PRIVATE LANDS IN THE MIDWEST: EXPLORING LANDOWNER VIEWS ON COLLABORATION, COMMUNITY, AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

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ABSTRACT

Through a qualitative case study, this research explores how landowners relate to their land, community, and place, as well as landowners' opinions on working collaboratively. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with landowners in two watersheds of north-central Indiana. Landowners offered diverse views of their communities, yet frequently indicated their satisfaction with the community and rural character. In terms of social capital, norms of reciprocity were frequently discussed in the interviews as characteristic of these communities. Landowners often indicated that they felt they could trust other landowners. Conceptions of place were framed in terms of an individual's owned property and nearby lands. Frequently, people discussed scenic waterways and forested areas as places that held meaning and importance to them, thus indicating the role that physical attributes play in shaping sense of place. Initial analysis indicates that landowners find value in working collaboratively to address natural resources issues on private lands, and that they consider social attributes and institutional structures, such as leadership, trust, and clearly-defined goals, as the most crucial antecedents to successful collaborative efforts. There were mixed opinions on the role of property rights in shaping people's propensity to work collaboratively, but many felt that provision of adequate information on how collaborative projects could potentially affect property rights would alleviate concerns over property rights infringement. Conclusions and implications focus on the necessity of the careful construction of forums through which landowners may choose to work collaboratively with other landowners.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Collaborative approaches among diverse stakeholders in complex and sometimes contentious natural resource management scenarios have gained support since the early 1990s as an appropriate way to reach ecological and societal goals (Conley and Moote 2001; Daniels and Walker 2001; Weber 2000; Wondolleck and Yaffee 2000). This burgeoning arena of activity goes by many names including community-based ecosystem management, collaborative stewardship, community-based natural resource management, collaborative conservation, grass-roots ecosystem management, and community forestry, to name a few. In this research, we will use the term collaboration to represent these concepts. Despite the subtle differences implied in each of these terms, they all involve cooperation and coordination among diverse stakeholders. As this approach unfolds across the landscape, it is logical to question if these approaches hold promise and potential for the stewardship of private lands, especially private forests. Private landowner collaboration may be a promising new territory—one that may ultimately serve to better meet landowner, community, and ecological goals (Curry and McGuire 2002; Freyfogle 1996). As the United States moves towards this new private land management paradigm, it becomes necessary to understand the relationships that landowners have with their land, community, and place, so as to ascertain whether landowners might choose to engage in collaborative projects.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies, many employing survey methodology, have examined the forest values and attitudes of private forest owners. These studies have illuminated the dynamic and divergent associations landowners have with their lands. However, limited empirical research exists detailing the existence of and potential for collaborative stewardship across non-industrial private forests (NIPF), or even more broadly, across private lands in general (Knight and Landres 1998; Rickenbach and Reed 2002). With few examples of collaborative private land stewardship projects, there are limited opportunities to understand why landowners choose to work collaboratively on private land issues, what landowners deem as successful collaboration, and what social, ecological, and institutional arrangements may lead to that success.

Very recently, there has been an increase in the number of studies examining the potential for collaboration and cooperation across private ownerships, specifically of NIPF owners. These studies have examined the propensity of landowners to engage in collaborative or cooperative endeavors and ecosystem management (Brunson and others 1996; Campbell and Kittredge 1996; Creighton and others 2002; Jacobson 2002a; Jacobson 2002b; Jacobson and others 2000; Klosowoski and others 2001; Rickenbach and others 1998; Rickenbach and Reed 2002; Stevens and others 1999). Surveys have generally found NIPF owners to hold favorable attitudes towards the principles of ecosystem management (Brunson and others 1996). Research indicates that financial incentives may motivate landowners to participate in collaborative situations (Jacobson and others 2000; Klosowoski 2001). The impetus for collaboration also plays a role in whether or not landowners demonstrate willingness to engage in collaborative stewardship. For example, projects relating to wildlife habitat or amenity values found increased support for collaborative management from landowners as compared to those focusing on timber management (Stevens and others 1999). In a qualitative research study, desire to be a steward, ensured control over individual property rights, and tangible outputs and outcomes encouraged participation among individuals involved in collaborative endeavors (Rickenbach and Reed 2002). Although cooperative landscape level management among private landowners in the United States is rare, others countries such as Australia, Japan, and Sweden have documented examples of cooperative forest management, suggesting possible models and applications of such management regimes for landowners in the U.S. (Kittredge 2003).

