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Seeking Consensus through Community and Cooperation

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I thought today was wonderful. To have the lack of heat and the presence of light at a meeting like this was unimaginable five or ten years ago. I think the setting here and the level of discourse were also unimaginable in the past. We may take what happened here today for granted because we all have evolved, but I think the dynamic we had should be recognized. We are future thinkers; we do not think of this meeting as the experience but as preparing the way for actions.

I am not going to summarize today's proceedings as much as react to the speakers. I will start by reacting to Don Sampson's comments because he stimulated a string of thoughts. My wife Betsy and I were lucky enough to teach a course at Wallowa Lake this February. Wallowa Lake is in the Wallowa Mountains, near Joseph and Enterprise in eastern Oregon. It is a beautiful lake. The course was a very moving experience; sixty people or so attended, a real mix of environmentalists, people who want to see Hell's Canyon made a national park, ranchers, people who absolutely hate the idea of a national park in Hell's Canyon, and loggers. We taught the course with a rancher-writer, Teresa Jordon, and a cowboy poet named Hal Canon. One of the most moving moments for me came when an older woman in her seventies or early eighties, who had grown up in Hell's Canyon on a ranch, recounted how her family ranch had been condemned or taken away when her family was given a "take it or leave it" offer by the Federal Government. When she visits that ranch now in Hell's Canyon, it breaks her heart because the ditches and irrigation system have been let go, and, as she sees it, the place has deteriorated and gone to weeds. Her story was a story of the working people in the West, of real people pushed out of a life that they cared about and to which they were loyal.

These comments were transcribed from an audiotape of the symposium proceedings.

Recently I stumbled across a television documentary on how the West was lost. It was a segment of a six-part series attempting to view American history from the Native Americans' perspective. The segment I saw happened to be about the Nez Perce and how they were evicted from Hell's Canyon, the Wallowa Mountains, and Wallowa Lake. They were driven out, forbidden to come back, and harassed, chased, and slaughtered as they attempted to escape to Canada. Their story did not negate what I heard from the older woman at the course we taught, but it put a different cast on it.

Today at lunch, I talked about my little part in the destruction of the West I loved. When we moved to Paonia as outsiders 20 years ago, we immediately began improving it a little by changing the school system, getting a health food store, and establishing a public radio station. Paonia was a perfect little rural working town, but it just needed these few things. Such changes were being effected by busy immigrants all over the West. Now we have another wave of immigration into the West that is a major threat to the region as it now exists. I try very hard not to become an old timer as I think about it, not to continuously mourn what is lost and say, "Gee, those were the days and it's terrible now." I see many examples of people who are like that. Yet I think we need a certain amount of recognition of the damage we do if we get up in the morning and if we act. A sense of loss comes with living; those of us who are parents and have grown children know that incredible sense of loss.

Marc Reisner reminded me a little of me because of the kind of journalism we practice at *High Country News*. We love to do parachute journalism in the West. We will go into a town and write a story that the local journalists cannot write. They generally cannot write it for two reasons: maybe they are tied

¹Earlier in the day, Ed Marston was the Utah State University Convocations invited speaker in honor of Earth Day 1993.

into the local power structure so they cannot write about the people in power; or, they see the world as much more complicated and textured than those of us from outside see it. I go in and I see a great story, I see black hats and white hats, and I see drama. They see Joe and Sally going at it just like they always do rather than a dramatic moment in time.

Although Marc Reisner is a westerner—I do not deny that California is the West-his base is different from a rural western town or a place like Logan, which is almost a city. When Reisner discusses economic rationality and advocates letting money decide what to do, I think, yes, water being put on alfalfa is low-grade economy, but at the same time without that alfalfa and without that cow, what would go there, what would move into that vacuum? Richard Knight at Colorado State University has done analyses and has collected other peoples' analyses of sediment, diversity, and habitat in the West. He says the worst, most degraded ranch is better than the best subdivision in terms of anything we could call the environment. I do not know whether that is true or false. But when we do economic accounting, or when we displace one economy to bring in another economy that is supposed to make things great, it is more complicated than we think.

