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"Place" as an Integrating Concept in Natural Resource Politics: Propositions for a Social Science Research Agenda

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This article lays out six propositions centering on a relationship between people-place connections and strategic behavior in natural resource politics. The first two propositions suggest a strong and direct connection between self-identity, place, and how individuals perceive and value the environment. The third, fourth, and fifth propositions tie together social group identity and place, particularly emphasizing the influence of social group identity on strategic behavior in natural resource politics. The sixth proposition relates to the geographic scale of place as a strategic choice in natural resource decision making. Taken together, the propositions suggest that natural resource politics is as much a contest over place meanings as it is a competition among interest groups over scarce resources. The place perspective suggests an expanded role for natural resource social scientists as giving voice to meanings and values that may not otherwise be expressed in natural resource decision-making processes.

Keywords group identity, natural resource conflict, natural resource decision making, natural resource policy analysis, place, sense of place

Phrases such as "sense of place" and "place attachment" are increasingly used to characterize the complex connections people have with the environments they encounter (Cantrill 1998; Williams and Stewart 1998). Implied in these phrases are the rich and often powerfully emotional sentiments that influence how people

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perceive, experience, and value the environment. As such, people-place connections are difficult to uniformly define and measure since they vary across places over time. They further suggest that places are not merely the physical backdrops of human action. Places constitute those actions, helping people find order and meaning in the world.

The connection between people and places in a natural resource management context has been explored primarily through wildland recreation research (Mitchell et al. 1993; Schroeder 1996; Williams et al. 1992). Exploring this people-place connection in the context of natural resource politics, however, is still in its infancy. This connection is critical to examine since place-based approaches to addressing natural resource issues are receiving increased attention from academics, policymakers, and citizens. The reason for this increased attention is perhaps best captured by the following quote from Daniel Kemmis (1990), *Community and the Politics of Place:*

> Places have a way of claiming people. When they claim very diverse kinds of people, then those people must eventually learn to live with each other; they must learn to inhabit, their place together, which they can only do through the development of certain practices of inhabitation which both rely upon and nurture the old-fashion civic virtues of trust, honesty, justice, toleration, cooperation, hope, and remembrance. (p. 119)

The emergence and persistence of community-based collaborative partnerships since the early 1990s lend real-world support to Kemmis' thesis. These partnerships, also called "place-based" collaborations, are generally composed of individuals who, despite their diverse backgrounds and frequently opposing perspectives on natural resource management, work together to define and address common resource management issues bounded by a geographic place (e.g., watershed, forest land surrounding a community). They emphasize open participation regardless of interest group participation, joint learning and problem solving, proactive conflict management, and joint implementation and monitoring of on-the-ground actions. Although there is not a comprehensive catalog of such partnerships, an impressive body of literature has grown around the study of place-based collaborations (Coughlin et al. 1999; Griffin 1999; Richard and Burns 1998; Sturtevant and Lange 1995; Weber 2000; Wondolleck and Yaffee 2000).

When viewing place-based collaborative partnerships in light of Kemmis's assertions, there appears to be a new type of politics in natural resource management-a politics of place. The common thread running through these initiatives is the notion that the interactions occurring in place-based collaborations tend to center on problem solving, emphasize trust building, and focus on achieving on-the-ground actions supported by a broad spectrum of publics. In contrast, the interactions in formal political processes, such as those that occur in legislative arenas or in agency planning processes, tend to center on approving or opposing single-issue policy positions favored by a coalition of interest groups-the politics of interests. While there is a well-founded, healthy skepticism about the role of place-based collaboration (Getches 1998; McCloskey 1996), empirical research findings generally support the notion that these differences between place-based collaborative processes and traditional policy processes are significant. This difference may, in part, be explained by the fact that a place-a distinct geographic area toward which all collaboration participants express value-is a central organizing principle for many of these emergent collaborative partnerships.

What, then, is the connection between people, places, and politics? The purpose of this article is to present a set of theory-informed propositions that guide how these connections can be systematically examined. The propositions are centered on the following fundamental premise: *Place is a powerful social influence* in natural resource politics. The propositions have a distinctive social psychological flavor as they draw primarily from social cognition perspectives in human geography and environmental psychology. The article is organized into three sections. The first section synthesizes theoretical writings and empirical research on people-place relationships, especially literature that addresses how place influences individual and collective action. This synthesis builds on a foundation laid out in Williams and Patterson (1996). As a result of this literature review and synthesis, we conclude that "place" is a compelling social concept that can inform the study of natural resource politics.

The propositions are presented in the second section. A key theme among the propositions is identity-both self-identity and social-group identity. Group identity has been recognized a key behavioral influence in empirical research in human geography and environmental psychology, as well in experimental and field research on strategic group decision-making processes. The last section discusses the implications of taking a place perspective when examining natural resource politics. One key implication is that place-based inquiry strives to bring to the fore the diverse ways in which values and meanings are articulated and negotiated, but are typically excluded in natural resource decision making. A key goal of place-based inquiry is to foster more equitable, democratic participation in natural resource politics by including a broader range of voices and values centering around places rather than policy positions.