Ecosystem management calls for landscape level decisions and coordinated management, necessitating consideration of the communities—including both resource and user—that span the areas affected by those decisions. Critical elements of effective coordination and collaboration are personal relationships, trust, and respect (Wondolleck and Yaffee 2000). For many landowners, lack of trust for neighboring landowners or natural resources

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agencies may prevent them from collaborating (Creighton and others 2002; Raedeke and others 2001). In considering the role of community and trust in collaboration, the concept of social capital is a natural fit. Social capital is defined as "features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (Putnam 1995, p. 67). We aim to investigate whether it is the intersection of these components that may encourage private landowners to consider working collaboratively. Being related by a common place and having physical proximity to other stakeholders in a collaborative process may serve to increase trust and facilitate the collaborative process (Gray 1989; Kemmis 1990); thus we also intend to examine the role that sense of place may play in collaboration.

Sense of place is an abstract and multi-dimensional concept, incorporating geographical interrelatedness, place attachment, place identity, place dependence, and place satisfaction. It includes "meanings, beliefs, symbols, values, and feelings" associated with a location (Williams and Stewart 1998, p. 19). The hierarchical relationships between these components are disputed in the literature (Stedman 2003), but there is a consensus regarding the importance of sense of place in collaborative ecosystem management processes (Cheng and others 2003; Creighton and others 2002; Freyfogle 1996; Kemmis 1990; Weber 2000; Williams and Stewart 1998; Wondolleck and Yaffee 2000). Some have postulated that an increased sense of place, or place attachment, may manifest itself in greater care and concern for the place (Freyfogle 1996; Kemmis 1990). This may translate into an increased propensity to become active and engaged in the issues of that place, which may be environmental or natural resource related. When thinking about what sense of place means in terms of being bounded in a similar geographic location, this concept may serve as a catalyst for the creation of common ground, and aid in the logistics of face-to-face interactions. Such interactions may foster a sense of interdependence, another key component of collaborative processes (Gray 1989).

RESEARCH GOALS AND QUESTIONS

This research examines the views of private landowners regarding working collaboratively and several factors that we hypothesize to relate to propensity to collaborate. The development of the qualitative methodology was guided by the following research question: how can we form, sustain, and evaluate collaborative natural resource management on private lands? Thus the first phase of this research sought to explore how private landowners view their lands, their community, their sense of place, and the potential for collaborative undertakings. We examine the constellation of factors that we hypothesize to influence collaborative processes—social capital, community, sense of place, and sentiments on working collaboratively.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Gray's (1989) seminal work on collaboration provides the definition of collaboration that underlies this research: "a process in which those parties with a stake in the problem actively seek a mutually determined solution" (Gray 1989, p.xviii). Selin and Chavez (1995) presented a five-step model of collaboration and identified antecedents as the beginning point of collaboration, a three-step process (problem-setting, direction-setting, and structuring), and outcomes as the final component. Semi-structured interview questions were designed to elicit landowners' perceptions of each of these stages.

In addition to the antecedents presented in the Selin and Chavez model, Ostrom's work on self-organization of individuals addressing common-pool resource management issues identifies several components of the resource, user community, and institutions, which influence the effectiveness of the self-governed management regimes (Ostrom 1999). Such components, or attributes, may also be antecedents to collective action in private land stewardship. Though management of common-pool resources is notably different from collaborative management of private properties, there are several parallels to be considered. Attributes such as trust (a component of social capital), common or shared conceptions of the resource and the impacts of users, a value ascribed to the resource, and previous experience in collective work increase success in collective common-pool resource management efforts (Ostrom 1999). These attributes are most likely antecedents for collective action in private land management. Expanding upon these predicted antecedents, we have included social capital (including trust and networks), sense of place (including social and physical constructs), and community in our model.