My initial reaction to Michael Fischer is that I will never forget his phrase, "people of pallor," but my other reaction was to his comments about Rush Limbaugh. I think Rush is one of the smartest white men that I have ever heard. The reason I listen to him—despite the fact that he puts my teeth on edge and I find him obnoxious in many ways—is that he has one incredible strength. He can go right for my weakest point, and he understands where people like me (sort of elitist, liberal, environmentalist) are vulnerable. I listen to him for criticisms, for perspectives on myself that I would never have otherwise. I loved when George Bush lost his bid to be reelected President. Then I listened to Rush closely. He could not make use of, he would not truly listen to, the people like me who were calling in to tell him why Bush lost. So I feel like, at least, I have one up on Rush Limbaugh.

The multi-ethnic, multicultural issue that Michael Fischer raised is fascinating. I spent a year at Stanford University, and I found that the institution was clearly multi-ethnic and multi-gender, but it was uni-culture. Everyone at Stanford, it seemed to me, came from the same background. If they were not already upper-middle class, that is where they were heading. Stanford is a university which produces self-confident, ambitious, upper-middle class, ruling class people. I find the West, especially western Colorado, much more diverse with greater opportunities to cross cultural lines. That is a major challenge in my life. There are Native American and Hispanic com-

munities, but also immense barriers between groups of white males, for instance.

I mentioned the Oregon ranchers this morning. What struck me about those men and women (they operate as couples and the ranching community has brought its women to the front lines) was the enormous pain they must have experienced in crossing over and reaching out to people like me. They abandoned their fortress, which is something I am not sure I have ever done. I admired and was awed by their ability to do that. They did it because their backs are to the wall and it was either go under as so many have chosen to do, or reach out and change and survive. My back is not to the wall at this point.

I was reminded of those ranchers' courage in listening to James Matson of Kaibab Forest Products Company. He was good enough to leave his talk for me so that when I got here last night I could read it. I only read half of it because in the first half, when he posed his series of questions and talked about the importance of wood, I read the message as "there is better living through wood," and I thought I did not have to read the whole paper. I did not know that at the end, he would say that he was willing to reach out, to accept other values as legitimate, to ask the land-grant universities to research what the original forests were like, and to figure out how to manage those forests to produce commonly agreed upon goals. Of everything I heard today, I can hardly believe that his was the closest to my vision of the West. If there is pain in my life, it comes from having to abandon my preservationist view of the West, because it was such a simple vision, but not one that can work.

I think I heard James Matson talking about an internalization of the larger society's values, and that was what I heard from some of the ranchers. Only through that internalization can the West work. It cannot work if imposed from without through regulation and bureaucratic muscle. The reason these are such terribly difficult times is that we are trying to internalize those values. We are trying to convince each other, to co-opt each other, to see the world from others' points of view, and to get others to see our point of view. We should not feel hopeless; this is the time of maximum confusion and maximum pain.

With regard to George Reiger, I think he put the blame in the wrong place. I think bureaucratic failure mirrors social failure. There is no consensus among us, therefore natural resources managers get mixed signals and go in many different directions. No one likes to be beat on and no one likes to be beat on from several directions. Once we understand what we want, once there is consensus among independent, private sector people, then we will find that we have a marvelously talented managerial group that can give us exactly what we want if we know what we want. I do not see privatization as a solution. It is

a solution, but I do not think it is a solution for the West. The heart of the West is its public lands. The challenge for us as a society, and it will make or break us, is whether or not we can come together and manage those public lands. If we cannot, we fail as a society and we will continue to have endless conflict. If we can, we have a treasure that is beyond any possible imagining.

George Reiger performed another function: he challenged the idea of ecosystem management. I want to present what I think of as ecosystem management. My idea of ecosystem management is both private and public land-based and comes from an example by Sid Goodlow. Sid is a rancher in southern New Mexico who is about fifty years old. His ranch is on the Smokey the Bear District of the Lincoln National Forest, about 80 miles north of Ruidoso, New Mexico. About 30 years ago, Sid bought 3,600 acres of piñon-juniper uplands. The land had no live streams on it, was pretty much covered with piñonjunipers, and was barely able to support, according to Sid, seventy starving mother cows with their calves. He said he knew it was not very good land, but it was all he could afford.