"Place" as a Social Science Concept

This section is a synthesis of the place literature primarily from human geography and environmental psychology, but also includes works from other disciplines. The literature synthesis is confined to natural resource management contexts, building on a synthesis of the same literature base compiled by Williams and Patterson (1996). The key difference between this article and Williams and Patterson is that our focus is enhancing understanding of people-place relationships in a *political* context.[1]

Defining "Place"

Place is defined as a physical space imbued with meaning (Low and Altman 1992, 5). Place meanings encompass instrumental or utilitarian values as well as intangible values such as belonging, attachment, beauty, and spirituality. This definition explicitly acknowledges the subjectivity of people's encounters with places. The meanings people assign to such encounters are not readily categorized; instrumental and intangible values are intertwined. Consider the phrase, "There's no place like home." A "home" is: a physical structure that provides financial security; the locus of sentimental experiences, social relationships, and memories; and a cultural symbol that expresses stability, comfort, and identity. When people speak of "home," they may not even be referring to a geographic location but to an idea that conveys certain images and sentiments. Home is, thus, a physical space imbued with significant meanings which defy categorization.

How does this definition relate to natural resource politics? By taking a place perspective, one recognizes that human connections with natural resources and the

landscapes in which they occur are multifaceted, complex, and saturated with meaning. Instrumental and intangible values are inseparable; both are part and parcel of the meanings people may assign to a place. Finally, by taking the place perspective, a social science researcher recognizes that these connections are not readily amenable to replicable measurement, quantification, and generalization across populations. As Williams and Patterson claim (1996): "The concept of place embeds [natural] resource attributes back into the system of which they are a part, reminding managers that resources exist in a meaning-filled spatial (and temporal) context. Recognizing and understanding this context is the principal contribution of social science to ecosystem management" (508-509).

Key Elements of Place

In the words of geographer Robert Sack, places are "fundamental means by which we make sense of the world and through which we act" (1992, 1). Places inform who we are and therefore how we are to behave; in short, to be some*where* is to be some*one*. More importantly, places are also imbued with socially constructed (and often politically defined) expectations of appropriate behavior. For example, an artificial dinosaur skeleton in a municipal park invites people to play on it; the same skeleton in a museum of natural history invites people to learn about prehistoric life. Although the same physical attribute exists in both places, the identity of the people, their behaviors, and the meaning of those behaviors are prescribed differently in each place. Hence, place is not simply an inert container for biophysical attributes; place is constructed-and continuously reconstructed-through social and political processes that assign meaning. This is why several place writers illustrate place as the intersection of three forces, as depicted in Figure 1 (Canter 1977; Relph 1976; Sack 1992).

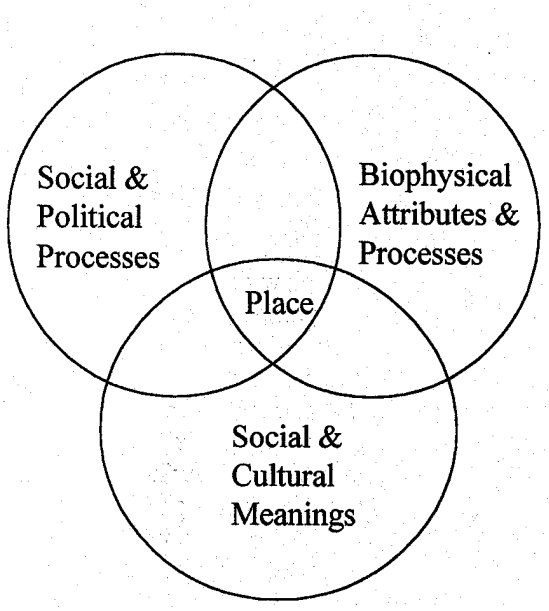

FIGURE 1 Schematic of place as the locus of forces affecting human action. Based on Canter (1977), Relph (1976), and Sack (1992).

Biophysical attributes and processes include naturally occurring and human-made physical features, and processes such as climate, nutrient flows, predator-prey relationships, animal and human migrations, hydrologic regimes, and the like. Social and political processes encompass various types of human interactions, from familial relations to resource user conflicts to political power plays. These also include formal and informal rules (e.g., statutes, regulations, treaties, norms) governing conduct. Social and cultural meanings are the ideas, values, and beliefs that order the world. Each force provides a type of "information" that allows people to define who they are and how they must behave in that place.

