate wilderness areas. Desire to restore wildlands which have been altered by fire suppression or clear-cutting leads some activists to endorse some road-building and selective logging in these areas as part of their strategy. Such intervention contradicts common premises of wilderness area preservation. These say that people should not try to manage nature in wild places. Supporters of such active management are challenged to come up with alternative descriptions of wildness and of wildlands protection that do not embody these contradictions.

Looking at some of the roles played by participants in Washington wildlands controversies can help us understand various types of activism:

Politics as War

Though graciously poetic inside and anything but embattled, the cover of Michael Frome's book about wildlands preservation shows the title, *Battle for the Wilderness*.[18] Whoever chose this title was reflecting the deep and pervasive use of the war metaphor in our politics.

I had the good fortune to begin my career in wilderness preservation activism as an intern with Brock Evans, the respected and successful professional Seattle-based field organizer for the Sierra Club and Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs in the '60's. Now working in Washington, D.C., Brock recently wrote a recent bulletin to friends describing the current federal administration as the "Forces of Darkness," urging citizens to carry on against this evil in the tradition of the battles for designation of North Cascades National Park and national forest wilderness areas during his years in the state: [19]

> … these successful struggles to protect our beautiful land are among the greatest and least-told stories of our times. We must remember them now, because it is in these stories- which are almost always a tale of small bands of plain ordinary citizens, who loved the place near them and who were appalled at proposals to destroy them - that we will find the answer to the question of what we must do now.

His terms are similar to those that a revolutionary guerrilla organizer might use:

> It was these ordinary folks who decided to take action and fight for the places they loved who are the whole reason we enjoy those places now. Rarely did they have any money or support from the political powers that be when they began. Armed only with the passion of their own hearts, they just set out — and won. …After ten years of struggle and gathering massive public support, over two million acres of wilderness and forests in Washington's North Cascades had permanent protection, safe forever.

Wildlands preservation is like defense of country, derived from our innate territoriality:

> Draw a Line around it. There is a magic and a power to stir human hearts when we draw a line around a place we know and love. It gives that place weight and heft — identity, perhaps stirring something very old and 'territorial' inside the human-race memories of each of us.

We strive for victory:

> … I think most of us agree that what we are facing — and not just in the environment either — IS a struggle between Good and Evil, insofar as so many values we cherish in this country are at risk….
>
> Just as I know that we all will do everything in our power to stand up and fight back now against those who would destroy all the things we value and love about our country. These are scary times, maybe: but we don't

scare easy, do we, dear comrades? And we will never quit, will we? We will prevail.

In his reference to good and evil and use of metaphor, Brock's approach to political action is similar to that of many of his opponents. As he points out, using this approach, historically the movement has been strikingly successful in creating 220 million acres of legislatively protected wilderness in the United States, most of it before 1985 in straightforward campaigns for places with lines drawn around them. When we use the battle metaphor, we live with it, the camaraderie and the conflict; the potential for victory, and for loss.

Often in reaction to the embattled character of political struggles, people and groups attempt to substitute harmony for controversy. This emphasis on alternatives to conflict can take many forms.

Minimizing Conflict

An activist whose priority is conflict reduction can take the role of neutral bridge builder, helping participants find mutually satisfactory solutions. This sort of intervenor in the political scene can be an arbiter, equalizer, and healer.[20] Elected officials seeking to defuse conflicts in their districts may try to become mediators, rather than take an advocacy position that attracts opposition. And there are many professional mediators skilled in bringing parties together to seek consensus solutions. We do not usually see wildlands protection groups taking a mediating role, but they often may be asked to participate in mediated processes.

While outside facilitation can be very useful in some situations, emphasis on partnership and cooperation does not always consider the power relations between groups participating in the controversy. What happens if some stakeholders are not visible or not represented, or if wealth and power are inequitably held by a few? And how is a decision reached on issues for which the disagreement is rooted in basic value differences, not amenable to win/win solutions?

If politics is discredited, that does not mean it does not exist. Consensus building can be used as a tool for manipulating less savvy participants. If real, underlying differences are ignored, a superficially cooperative partnership process may yield control to those who remain politically active and to bureaucracies that are intertwined with and dependent upon them. Compromise will be weighted in favor of the powerful. In comparison, acceptance of ongoing conflict may retain more opportunities for the citizen participation and democratic governance which has been key to protection of the natural wild in Washington.

For example, government agencies have a choice about how to conduct legally-required public meetings about pending controversial decisions. Conventional proceedings, at which people testify and debate with staff and the audience, enable citizens to build a formal record which can be difficult for the agency to ignore. At such proceedings, I have seen new coalitions between contending citizen groups form as participants discover common interests in the course of listening to each other (and perhaps seeing the agency as a common adversary). Unfortunately, the soapbox these forums provide also often encourages strong rhetoric and escalates tensions.

