Ripples Across A Pond: From Conflict to Collaboration in Wallowa County Oregon and Beyond

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Abstract

This case is a story about the restoration of broken economies, societies and forest systems in Wallowa County, Oregon USA and the manner in which those experiences are being spread across similar systems of public and private land in the western US. The history of conflict over forest management in the PNW of the USA, extends over several decades and came to a head when the Spotted Owl and two salmonids were listed as endangered species. Intensive timber production stopped; sawmills closed; household incomes fell along with revenues required to maintain social services and forest management. Every business and household in Wallowa County felt the downstream economic effects of the collapse of the timber industry. The case reports on the work of Wallowa Resources, a community based civil society organisation that was established in 1996 to work with forest system stakeholders to restore forest based livelihoods and forest management through innovation and entrepreneurship so that endangered species could be protected and people could maintain a traditional rural lifestyle. Beyond that, ideas being developed and tested in Wallowa are being adopted and adapted by 15 similar county based CSOs in the dry forest region of PNW through a partnership of CSOs and the University of Oregon. This forest centered initiative is set within a larger framework of land use reform that encompasses forest, river and rangeland systems under federal, state and private management the rural west. The aim is collaborative partnerships operating at relevant levels of scale for effective restoration and management. The biggest obstacles are conflicts between authorities, environmental organisations and local people. The biggest threats are loss of ecosystem function in the face of advancing climate and other global scale change.

Keywords: Community based CSO, collaboration, conflict, endangered species, forest systems, land use reform, livelihoods, restoration, scale