How might this conception of place transfer to natural resource management? Consider the following forestry illustration. On private forest lands, cutting down trees is generally considered an appropriate activity. Although forest practices restrictions may be imposed in some situations, such as harvesting in wetlands, riparian zones, or endangered species habitat, cutting down trees on private lands is widely considered an appropriate land use. However, in a designated wilderness area, cutting down trees would never even be considered as it is both illegal and culturally inappropriate. The most heated forestry-related conflicts are over logging on multiple-use public lands. On these lands, cutting trees is legal as long as it complies with federal environmental statutes and regulations. However, culturally, cutting trees on public lands has become distasteful to many and even vilified by some groups. Although the species and size of the trees may be identical to those on private lands (e.g., identical biophysical attributes), the *meaning* of cutting trees differs dramatically for public lands. The social and political processes that define what is and is not appropriate behavior on public lands has altered the meaning of cutting trees in recent years.

As natural resource planning and management increasingly occurs at a landscape scale, especially on federal lands in the United States, the relevance of "place" becomes more apparent. Indeed, landscapes are places-socially constructed settings imbued with meaning (Bender 1993; Greider and Garkovich 1994; Riley 1992). In some landscapes, such as a designated wilderness area or municipal watershed, expectations of appropriate behavior are well defined and well accepted. But what about the urban-wildland interface? Or multiple-use public forest land? In these landscapes, expectations of appropriate behavior are not well defined and well accepted. It is not surprising that conflict is a pervasive feature of natural resource planning and management decision making. Conflicts emerge not only over competing uses, such as between nonmotorized and motorized recreation users, but also over the meanings-and, therefore, expectations of appropriate behavior-assigned to the place. In this view, understanding how and why individuals define appropriate behavior for a landscape turns on understanding the landscape as a place-as the convergence of social and political processes, biophysical attributes and processes, and social and cultural meanings.

Places Influence Individual Action

The place literature is generally composed of two approaches for investigating how and why places influence individual action. The first is a phenomenological approach, which can be summarized by Kemmis's assertion that "places have way of claiming people" (1990, 119). In this view, places take on an iconic quality, somehow permeating our collective consciousness and subconsciousness, and motivating people to view places as benchmarks of experience, memories, and values (Anderson

and Gale 1992; Duncan and Ley 1993; Feld and Basso 1996). The socially constructed symbolic meanings of a place, rather than the place itself, that holds power over people. The phenomenological approach avoids specifying mechanisms by which places influence people; that places influence people is taken for granted (Eyles 1988; Eyles and Smith 1988). More important is understanding the nuances and consequences (both positive and negative) of this influence (Low 1992; Rodman 1992).

The second approach centers on examining people-place relationships from a cognitive perspective. This approach arose in human geography in the mid 1970s (Golledge and Rushton 1976; Relph 1976; Tuan 1974), paralleling a similar emergence in cognition studies in environmental psychology (Canter 1977; Moore 1976). The cognitive approach rests on the premise that people's valuations of and behavior in a place are primarily driven by how the human mind processes information about a geographic setting (Burnett 1976). Figure 2 illustrates a cognitive model of geographic decision making as adapted from Burnett (1976, 26) and Canter (1977, 8). According to this model, the human mind discriminates and categorizes information about the place according to certain cognitive strategies (heuristics or "rules of thumb"), as well as personality and social and cultural factors. Individuals in turn act to influence the setting, which alters biophysical attributes and place meanings, and provides new information to individuals.

The cognitive model has been applied in two strands of place-based inquiry. One strand seeks to understand the linkages between how people categorize places and