METHODOLOGY

Study Sites and Sampling

Case studies are ongoing in two north-central Indiana watersheds, the Middle-Wabash/Little Vermillion and the Wildcat. Both are dominated by row-crop agriculture and highly fragmented forest land, the majority of which is riparian. Within each watershed we selected a 9 square-mile study site based on forest cover, creek presence, private individual ownership, and rural location. Key informant interviews played an important role in site selection, interview questions, and interview participant solicitation (Elmendorf and Luloff 2001). Our research was informed by ten key informant interviews in winter of 2002 with local natural resources agencies personnel. During these interviews, agency personnel were asked to describe the county, the major local natural resource challenges, the climate of the community in terms of natural resources, and the names of landowners enrolled in government programs. These enrolled landowners comprise the stakeholders that we interviewed for this project. Further, these key informant interviews provided an opportunity for researchers to introduce and explain this project. Although these interviews were not audio-recorded, field notes were developed by the three researchers present at each of these meetings.

We interviewed a wide range of landowners: those in the study sites, those identified as local stakeholders by key informant interviews, and those recommended by interview participants. The criterion for study site participants was ownership of at least one acre of land. In this research, local stakeholders are those individuals identified during key informant interviews as having land in the study counties enrolled in government programs. The smallest interviewed ownership was 1.6 acres; the largest was a multiple parcel ownership of over 4,700 acres (non-contiguous) spanning several counties. Some landowners were active in natural resources management, enrolling in government programs and participating throughout their communities on related issues, whereas others had never sought professional advice or consultation for natural resources issues, nor were they involved in community organizations. A diverse range of ownership tenure was also reflected in our sample: one landowner purchased his acreage 1.5 years ago (at time of interview) while another's land has been in his family since the 1820s. Some were residents on their property; some owned multiple parcels, and some were absentee landowners residing in other states.

Data Collection

Interviews were semi-structured; questioning followed a pre-determined set of questions, while allowing flexibility in the flow, to provide for the exploration of answers and follow-up

probes to shorter answers (Patton 1990). The questions group into the following major themes: (1) land use, (2) opinions on land ownership, (3) sense of place, (4) community and social capital, (5) natural resources, (6) working collectively, (7) information sources, and (8) views of the future.

Letters describing the project and the interview procedure were mailed to all landowners meeting the one acre criterion in each of the 9 square-mile study sites and stakeholders. Contact information was obtained from plat maps, public directories, and public records from the local courthouses. Following anticipated receipt of the letter, landowners were telephoned up to 10 times to determine their interest level in participating in the interviews. In County A, response rates were as follows for the following groups: study site landowners, 36.2%, stakeholders, 84.2%, snowball samples, 71.4%; overall response rate was 50.0%. In County B, study site landowners, 34.7%, stakeholders, 100.0%, snowball, 50.0%; overall response rate was 43.5%.

Eighty-one out of eighty-three interviews were taped and transcribed. Two of the eighty-one recorded interviews were conducted as telephone interviews because the participants were absentee landowners not residing in the nearby area. Participants were asked to sign an informed consent describing the research project and the expectations of their participation; no participants objected to signing this form. Average interview duration was 75 minutes, ranging from 25 minutes to 3 ½ hours. Field notes recording descriptive and interpretive observations were made immediately following each interview. Many landowners were enthusiastic and excited when talking about their land and what the land meant to them. Many interviews concluded with the researchers being invited back, going on a tour of the land, or with the grateful comment of "thank you for listening." Occasionally, landowners shared with the researchers various documents and objects related to their land, including land deeds, maps, government program contracts, arrowheads, and conservation awards. Further, many landowners expressed curiosity at the findings of the research project, exhibited by comments such as "I've watched it (the land) over my lifetime disappear, and I'm anxious to hear what these new people say."