To avoid these sorts of engagement, some agencies, including the U.S. Forest Service, can depoliticize the public meetings required in their planning processes and by the National Environmental Policy Act by conducting them as "open houses." Instead of providing for healthy expression of disagreement and discovery of common ground (to which the agency must respond), in such sessions the staff chats informally with citizens. This removes opportunities for direct interaction between contesting interests. Much as at a cocktail party, group expression is replaced by individual conversation.

The Role of Science

Another way to avoid contention is to take the stance that policy decisions can be made rationally by scientific and technical experts, who have the knowledge to make the right choices. But, given its internal debates and varied emphases, expert science can be used to support a variety of policies, depending on the studies you chose to look at and the assumptions on which they are based. The resolution between them often rests in a choice between values, not facts, and thus is political.

For example, industrial logging forestry, ecological management, and hands-off wildlands regeneration all can be supported by science. A few decades ago, well-publicized science advocated rapid clear cutting of big trees and the establishment of young plantations. Now, technically-trained agency managers focus on restoration old growth forests to protect species dependent on this ecosystem from extinction. To some extent, science has advanced during this period. But the biggest difference is in society's changing goals for this forest, with priority switching from wood fiber production to ecosystem diversity and ancient forest protection. As activist and poet Tim McNulty pointed out to the authors of this book as we overlooked clear-cuts on the Quilcene River in the Olympics, a sustained grass-roots, legislative, administrative and legal campaign was the driving force behind changes in public forest policy, rather than any scientific justification.[21]

Side-Stepping Contention

Some organizations avoid contention on issues, choosing to focus on goals amenable to non-confrontational methods. Elliott Marks, Nature Conservancy vice-president in Seattle, explains, for example, that his group is always looking for "win-win" solutions and emphasizing "the art of compromise" to accomplish what otherwise would not be possible.[22]

Using their research program to identify ecosystem protection priorities and publicizing the results, they can, within limits, influence both private landowners and government policy. Raising money to buy land and development rights from willing sellers, they achieve protection of private wildlands often not attainable through legislation, regulation and overt lobbying. Without engaging in tussles over contentious public policies, their results are limited to what scientific information and cooperative discussion can achieve, and what their money can buy and land owners will sell.

Finding Peace within Politics

Acknowledging both the problems with depoliticized harmony and the difficulty of achieving consensus on contested issues, a working group at the Harvard Negotiation Project writes about "coping with conflict," rather than eliminating it. [23]

> Getting along does not mean harmony, after all, but rather a great cooperative struggle to resolve our differences with a minimum of harmful strife. Getting along is not the absence of conflict, but the strenuous processing of conflicting needs and interests.[24]

The crux of the matter is somehow being able to acknowledge difficult differences, neither looking away from them nor letting them reach destructive levels.

Some psychological models, particularly those developed in the Buddhist tradition,[25] demonstrate how we can easily become emotionally fixated on our differences, dysfunctionally escalating anger and conflict. But Harry Boyte views anger as able to reveal underlying problems in society and does not simply call for its reduction, believing that this could obscure issues and reduce the potential for citizen political empowerment:

> "The etymological roots of anger, from the Old Norse word *angr*, suggest grief--the sense that grows from separation, deep loss, failure to attain fundamental goals…. The question is whether anger can be disciplined and directed in a constructive, positive fashion or whether it becomes "rage," leading to violence, disruption, and social disintegration."[26]

As you read the interviews with activists in the following chapters, note how grief at the loss of wild nature can be central to commitment to their cause. Similarly, grief and fear can be at the core of the hostile reaction motivating many members of anti-wilderness "wise use" groups, insecure about their own and their community's future.

If succumbing to grief and anger is one danger, the opposite is also true. Those who recognize the devastating problems that escalating rage creates around the world today can quite reasonably decide not to participate in activities that exacerbate such feelings. So out of that fear, they stay away from political activism. "The strenuous processing of conflicting needs and interests" is indeed difficult and dangerous work. Evidence shows, however, that it can be done, without generating bitterness and rage. For the individual, a key can be finding the time and making the effort to calm personal emotions and develop understanding of other peoples' views.[27]

Both individuals and groups face the challenge of finding ways to engage with controversy, while neither backing off from the issues nor feeding anger. The Japanese martial art of Aikido provides a metaphor for this kind of activism. The Aikido practitioner stays aware of the position and movements of an attacker, without taking a confrontational stance. When an attack comes, rather than blocking, the practitioner blends with it, moving with it to shift its force to a safe direction. Results are best achieved when attained without creating either a heroic victor or a loser who is motivated to regroup forces to attack again.[28]

The Nature Conservancy's Elliott Marks reflects this principle when he asks, "How can we achieve outcomes in which we win what we want without making the other

side feel like it lost?"[29] Aikido concepts can be applied not only in the non-contentious strategies employed by Marks' organization, but also in the midst of the most vigorous legislative and legal campaigns.