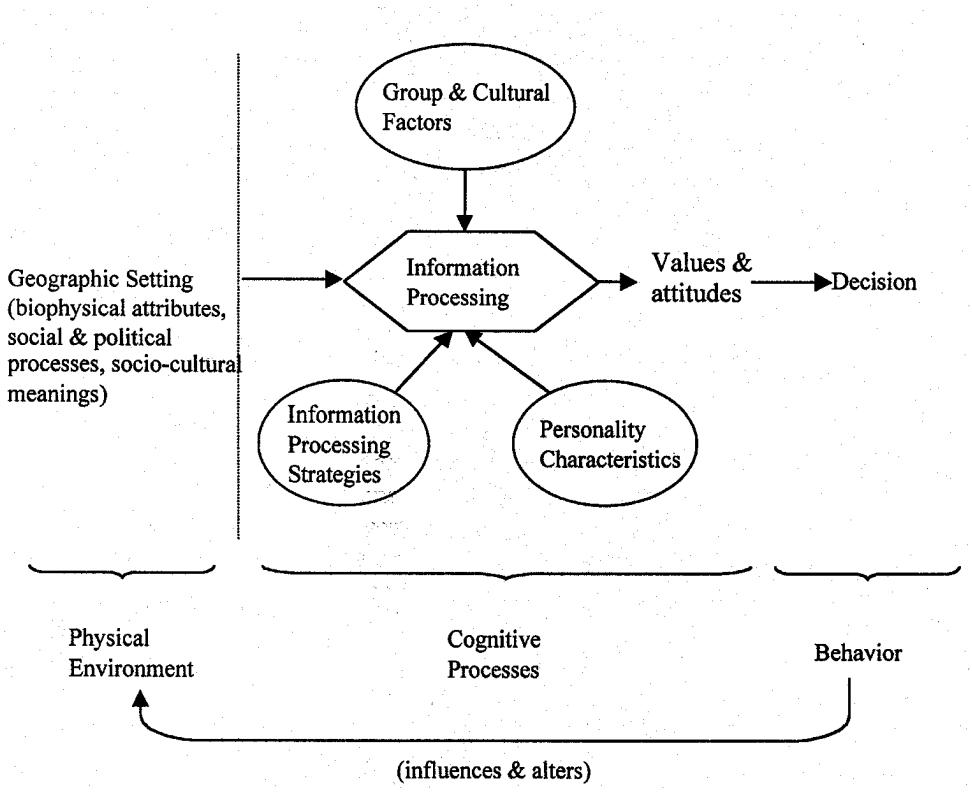

FIGURE 2 A cognitive model of geographic decision making. Adapted from Burnett (1976) and Canter (1977).

their behavior (Canter 1977; Cuba and Hummon 1993; Kaplan and Kaplan 1989; Kramer 1995; Stokols and Shumaker 1981). Such studies focus on how individuals discriminate and classify places according to how well they satisfy individual preferences. A second strand of inquiry focuses on the cognitive strategies themselves-how they develop and transform as individuals interact with a place or multiple places (Golledge and Rushton 1976; Moore and Golledge 1976; Proshansky et al. 1983). This latter strand of inquiry is of primary relevance to natural resource politics because in strategic decision processes (e.g., land use planning, conflict over resource management objectives), people's behaviors have primarily been explained as a function of cognitive strategies-strategies that take into account not only information about the geographic setting in question, but information about the fairness of the decision process (Lind and Tyler 1988), other participants in the process (Tetlock 1985; Thompson and Hastie 1990), and potential policy outcomes (Austin 1994; Fischhoff 1983).

One of the recurring cognitive strategies uncovered in place-based research is the protection and enhancement of self-identity (Proshansky et al. 1983). Consider the following example in Greider and Garkovich (1994). In a hypothetical field trip, a researcher may ask a developer, a farmer, and a hunter to describe the potential of an open field. Predictably, the field is described as suburban home sites, endless rows of wheat, and grazing grounds for a five-point buck, respectively. The field is conceptualized in particular ways by different people depending on how people define themselves. Beyond the obvious utilitarian values one might have for a particular setting, the ways people see and value that setting are fundamentally expressions of self-identity.

Why is self-identity important in natural resource politics? Identity is a powerful behavioral influence, for the process of distinguishing oneself from others lends meaning and order to an otherwise chaotic world. Not only do places affect how individuals look out upon the world (e.g., categorization or classification of places), they influence how they look on themselves. How one understands, evaluates, and acts in a geographic setting directly reflects ones self-identity. Like a tinted window, place is at once reflective and transparent, allowing one to look on oneself while looking on others. This conception of people-place relationships suggests that the connections people have with natural resources extend far beyond use. For many people, these connections cut to the core of their sense of self (Cantrill 1998; Williams and Stewart 1998). It is not surprising that reactions to natural resource policy and management proposals can be intensely emotional. This conception of people-place relationships also suggests that natural resource politics is layered with very passionate and deep-seated personal elements. Outside the power plays over traditional economic and environmental policy positions conducted by interest groups in legislatures, formal agency planning processes, or courtrooms, natural resource politics involves citizens whose expressions of value for natural resources are rooted in connections with places, connections that define in part who they are.

Places Influence Collective Action

That places can inspire people to take collective action is a central theme in the place literature. Individuals who organize around place-based collective action essentially seek to impose a social order by assigning certain shared meanings and expectations of appropriate behaviors to a place (Low and Altman 1992; Stokols and

Shumaker 1981). In turn, the place-based meanings and expectations of behavior are expressions of the group's self-identification-a place-based social group identity (Agnew 1992; Brandenburg and Carroll 1995; Greider and Garkovich 1994). Group identity is a cognitive process for defining oneself and others according to broad social categories (Turner 1982). Group identity shapes how an individual infers the intentions and, hence, predicts behaviors of others based on perceptions of the others' group identities-often erroneously (Allison and Messick 1985; Jetten et al. 1996). Furthermore, by adopting a certain group identity, the individual can convey to others one's own intentions and behavior.

Just as places are fundamental to an individual's self-identity, so they are to group identity. As geographer Byron Miller (1992) writes, "Individuals who come to share domains of particular places must necessarily confront the meaning of such interactions .... [I]ndividuals may come to see commonalities in their experience. They may come to consider themselves members of a community and view themselves in collective terms" (p. 32). Examples of what Miller proposes abound in natural resource management contexts. For instance, "friends" groups can be found in abundance throughout the United States. Such groups are organized by individuals who share not only similar experiences but goals to protect, use, and maintain a particular natural area that allows others to enjoy those experiences. The "friends" reference reinforces the centrality of highly personal relationships to a place as well as positive relationships between individuals relative to a place. The "friends" reference creates a sense of shared identity, what is commonly called the "ingroup" effect (Brewer 1979; Turner 1982).