Sid wanted to know where the corners of his property were so he would know what land belonged to the Bureau of Land Management below his place and what land belonged to the Lincoln National Forest above his place. So Sid began looking for the monuments that marked the corners. To aid his search, he read the original surveyor's notes. He found that the original surveyor's notes said, "No trees for 100 chains" (surveyors measure distances in chains). So they set a rock cairn and when Sid found that cairn a century later, it was always hidden in a dense piñon-juniper forest. At one time there was an Indian village on Sid's land. Native Americans were long gone, but they had left petroglyphs showing pictures of fish jumping and beavers gnawing on willows and aspens. Sid put two and two together, and decided that originally his ranch was a savannah: there were piñon-juniper trees in fire-resistant, rocky areas, but basically the land was open grasslands with year-round streams instead of the eroding gullies on his land.

Sid spent thirty years recreating the savannah. He bought a wood corer to determine the age of the trees. He would core the trees and any tree that was pre-European settlement, he left. Any tree that was younger, he took out. I visited his ranch in Fall 1992 and he had running streams, year-round running streams. His downstream neighbors are really mad at him because they used to get a spring rush of irrigation water off the uplands, and now that water is absorbed by his land. Downstream neighbors get a live stream all year, but they do not get the spring flood waters that they once used as irrigation water.

Sid bought a little portable saw that he hauls behind a jeep up to the Lincoln National Forest where he is beginning to cut wood. Because of fire suppression and loggers cutting the big Ponderosa pines, there are thousands of small trees but no big ones. You cannot set a fire there because it would turn into an inferno. Sid is going in and selling vegas for adobe houses and firewood from trees he is cutting in an attempt to get the wood volume low enough so they can reintroduce burning. He is doing this cooperatively with the Smokey Bear District, which is amusing and ironic because this is the place where, after the Forest Service had already created Smokey Bear, a little burned cub was found, rescued and nursed back to life. In honor of that event, the district changed its name to Smokey Bear.

Sid is also burning on his grasslands to control the piñon-juniper. He has also reintroduced wild turkeys because he says they fluff up the fallen pine needles so fires burn cooler. According to Sid, without turkeys, fires would not spread until you get loading of fuel to the point the whole area would go up in flames. Sid also makes money from some hunting cabins he has there and he now has 130 fat cows with their calves. When I visited, they had just had five years of drought. This is only an outline; I have not done Sid's view of that ecosystem justice.

This example is my idea of ecosystem management. While it has been implemented by a private person on private land, it also has been implemented with the help of a government agency. The agency personnel were amenable to Sid's efforts. I wanted to tell Sid's story so that we would have at least one example of what ecosystem management might be.

I want to close with a personal note about my visit to Sid's ranch. When I arrived, after driving 150 miles through a piñon-juniper desert—at least that is how I had begun thinking about that forest— Sid was there along with a retired rancher in his 70s and Sid's son-in-law. Sid had had a \$30,000 back operation because the work of clearing his land had destroyed his back and it had to be rebuilt. Those three men were standing around a brushhog. A brushhog is a rotary lawnmower blown up about 500 times. They wanted to lift it into the back of a pickup truck. That is how ranchers do things. I was to be the fourth corner. So we all lifted, Sid with a bad back and a seventy-year-old man, and their three corners go up while my corner stays on the ground. They said, "Oh, you have the heavy corner," being really gracious. We figured out a different way to get it into the pickup truck.

Jerry Hopkins and Daniel Sugerman wrote a biography about Jim Morrison entitled *No One Here Gets Out Alive*. The lesson I drew from that experience is that we do not even get half way out of here

undamaged. Sid lost his back, and I sit at a desk and am not the vigorous person I could be. That is the story of the West. We should not be too demanding. We should not expect too much except to hope for community and cooperation and understanding.