Collaborative Processes

In the face of today's increasingly difficult and partisan environmental disputes, professionals are developing new methods for bringing contending parties together in ways that decrease the heat of the controversy. Like "politics," "collaboration" is a complex idea, with both positive and negative connotations. No one wants to be identified as a collaborator with an enemy. But collaboration with colleagues is valued, especially if it brings useful results.

If a process ignores real disagreements and inequities in political power, citizen activists would be rightly suspicious of that collaboration. But that is not always the case. In their book on environmental conflict, Steven Daniels and Gregg Walker list five assumptions underlying the process of "collaborative learning" that they advocate.[30] Taking some liberties to simplify them, I summarize these as:

1. Conflict is inevitable.

2. Conflict is irresolvable, but manageable.

3. Truly vexing situations are often complex.

4. Good collaborative processes are learning opportunities for everybody

5. The best way to improve decisions in complex situations is to consider decision making as a learning process.

I would add another:

6. Conflicts embody power relationships between the participants which cannot be ignored.

Instead of (or in addition to) legislative battles and court cases, collaborative projects usually involve bringing representatives of contending interests together in workshops, often facilitated by professional mediators. President Clinton and his Forest Service chief, Jack Ward Thomas, initiated a major experiment of this sort, bringing together managers, scientists, and contending interest groups. They attempted to work out a solution to what has been called the "Northwest timber wars," the dispute over logging and forest preservation. In the wake of that effort, Dr. Thomas concluded that

> ordinary citizens can help solve problems that affect their lives [including] even relatively complex problems of natural resource management. However, they must be truly engaged in the process. They must learn from one another about the issues, and they must gain the skills necessary to fully participate in democratic governance.[31]

Later chapters of this book evaluate the Northwest Forest Plan the Clinton administration adopted. We will note what the plan has achieved and see how it imperfectly reflects the collaborative process.

Evaluating Activist Strategies

With an understanding of both political processes and the issues at stake in wildlands protection, we can establish criteria for evaluating activist strategies employed by the movement. These criteria include, of course, whether an organizational effort is successful in preserving or regenerating wildness in a specific place. Beyond that immediate goal, it also makes sense to address the larger question of whether the campaign contributes to the long-term strength of the movement, the commitment of its members and the health of its constituent groups. Further, we can ask how the strategy alters the situation in which activists are working: How are other groups, including opponents, affected? As a result, how are they likely to change their behavior in the future and with what consequences? And, who gains in power, who loses, and with what outcome?

If, as we've discussed, politics is the creation of community, we can also ask: Does the strategy in fact build trust, communication and mutual support between participants in the movement? Granted that the harmony of consensus may not be possible or even desirable, does the strategy promote ways of dealing with conflict between contending groups that is non-destructive to those involved and that minimizes escalation of anger and fear, especially in ways that could harm other issues and relationships?

On the personal level, does participating in the strategy contribute to a person's happiness, their sense of fulfillment and their ability to be a positive influence on those around them? If, as is always possible, the strategy fails utterly to protect wild lands, will the participants be able to look back afterward regardless, concluding that they, their family and neighbors, and the world are better off because of the action they chose to take?

We can reflect on these criteria as we read the stories in the following chapters.

Entering the Political Wilderness

In its complexity, the politics of citizen action mimics the natural wild: Those seeking to preserve and regenerate wildlands find themselves in a political scene that can be viewed from a variety of perspectives, opens an array of options, and calls for a diversity of goals, strategies and tactics, depending on the specific, evolving situation. Thus perhaps the metaphor most useful for the activist is the "political wilderness." So we would expect that the adaptability and flexibility useful in wilderness life should be applicable to citizen action in the political sphere. One would hope that wildlands activists would be very good at this.

Activists try to assemble a coherent program of wildlands protection within a political system that is messy and only intermittently responsive. Much as natural wildness is to be pieced together from scattered and incomplete parts, which must be combined and regenerated into a functioning whole, the political process is a piecing together of interest groups, opportunities, strategies and tactics. These are practical matters, responsive to the situation of the moment rather than to some preconceived grand design. In this way, as well, politics emulates the natural wild.