Data Analysis

Following transcription, the text documents of the interviews were uploaded to a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software program, Atlas/ti, Version 4.2 (Scientific Software Development 1997). Although we did develop *a priori* hypotheses, based on the model of collaboration discussed in the theoretical framework, grounded theory was used to guide data analysis. Grounded theory demands that the generation of theory, whether it be building novel theory or building upon existing theory, be rooted, or grounded, in the empirical data and that it occur through an inductive analysis (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Inductive analysis employs three coding strategies: (1) open—denoting and labeling major categories and themes, (2) axial—examining those categories in greater detail and creating dimensions and properties to describe the categories, and (3) selective—synthesizing major coding structures to find underlying relationships leading to theory (Strauss and Corbin 1998). The analysis presented here represents a preliminary exploration of the majority of these interviews.

RESULTS

In this presentation of the interview findings, we discuss the results of each of the following major components of the interview guide: land use and ownership, community and social capital, sense of place, and working collaboratively.

Land Use

Questions related to the land use were used to start the interview, setting the context for the interview's focus on land and natural resources. Responses to the question, "what do you use your land for," fell into several categories, some of which are interesting semantically, especially as related to the word "use." The first category would be functional use of land, for which two subcategories emerged-consumptive and non-consumptive uses. In the consumptive use category, landowners responded with items such as agriculture, livestock, or hunting. For non-consumptive use, responses can be classified as enjoyment or recreation. Also frequently mentioned was the "to live on" category. Some maintained that they were 'anti-use,' claiming they would not build or harvest. The second major land-use theme was land cover type, for example, prairie grass, pond, tree plantations, or wetlands. The third category that seems to cover all of the responses generated by this seemingly straightforward question is that of ecosystem services. Some landowners discussed use in terms of various aspects of preservation, or that they used it for wildlife. In addition to a landowner answering with a response that fell into one of the three aforementioned non-mutually-exclusive categories, some had a future orientation. They may have mentioned an intent to harvest, to sell off land, to donate to a land trust, or to bequeath it to future generations. Given that people have pluralistic visions of how they use their land and what the land provides, and often recognize ecosystem services as part of the function of their land, we may consider these notions of ecosystem services as convening points for collaborative efforts.

Land Ownership

We asked several questions designed to uncover various aspects of land ownership, including questions on primary reasons for owning land, on whether or not there is something special or meaningful about owning land, and on what they like best about owning land. Across nearly all of these interviews, ownership of land was of tremendous importance, whether it was due to monetary value, continuity across generations, the lifestyle it provided, the responsibility to land and nature, the pride of ownership, or the actual physical characteristics of the land. These themes encompass nearly all of the responses. Many landowners articulated more than one reason for ownership and thus themes that we put forth below are not mutually exclusive.

Financial values were rarely cited as the only, or even major, reason for ownership. When monetarily related sentiments were expressed, they often fell into one of the following subcategories: the land was affordable; the land provides income and security; the land is a tangible investment; and, often stated by participants, "they're not making any more of it!" Participants making this statement often elaborated on how land is finite, and how it makes sense in terms of an investment. The second theme present in these responses is that of connection to other familial generations, past and/or future. Heritage and family tradition served to bind many individuals to the land, such that they continued to bear the cost of owning that land. For others, the possibility of passing it on to future generations figured largely into their rationale for continued ownership. Several participants spanned both of these categories-having inherited the land, and now being of an age where they were considering future heirs. They were concerned for the future stewardship of their land, noting that their kin were removed from the land in such a way that it may drastically reduce any future commitment to keep the land in the family.

For many owners land was an essential element in a desired lifestyle. Many indicated that freedom, privacy, independence, peace and quiet, or "escape" from urban areas motivated them to purchase their land. These characteristics that people see in their

land or work to create on their land, especially those of freedom, privacy, and independence, may deter people from engaging with other landowners in cooperative ecosystem projects (Rickenbach and others 1998). While some people use land as a tool or means to create the lifestyle they desire, we also see the reverse—where the land creates the lifestyle, or self-identity. In these interviews, people described the land as a source of hobbies and opportunities that shaped their identity. In one stakeholder interview the participant said to us, "You become so attached to the land, because you draw your identity from it." Another participant, a farmer with a long history of farming in his family, stated, "I think, owning land, you become attached to it…." At this point he handed the conversation off to his wife, as he became choked up with emotion.