The "ingroup" effect refers to a cognitive frame individuals develop when interacting in strategic group settings, such as team competitions or resource allocation conflicts. By identifying oneself and others according to the groups they are perceived to belong to-the "ingroup" versus an opposing "outgroup"-people can determine how to behave in strategic situations. Place-based ingroup-outgroup effects are especially evident in rural communities that experience a rapid influx of urban migrants who bring ideas, norms, and practices that are very different from those belonging to long-time community residents. Disputes in these communities are often characterized as "newcomers" versus "old-timers." Such ingroupoutgroup frames can entrench negative stereotypes and behaviors that can be very difficult to overcome. Ingroup-outgroup frames can exaggerate differences, causing people to believe that conflicts can only be resolved if one group leaves entirely. The influence of group identity on strategic behavior is a consistently significant finding from research in strategic group decision making, such as social dilemma experiments, negotiation simulations, and field research in intergroup conflict and negotiation (Branscombe et al. 1993; Dawes et al. 1988; Dovidio et al. 1998; Jetten et al. 1996; Kramer et al. 1993).

The influence of place on group identity has been examined in a small but growing number of empirical studies. In a study examining the relationship between group formation and place in educational institutions, Minami and Tanaka (1995) discovered through surveys and group observation that distinct social groups organized and interacted according to "group-occupied space." Furthermore, one of the primary activities of the observed groups was to take actions to protect and maintain their group-occupied space. If denied their places, groups would either disband or reconfigure around a newfound place. A new place-based group identity would emerge and, with it, a new set of place meanings. These findings extend results from earlier field case studies (Low 1992; Pellow 1992; Rodman 1992).

The possibilities for common place-based group identities fosters a certain optimism. This optimism has been boosted by collaborative partnerships such as the Applegate Partnership and the Quincy Library Group. That traditional adversaries like "environmentalists" and "loggers" in these communities in the Pacific Northwest and northern California, respectively, could sufficiently work through their core differences to collaboratively address resource management issues in their shared place seems almost antithetical. The ingroup-outgroup frames presented in the media, political, and judicial processes, and our own experiences are causes for cynicism. Yet the potential for the discovery of common affiliations to a place in part explains why a broad spectrum of individuals and groups who have an abiding interest in natural resource management favors place-based approaches to deal with natural resource issues. Developing a common place-based group identity among such disparate individuals can provide the basis for individuals to collectively act without relying on formal contracts or legal authority.

Why is the relationship between place and collective action significant? In short, natural resource politics is not always and forever the zero-sum game articulated in the highly positional rhetoric of interest groups and the news media. Natural resource management, as an inherently place-based endeavor, always brings diverse individuals and groups in relationship to one another. Although conflicts stemming from ingroup-outgroup frames are inevitable, such conflicts do not wholly preclude the possibility of discovering common place-based group identities. There is, of course, a potential negative side: a community with a powerful common group identity can become narrow-minded and resistant to change (Getches 1998; McCloskey 1996). Nevertheless, place remains a central feature of natural resource politics and management, and can play a role in transforming and sustaining the communities that have direct effects on natural resources.

Summary

The place concept touches on many central themes in the social sciences: cognition, identity, conflict, collective action, and politics. There are several perspectives in the place literature concerning how places act upon people. One of the more productive perspectives focuses on cognitive processes. This perspective is consistent with the cognitive approach taken by researchers interested in strategic group decision making, conflict, and negotiation-fields of study with direct linkages to the study of natural resource politics. While the relationship between place and natural resource politics is the focus of this article, it is clear that place is a powerful, integrating social science concept that offers unique perspectives on how social science research in general can continue exploring the connections between people, natural resources, and the environment as a whole.

Propositions

The following section sets out six propositions that reflect a place-based approach to interpreting behavior in natural resource policy debates. The propositions have a distinctive social psychological flavor, reflecting the cognitive approach employed in place studies as well as in research in strategic group decision making. The first two propositions draw a connection between people and places at an individual level. The third, fourth, and fifth propositions assert linkages between places and group-level strategic behaviors in natural resource controversies. The last proposition

emphasizes geographic scale as an important facet in the relationship between place, people, and natural resource politics.

Proposition 1: People's Perceptions and Evaluations of the Environment Are Expressions of Place-Based Self-Identity

Individuals tend to view themselves relative to the surrounding environment. At "home," one is a family member or roommate. At "work," one is a colleague, superior, or subordinate. In the natural environment, one can be sixth-generation rancher or a weary refugee from the city. One might be a "weekend warrior" from a nearby urban community or a permanent resident, a newcomer, or an old-timer. One can also consider oneself an "environmentalist" or an experienced "land steward." In short, an individual's interactions with a place shape the individual's identity relative to that place. The individual values about the place are expressions of self-definition. That places are intertwined with one's sense of self points to the deeply personal connections people have to natural resources and the environment. These connections are packed with dense layers of history and meaning. This makes measurement and generalization of people-environment connections difficult. Uncovering and understanding people-environment connections requires diversity of methods to "unpack" the layers of identity and meaning that connect people to places.