Bricolage: Putting the Pieces Together

Rather than the engineer, a better term for describing the citizen activist is the bricoleur. Steven Nachmanovitch explains that bricolage is a French word meaning

> …making do with the material at hand; a *bricoleur* is a kind of jack-of-all trades or handyman who can fix anything. In popular movies, the power of *bricolage* is symbolized by the resourceful hero who saves the world with a Swiss army knife and a couple of clever tricks.…
>
> We see *bricolage* in small children, who will incorporate anything into their play—whatever small piece of stuff is lying on the ground, whatever piece of information they picked up at breakfast.
>
> These magical acts of creations are analogous to pulling a large amount of rabbit from a small amount of hat. As in the greatest known form of magic, organic growth and evolution, the output is greater than the input.
> …
>
> …The artistic attitude, which always involves a healthy attitude of *bricolage*, frees us to see the possibilities before us; then we can take an ordinary instrument and make it extraordinary.[32]

Washington's citizen activists are at their best when they remember that they are citizens of the wilderness. Reading the following chapters, we can appreciate their journeys into the political wilds. And we can evaluate them with an eye to natural wild processes: To what extent are their perceptions and actions responsive to the complex, unpredictable, mysterious political world in which they find themselves? Do they evolve and adapt well? What enables them to survive and flourish?

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[1] personal communication, email, March 2003.
[2] quoted in Lin Nelson, "Remembering Rachel," *The Cooper Point Journal*, vol. 31, number 22, April 10, 2003. p. 6.
[3] I had the pleasure of working with Harry while he was writing his book, *Commonwealth: A Return to Citizen Politics*.
[4] "Reinventing Citizenship," Harry C. Boyte, Kettering Review, 1993. p. 2
[5] Cited in Harry C. Boyte, *Commonwealth: A Return to Citizen Politics*, Free Press, New York, 1989, p. 121.
[6] Harry C. Boyte, "Builders of the Commonwealth: Citizenship as Public Work," Center for Democracy and Citizenship Working Paper, n.d., p. 2. http://www.publicwork.org/3_1_papers.html
[7] Harry C. Boyte, "Builders of the Commonwealth: Citizenship as Public Work," p. 4.
[8]Bernard Crick: *Democracy: A Very Short Introduction,* Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002, p. 1.
[9] Speech in House of Commons, 11 Nov 1947.
[10] Bernard Crick: *Democracy: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002, p.p. 12,5. Emphasis in the original.
[11] Harry C. Boyte, *Commonwealth: A Return to Citizen Politics*, Free Press, New York, 1989, p. 5.
[12] e.g. Robert Bellah, et al., assert the prevalence of this ethos *in Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in the American Experience* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985)
[13] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1958). p.189.
[14] Steven E. Daniels and Gregg B. Walker, *Working Through Environmental Conflict*, Praeger, Westport, 2001, p. 4.
[15] Quoted in Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1958). p.175.

[16] David Jennings, chair, Gifford Pinchot Task Force, Evergreen State College class lecture, February 28, 2003. We observed the agency shift he describes during our class visit with state wildlife and federal Forest Service staff at the Sinlehekin refuge in October, 2003.
[17] David Jenning's maps graphically illustrate this trend. See, e.g., "Continued Logging of Old Growth is Based on False Assumptions" and "Roadless Areas and Threatened Native Forests of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest, Gifford Pinchot Task Force, January, 2003.
[18] Praeger/Wilderness Society, New York, 1974.
[19] Published on the Web at < http://b-team.org/brock/bb-10.htm>.
[20]William Ury, *Getting to Peace*, Viking, 1999, p. 140.
[21] Evergreen State College field trip, December 3, 2002.
[22] Presentation to Evergreen State College group at The Nature Conservancy offices, Seattle, November 12, 2002.
[23] Roger Fisher, Elizabeth Kopelman and Andrea Kupfer Schneider*, Beyond Machiavelli: Tools for Coping with Conflict*, Harvard University Press, 1994.
[24]William Ury, *Getting to Peace*, Viking, 1999, p. 198.
[25] See, for example, the work of Buddhist peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh, e.g., *Being Peace*, Parallax Press, Berkeley, 1988.
[26]Harry C. Boyte, "Builders of the Commonwealth: Citizenship as Public Work," p.p. 232-233.
[27] Tenzin Gyatso, the Dalai Lama, reports, e.g., that the work of University of Wisconsin neuroscientist Richard Davidson supports the conclusion that meditative practices "cultivating compassion, equanimity or mindfulness…strengthen the neurological circuits that calm a part of the brain that acts as a trigger for fear and anger. This raises the possibility that we have a way to create a kind of buffer between the brain's violent impulses and our actions." New York Times, op-ed, April 26, 2003.
[28] I owe many thanks to Paul Becker, teacher, and my fellow practitioners at the Port Townsend Aikido dojo for the training which has given insight to my political activism in recent years.
[29] Presentation to Evergreen State College group at The Nature Conservancy offices, Seattle, November 12, 2002.
[30] Steven E. Daniels and Gregg B. Walker, *Working Through Environmental Conflict*, Praeger, Westport, 2001, p. 16.
[31] Quoted in Steven E. Daniels and Gregg B. Walker, *Working Through Environmental Conflict*, Praeger, Westport, 2001, p. 1.
[32] Steven Nachmanovitch*, Free play: The power of improvisation in life and the arts*. Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, New York, 1990, pp. 86-87.