A fourth ownership theme was responsibility to the land and nature. Some felt a duty to be stewards of the land. The owner of several hundred acres said, "Our purpose is more for mother nature. And we're trying our best to keep it that way and preserve it that way for future generations." In a few instances, landowners expressed discomfort with the term "ownership," noting that their interpretation of the term ownership was less about the benefits, financial and otherwise, that they derive from owning the land, and more about the duty that they felt to give something back. One stakeholder explains, "I have a little problem when you refer to ownership—you know we don't own this ground, none of it. Whether we like it or not we're more or less care takers of it for a period of time." This alienation from the term ownership, however, was a unique instance and was only reflected in a few interviews. It seems quite contrary to the next theme of possession, which was expressed by many interview participants.

The fifth rationale for ownership is possession and the pride that stems from ownership. This is more than mere knowledge that a piece of land belongs to him/her. It brings a sense accomplishment and pride; some even likened it to the "American dream." As stated by one landowner of less than 10 acres, "It's the American dream! It's the best investment I ever made in my life…Yes, this is my piece of the world…Well, it gives you a feeling of pride."

The sixth major theme was the physical characteristics of their land; people owned the land because of the attributes of the land, which frequently had to do with the presence of woods, a creek, or a scenic viewshed. From a landowner with less than 10 acres of land, "When we moved here, it was not because the house was a nice house, or we liked the house. It was because what we could see when we looked out the windows."

Community and Social Capital

Questions in this section were designed to investigate how participants describe their community and if/how they see themselves as part of it. We investigate what meanings the concept of community holds for landowners, looking at the data for discussions on actors, values, relationships, and processes, as well as other notions that landowners may use to describe and define their community. Working from the accepted major factors of social capital—networks, trust, and norms—we sought to garner a very qualitative assessment of these by asking people if they were involved in their community, if they felt as though they belonged to the community, and if they felt they could trust others. Given the project and the context of the rest of the interview, we asked about trust in the context of natural resources.

In response to the question, how would you describe or define your community, many people responded by saying it was a typical "rural community," comprised of "good people," that make it a "good place to live." For many, they also defined the community as a "farming community," and then went on to describe either how that was changing, or, what "farming community" means to them—hard workers and typically longer tenured residents. There was much variation in how people defined the place that was their community. Some landowners identified the county as their community, others their township, and others still as their neighboring landowners. One participant took a much broader view and identified the entire state as her community.

In terms of actors in the community, participants did not necessarily view their communities as homogeneous, even though to an outsider the communities of the study sites may appear homogeneous. People seemed often to identify groups of people in the community, groups that result from one's length of residency in the community and from one's profession. In several interviews, people spoke of insider/outsider groups in the community, often the result of variations in tenure. In many instances, this multi-group notion resulted in a "blame game" related to natural resource issues for some participants—farmers blaming new rural residents for natural resource problems and new rural residents blaming farmers for natural resource problems.

Looking at the data for values, we consistently see people discussing change occurring throughout their communities. For many this provoked a sense of concern. Landowners living in the same community not only differ in terms of whether or not change is occurring, but whether or not this change is positive or negative. Many interviewees value the rural character of their community, for many it is part of why they choose to reside there, and the change is threatening that value. People described this change not only in terms of landscape, a loss of farmland and a loss of woodlots, but also in terms of people, a shift to a bedroom community.

Several participants, all of whom were near or in retirement, remarked on a shift they perceived in the social fabric of the community. They noted that the community was not networked and interdependent as it previously had been, and attributed that to changes in where people work and the increased mobility of community members. Many people see change occurring on the landscape and in the composition of their communities, but remarked that people tend to be "conservative" and "slow to change," sometimes even contending that the community was a "little bit backwards," a phrase we heard in several interviews.