Proposition 2: People Perceive and Evaluate the Environment as Different Places Rather Than an Assemblage of Individual Biophysical Attributes

The environment is not an inert, physical entity "out there" with trees, water, animals, and the like, but a dynamic system of interconnected, meaning-laden places. Biophysical attributes may be the most obvious features of places; however, those attributes are constantly altered by social and political processes (e.g., personal experiences, community uses, regional economic production, national conservation policies) and vary greatly in their social and cultural significance. When people articulate their concerns for and interest in the environment, they are expressing meanings that extend beyond the value of the biophysical resources. They are conveying their values for the legitimacy of social and political processes that shape and are influenced by specific places, and for the viability of significant social and cultural meanings. For example, when an activist and a logger clash over the harvest of a stand of trees, there is far more than the trees at stake. For the activist, the stand may hold symbolic value as a "biological legacy" or a "pristine ecosystem." The stand is, in essence, a special place in a world that is fast losing its special places. For the logger, the stand may reflect a way of life that cannot be measured solely by per capita income. Logging is a means by which independent people can lead independent lifestyles, work outside, and contribute to the economic well-being of the nation. Further, the logger does not regard logging the stand as destructive to the environment, but as an important way to renew the stand so that it can provide resources in the future.

Proposition 3: Social Groups That Seemingly Emerge Around Using, Protecting, or Altering the Physical Attributes of a Location May Be Engaging in More Fundamental Processes of Defining Significant Social and Cultural Meanings to That Place

A place not only embodies physical attributes, but encompasses expectations of what activities and people belong in place, and why certain activities and people do

or do not belong (e.g., meaning). Hence, a parcel of public land can give rise to different groups who have different definitions of what is considered "appropriate." For a group of scientists, that parcel may have attributes that make it suitable as nesting habitat for a certain bird species, and therefore they would consider human activities inappropriate during certain times of year. For a group of off-road vehicle enthusiasts, that parcel provides convenient and safe access to four-wheel-drive recreation for local youth who may otherwise engage in riskier behaviors in town. For a group of county commissioners, that parcel may have attributes that make it a perfect light industrial complex that can increase employment and property tax revenues. It is not simply the utility of biophysical attributes of the parcel that unites individuals into these groups; they are also united around certain meanings of place. Debates among different social groups must therefore be understood at this more fundamental level.

Proposition 4: People's Evaluations of, and Responses to, Natural Resource Management Proposals Are Influenced by Their Identification With Social Groups Organized Around Particular Meanings of the Places Involved

Proposals that alter a place through management actions (or lack of actions) invariably generate a response from people, even among people who have never even been to the place in dispute. Such responses have less to do with the place than with their identification with groups organized around meanings of the disputed place. For example, in January 2000, over 10,000 shovels were mailed from people across the United States to Elko County, Nevada. The mass mailing was to show support for the "Jarbidge Shovel Brigade," a group of Elko County residents who were protesting the refusal of the USDA Forest Service to rebuild a washed-out road adjacent to the Jarbidge River. It was not the road closure itself that most likely inspired people from as far off as Maine and Florida to mail in shovels. More likely, the people who sent the shovels identified with Elko County residents as ordinary citizens who have little or no voice in how the federal government defines what can and cannot occur in their local place. Similarly, many people who have never been to Alaska offer support to environmental organizations fighting to prevent oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge because they perceive a shared identification with any environmental group trying to save any remaining undeveloped place.

In this way, people perceive and evaluate natural resource management according to how the social group with which they identify assigns expectations of and meanings to the place in question. However, people may have to choose among multiple groups; each person may identify oneself as a "consumer" of forest products, a "recreation enthusiast," an "environmentalist," and a former resident of a rural Western county. Place-based group identity is but one of several group identities one can assume in a natural resource controversy.

Proposition 5: Groups Intentionally Manipulate the Meanings of Places Hoping to Influence the Outcome of Natural Resource Controversies

Every physical setting has multiple layers of meaning: As noted earlier, an open field is at once a potential residential subdivision, wheat. field, or deer foraging area, depending on who is viewing the field-a developer; a farmer, or a hunter. What the field will eventually be used for; and symbolize, depends on the ability of each individual or affiliated group to, manipulate and--market its place meanings to

policymakers. In natural resource politics, natural resource controversies frequently come down to a contest over place meanings. Individuals who inhabit or frequently encounter a setting may have one set of place meanings. Occasional visitors, national interest groups, the media, or policymakers may craft their own meanings by using certain images or focusing on a narrow set of biophysical attributes.