Examining the data for the component of social capital, we see that while many participants remarked that they were not involved in many community groups, they commented that they still felt as though they were a part of that community. Landowners often cited church as a major vehicle for community involvement. For many people, privacy was a motivating reason for selecting their place of residence, which most likely has a bearing on how often people interact. Nevertheless, in a discussion of rural reciprocity, respondents maintained that people "in the country" watch out for each other and help each other out. Several people mentioned how communities within the local area had developed in response to a crisis or a particular need, creating a temporary and interest-based community.

In order to examine another component of social capital, trust, we asked the following question, "we know that around here in this area of Indiana there's a lot of private properties, especially along creeks, and by the actions that people take on their property, they can contribute to a public benefit like clean water. Do you think you can trust individuals to work towards a public benefit like clean water?" By and large, participants indicated that you can trust people. For many confidence in this trust is increased when the individual in question is a landowner, is someone they know, or when the individual in question is knowledgeable about how to contribute to clean water. Several people raised concerns, however,

about the potential for one non-contributor, to destroy everyone else's work.

Sense of Place

For this portion of the interview, we chose to design questions to uncover the dimensions of "place" that landowners identify with. Questions included: "how would you describe where you live," "how would you describe the land around your property," "are there any particular places in the nearby area that are important or special to you," and "what are some negative/positive aspects to living in this area?" In general, these questions generated very enthusiastic responses. Landowners enjoyed talking about places and their personal meaning.

In many of these interviews, there was a relationship between the way people described place-both their land and nearby lands, and the reasons they had discussed earlier for owning land. For example, some who rationalized owning land for privacy, peace and quiet, also described their land in that way. Differences between how people describe where they live also seem to be based loosely on one's familiarity with farming. For those who are farmers, they often described the components of the landscape in terms of its productivity or lack thereof. This occurred slightly less often for those who were not in the farming profession, though they may have discussed the importance of farming in other portions of the interview.

Many landowners ascribed value to certain attributes of the landscape, in particular creeks and streams. Both study sites had nearby creeks and streams, and in the majority of interviews, people indicated that special places for them were near creeks or streams, or some formation that provided access to or a view of that stream. Comments on the significance of the physical attribute were often expressed in tandem with a discussion of experiences or activities that this place facilitated. Some examples include the ability to go fishing with their family, the ability to relax, and the ability to be closer to nature.

Emerging in the results on place is a nested concept of sense of place. Three levels to sense of place were observed: place from one's own land, place from the nearby land and community, and place resulting from the interplay between these two. For example, a view of neighbors' properties shaped how owners saw their own property; some suggested that severe changes to nearby or bordering landscapes may prompt them to go elsewhere. Place identity, and loss of such, may play a part of this equation. Participants explained how development changes the rural character and lifestyle that they deem important.

Working Collaboratively

We asked participants to comment on working collectively to address natural resource issues, especially on private lands. One of the most interesting findings is that some landowners indicated that there is a history of people working together to address natural resources issues across their private lands. Many of these landowners cited collective action associated with maintaining drainage ditches, drain tile outlets, or fencerows. In addition to the collective work occurring across agricultural lands, several people cited "crises," many focusing on water quality issues in the local area as instigation for the collaborative efforts. Many people did think that working collectively held potential for private landowners, but also believed it may be difficult to attain. Differing opinions/personalities and lack of time were the most frequently cited obstacles to collaboration among landowners. In virtually every interview, people indicated that they believe both individuals and groups of citizens have the ability to positively affect the condition of natural resources, though landowners frequently commented on the greater impacts possible by group work. This belief in individual and group efficacy is critical when considering whether people would believe that convening collaborative groups would have an impact.

Antecedents

Antecedents can be broken up into the following categories: social, institutional, and physical (i.e. resource). When landowners were asked to comment on perceived precursors to successful collaboration, the majority responded with antecedents that could fall into the social or institutional category. The most frequently cited antecedents to collaboration were trust, leadership, and education. Participants often defined a leader as someone who had credible knowledge about that area, was from that area, and was respected by local community members. Some participants linked these antecedents by indicating that education may lead to increased trust. Furthermore, many people claimed clearly defined and common goals as precursors to collaboration across private lands. It is interesting to note in only a few interviews did the participants question the possibility of uncovering any common goals. A slim minority of participants proclaimed that collaboration was not possible, and attributed this to intractable differences or a lack of issues over which to work together.

Benefits

When asked what some benefits to working collaboratively may be, landowners most frequently expressed a greater impact and ability to improve the quality of the natural resources at the focus of the collaborative effort. Reflecting a focus on the social aspects of collaboration, many landowners commented that a collaborative undertaking would result in increased community, more power and influence, and greater involvement. Several people also mentioned that they would derive a personal sense of satisfaction from working with others to accomplish commonly developed goals.

Obstacles

One theme running through many of the interviews is that of a "blame game," where individuals of one group (i.e. non-farmers) may perceive another group (i.e. farmers) to be a major source of environmental issues, and so on. This will most likely serve to inhibit collaborative activities; one landowner suggested that a facilitator of collaboration consider convening these groups separately to better understand their concerns. When asked directly what potential obstacles to working collectively may be, participants frequently commented that differing opinions and strong senses of individuality would prevent successful collaboration. Frequently, people often cited busy lifestyles as a factor that would discourage people from working collaboratively.

Property Rights

Responses to the question asking whether concerns over property rights would deter joining collaborative efforts were varied, ranging from not an issue at all to a major issue that could totally stymie collaborative efforts. However, many participants indicated that as long as it was clear from the inception that working collaboratively would not require individuals to relinquish control over their own property, many would be amenable to participating.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Previous surveys and interviews have indicated that landowners have stewardship ethics that are reflected in their reasons for ownership; the results from these interviews echo those findings. Yet, we now ask the question of how to facilitate the transformation of stewardship ethic and intent into action.

Through further analysis, and by correlating this interview data with a subsequent participatory action research project, we aim to understand how community, social capital, and sense of place may influence the process of collaboration. Based on this preliminary analysis, we offer the following recommendations, derived from recurring themes expressed through the interviews.

1. *Overall:* Working collaboratively is viewed positively by a majority of the landowners interviewed in this research. They suggest that social and institutional factors are the most important ingredients in working together to address natural resources issues. Natural resource professionals wishing to convene a collaborative group may be advised to seek out a local leader respected throughout the community, and to propose activities that may help establish trust among participants in the collaborative process.

2. *Place:* The landowners presented strong senses of place, derived both from experiences on the land that they own, and in the nearby area. Other researchers have also emphasized using place-based approach to ground collaborative groups. This research again shows the value of place as participants suggested that collaboration among private landowners may most efficiently and effectively occur when occurring in a particular geographic area, with people that have a common interest in that area. A shared sense of place may serve as the anchor or locus for collaborative efforts.

3. *Community:* Given the diverse definitions and descriptions of community, it is necessary to explore the components of community and how different members of the community discuss them. This may aid in establishing which elements of the concept of community will be important to collaborative efforts. Given the recurring theme of a "blame game," it will be necessary to consider how to facilitate interactions among groups that perceive each other as the source of natural resource and environmental problems.

4. *Process:* A transparent process will be necessary from the inception. Steps should be taken to establish trust by openly discussing property rights, clearly stating how projects will or will not affect them. Wildlife and water quality of nearby streams were salient issues for many, and thus should be considered as potential impetuses for collaborative endeavors. In future efforts, finding common elements that resonate well enough with landowners to encourage them to consider working together will take a deliberative dialogue, which may be enhanced by knowledge of the community through previous research or residence.

Overall, this research demonstrates that landowners see potential for collaboration among private landowners, given certain circumstances related to the collaborative process. Although this list of recommendations is not exhaustive, it can serve as a stepping stone on the way to developing effective forums for collaboration on privately-owned lands.

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