Place meanings can be superficial, like an advertisement. However, an increasing number of natural resource controversies revolve around competing place meanings that are deeply held, vigorously defended, and applied in ways that border on religious conviction. Indeed, in the battles over logging in the Pacific Northwest in the 1980s, environmental organizations effectively drew a parallel between the majestic cathedrals in Europe to the old-growth forests of the Northwest. The term "cathedral forests," coupled with stunning photos of those forests, became an effective media strategy and struck a chord with the American public. The religious nature of place meanings results in controversies that can become heated in a very short period of time. The manipulation of place meanings to create a "flashy" situation can quickly raise the visibility of the controversy, thereby demanding immediate political action. Groups skilled in manipulating place meanings can direct the political action and eventual resolution of the controversy in their favor.

Proposition 6: The Geographic Scale of a Place Can Change People's Perceived Group Identifications and Therefore Influence the Outcomes of a Natural Resource Controversy

Natural resource policy debates span a continuum from the global scale (climate change, acid rain, migratory birds, marine mammals) to local scales (loss of neighborhood street trees to development, residential home loss to wildland fire). At each geographic scale, there are different possible groups with which an individual may identify. At large geographic scales, such as a region or nation, well-established interest groups tend to dominate natural resource debates. People typically "pick sides" according to whether they consider themselves pro-environmentalist or pro-business. However, at local scales, one may also be a neighbor, a parent of a child who goes to the same school or who plays on the same soccer team as the child of so-called "opponents," a member of the same house of worship as an opponent, or a patron of the same store where an opponent buys groceries. While there may be differences, these individuals may also have common sentiments of, and concerns for, what happens to a shared place.

Discussion

The propositions put forth here suggest that natural resource politics is as much a contest over place meanings as it is a competition over the allocation and distribution of scarce resources among interest groups. Natural resource management actions create, transform, and destroy place meanings-meanings around which individuals and groups develop a sense of identity. Hence, some groups will vigorously defend place meanings under threat while others will favor the creation and transformation of alternative meanings. There is no objective middle ground; each group-even natural resource scientists and managers-advocates certain place meanings. However, place-based group identities are more complex than labels typically used in the study of natural resource politics, such as "environmentalist" or "logger." Indeed, stereotypical ingroup-outgroup labeling tends to

mask people-place connections-connections that may in fact be shared in common by opposing groups.

Brandenburg and Carroll (1995) discovered this masking process in a study of people's perceptions of how a small watershed on national forest lands should be managed by the USDA Forest Service. Using qualitative research methods, the authors found that the perceptions expressed by one stakeholder group ran counter to what one would normally infer from stereotypical group categories:

> These stakeholders could not be categorized with regular demographic variables, such as ethnicity, gender, education, income, or occupation. Rather, they represent a wide range of variables. Most important, this group contained individuals who said they identified with divergent primary groups, such as loggers and environmentalists. Thus, it was the experience of place instead of common group values that appeared to shape their environmental values and landscape meanings regarding the river drainage.
> (1995, 391)

These and other observations highlighting the significance of place-based experiences and affiliation call into question the general portrayal of natural resource politics as solely a competition between interest groups or resource users. A place perspective-as expressed in the propositions-invites the social scientist in natural resources to turn a conceptual corner and look at natural resource politics in a different way. This fresh perspective is instigated by the fact that many of the social and political processes influencing the outcomes of many natural resource controversies occur outside of political centers like Washington, DC, state capitols, city halls, courtrooms, or the ballot box. To a growing extent, natural resource politics takes varied forms, ranging from a library in a rural Western community to a neighborhood coalition to halt the removal of street trees. Natural resource politics is, at a fundamental level, the politics of place. In turn, the politics of place is multilayered and rich in subtleties, as illustrated in the study by Brandenburg and Carroll.

Turning the corner toward a place-based perspective asks the natural resource social scientist to take a closer look at place itself. Place is not an inert physical container for biophysical objects and human actions. Places are, in and of themselves, social constructs that defy ready definition, categorization, and measurement. Each place has a unique history among its inhabitants and visitors. Personalities, partnerships, feuds, compromises, out-migrants, and newcomers make a place what it is. In turn, the place brings people in relation to one another in incomparable ways, thereby affecting the biophysical attributes and processes in incomparable ways.

Each place, then, embodies and gives rise to its own set of social and political processes and, as a result, social and cultural meanings. These processes and meanings are *emergent properties* of particular places. That is, social and political behaviors and place meanings are not discernable by looking solely at biophysical attributes or individual inhabitants of the place; they emerge as result of the interaction between biophysical attributes and social and political processes. Meanings assigned to a place are unique to that place and do not readily transfer to other places, even if the biophysical attributes are identical. This means that people-place connections are properties that cannot be readily discerned independently of the places from which they emerge. Understanding people-place connections in the context of natural resource controversies requires the researcher to

experience the places and processes as stakeholders in the controversy do. This mode of inquiry falls into the "interpretivist" camp and relies on qualitative research methods to gather, analyze, and interpret data (Denzin and Lincoln 1998). In general, interpretivist social inquiry aims at uncovering patterns of social interactions in their real-world situations, and explaining those patterns through inductive analyses. It locates the researcher firmly within the world as the research subjects experience it (Maxwell 1996).

The six propositions are highly suggestive of an interpretivist approach as they center on the nuances of people-place connections, and the social and political contests that define what place meanings are significant, and how those meanings are created, protected, transformed, and destroyed. The propositions ask the researcher to set aside preconceived notions of how people perceive, experience, and value the environment based on traditional group affiliations (e.g., interest group, user group) and to uncover place-based connections. This uncovering process warrants the employment of diverse methods, such as ethnographic interviews, participant observation, content analysis of documents, survey instruments, cognitive concept mapping (see Kearney and Kaplan 1997), and oral histories. Table I links each proposition with potential research methods. The resulting data-interview texts, participant-observation notes, content analysis themes, survey data, and concept maps-are systematically coded and analyzed for common themes and patterns (see further Denzin and Lincoln 1998). The development of these patterns occurs through an inductive process that constantly compares conceptual themes with observed behavior. A good example of this form of research is Brandenburg and Carroll's study (see also Brandenburg et al. 1995).

Perhaps more fundamentally, turning the corner toward a place-based perspective asks natural resource social scientists to reformulate their role in natural resource politics. Conducting place-based social research provides more than data for decision makers. It transforms the decision-making process itself by redistributing power to voices and meanings that may not otherwise be expressed. In general, natural resource politics has been dominated by organized interest groups, commodity industries, elected officials, scientific experts, and resource specialists. All of these groups assign and advocate place meanings that tend to be general rather than nuanced. For example, a piece of land may be classified as a "roadless area," "multiple use," "critical habitat," or "semi-primitive recreation." It is far more

TABLE 1 Relationship Between Place Propositions and Potential Research Methods

	Proposition number					
Methodology	l	2	3	4	5	6
Ethnographic interviews	x	x	x	x		x
Participant observation			x	x	x	
Document analysis			x		x	x
Surveys/questionnaires	x	x		x		x
Cognitive mapping		x		x		x
Oral histories	x	x				

efficient for these dominant groups to lump places into general categories than spend time exploring and understanding the nuanced natural and cultural histories of particular places. However, in choosing efficiency over understanding in making natural resource decisions, many voices are marginalized or even ignored.

By classifying places into general categories, the dominant groups in natural resource politics have developed a fairly narrow set of place meanings considered in natural resource decision making, whereas the meanings people assign to places and the connections people form with places can be extremely diverse, nuanced, and multilayered. This relatively narrow set of place meanings serves to legitimize the existing power of the dominant groups, benefiting both organized environmental groups and commodity industries, as well as scientific experts and resource specialists. Missing are the rich, layered place meanings that are expressed and valued by people not strongly affiliated with organized interest groups or industries, or trained in a natural science discipline or resource management. Place-based interpretivist research uncovers and brings to the fore these meanings with the goal of enhancing dialogue and deliberation that may not otherwise occur in natural resource decision making.

In this view, the politics of place is not merely a battle between environmentalists and industry. It is an evolving effort to create more equitable, democratic ways of defining, expressing, and valuing places and, in the process, transforming how people form group identities. Hence, place-based research should not inherently privilege residents-in-place. It seeks to empower all citizens not affiliated with organized interest groups or industries or not trained in a natural resource discipline to participate in decisions that affect places they care about and to which they share common identities-whether or not they actually reside in those places. A core goal of place-based social research is to contribute to this effort through rigorous, systematic methods and analysis. Place-based research is emancipating, allowing expression of place-based experiences and affiliations that may not otherwise be heard or considered legitimate (see further Rodman 1992). The place researcher takes an active role by not only gathering data, running statistics, and publishing a summary report, but also designing and facilitating processes where a rich diversity of place meanings can be expressed, negotiated, and transformed.

If natural resource-based social science theory and empirical research are to benefit real-world problems in the long run, it is necessary for social science researchers to keep up with the times. There are hundreds if not thousands of place-based efforts to address natural resource issues across the United States and around the world. Some of them seek to- create equitable processes by which voices arid meanings that are traditionally 'riot heard can be expressed. Others may have less noble goals, like taking advantage of the power and resource inequities that often occur in rural communities. Regardless of the underlying individual motives, the expansion of place-based approaches in natural resource decision making is likely to continue. Turning the corner toward a place perspective is a widening path. As natural resource social scientists proceed, systematic exploration of place-based natural resource decision processes needs to be vigilant and have a strong ethical core, for these are real places, real pieces of land, and real people's values that are at stake. Place-based research should not be confused with advocating greater local control over natural resource decision making. By the same token, place-based research should also seek to question the status quo and to give real meaning and substance to public involvement in natural resource politics.

Note

1. We recognize that there has been an enormous amount written about "place." This article likely omits many of these writings. Omission does not imply that these writings do not have value, but rather reflects a need to impose boundaries on inquiry.

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