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Making Collaboration Work: Lessons from Innovation in Natural Resources Management, by Julia M. Wondolleck & Steven L. Yaffee

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Making Collaboration Work: Lessons from Innovation in Natural Resources Management. By Julia M. Wondolleck & Steven L. Yaffee. Washington, DC: Island Press, 2000. Pp. 277. \$25.00 paper.

In this valuable and timely book, Julia Wondolleck and Steven Yaffee provide a needed consideration and evaluation of the role of collaboration in natural resources management. The book builds on almost a decade of research by the authors "that has focused on learning how people have worked together successfully to solve common problems, resolve conflicts, and build partnerships in order to move their communities and agencies toward a more sustainable direction (xi)." *Making Collaboration Work* examines a number of investigations of collaborative efforts in order to develop and relay a framework of key elements that are integral to successful collaboration. For those familiar with research on collaboration and natural resources management, the book provides a cogent synthesis of relevant perspectives and concerns; those new to the topics will find a well balanced introduction to collaborative efforts, including critiques of previous efforts and strategies to help agencies and individuals develop successful collaborations.

This book comes at a time when many agencies and interested parties are developing collaborative efforts as a way out of increasingly hostile, litigious, and seemingly paralyzed efforts to address issues related to natural resources management. Yet all collaborations are not created equal, and not all collaborations are equally successful. Case studies of collaborative efforts can provide some explanation of why a particular effort succeeded or failed; however, understanding the impact of collaborative efforts on public policy processes requires a more systematic consideration of the many components that are involved in a collaboration, from the importance of interpersonal skills and trust building to the many methods for meaningful public participation in public policy processes. Fortunately, a thorough and critical consideration of the elements of collaborative endeavors is exactly what the authors provide.

Wondolleck and Yaffee reveal that collaborative approaches to natural resources management occur for many different reasons, involve a variety of participants, and exist at a range of scales and time periods. Among the parties involved in collaborative efforts might be a number of federal, state, and local government agencies; communities; non-governmental organizations; and private groups. Collaborations could be short term or long term and involve a single area or issue or interactions among regions or ecosystems. These efforts could involve developing management plans, educational outreach, or interagency working groups. Regardless of the character and participants of a collaborative effort, the cases discussed in *Making Collaboration Work* center on the development of a theoretical framework of aspects that contribute to successful collaborations. Wondolleck and Yaffee develop their theoretical framework

through discussions of collaboration divided into three sections that contain a total of 14 chapters.

The book begins with a section on the promises and challenges of collaboration in natural resources management. The first chapter considers reasons why collaborative approaches have gained an increasing amount of attention from practitioners and agencies as a possible solution to solving environmental and resource management problems. Citing increasing difficulty in resolving management issues, a decline in confidence in government officials and agencies, and the positive results of entrepreneurs, the authors advance collaboration as a new toolbox of management techniques that could possibly operate at different temporal and geographical scales and be especially useful in addressing problems involving complexity and uncertainty. The second chapter provides a summary of the many collaborative activities underway in natural resources management, while the third identifies some of the difficulties involved in such efforts.

The second part of the book draws on Wondolleck and Yaffee's extensive research into what is involved in making a collaborative endeavor successful. Drawing on studies of roughly 200 collaborative efforts, the authors use discussion of relevant cases and events to identify eight factors that are key to successful collaboration. Chapter four begins the consideration of these factors by discussing the need to begin with a common ground that unites potential collaborators. This common ground could come out of a sense of community, a commonality of interests or purpose, or shared visions or missions. Chapter five discusses the importance of creating opportunities for diverse groups of people to meaningfully interact with each other through communication, advisory activities, and education or outreach programs. Next, chapter six covers the need to develop and use meaningful and lasting collaborative processes that involve aspects such as representative or consensus building decision-making processes. Chapter seven explores the need for a willingness to think about problems in new and flexible ways, a goal that could involve cooperative learning efforts or reconceptualizing agency roles. Chapter eight considers the importance of fostering a sense of responsibility and commitment among participants in the collaboration, while the ninth chapter reminds readers that collaborations are made by the people involved in them, not the institutions those people might represent, and covers the importance of interpersonal factors and trust building to collaborative success. The tenth chapter covers the role that proactive and entrepreneurial individuals can have in making collaborations work. Finally, chapter eleven reminds collaborators of the need to look for and mobilize support for their efforts from a variety of sources.

The third and final section of the book is designed as a guide for those interested in fostering or participating in collaborative efforts. The inclusion of these three chapters greatly increases its utility to students,

practitioners, and readers with a general interest in collaboration. Chapter twelve serves as a primer for public agencies and recognizes the essential role that agency leadership plays in developing collaborative efforts. The chapter discusses the need to build an open and collaboration-friendly culture within an agency and offers some advice about how to provide employees the training and support they need to be effective in collaborative situations. Chapter thirteen addresses the important questions of how to make collaborative efforts not only more participatory, but also more accountable. The chapter addresses some common criticisms about the fairness or legitimacy of management solutions arrived at through collaborative processes. The authors rightly point out that such criticisms are more involved than simply a concern with collaboration and relate to larger concerns about the devolution of agency power, the privileged position given to scientific and professional experts, and other concerns of interest to public policy scholars.¹ The final chapter is addressed to individuals involved in collaborative processes designed to promote effective natural resource management and offers some guidelines for whether collaboration offers a viable means to accomplish their goals.

Overall, *Making Collaboration Work* is a worthwhile introduction for a variety of readers interested in collaborative efforts. The volume is written in a well-balanced style that offers approachability to students, practitioners, and general readers, yet sufficient coverage of academic literature on collaboration to benefit more advanced students and scholars. The volume would be especially useful in advanced undergraduate or graduate courses. The book suffers at times from its desire to appeal to both practitioners or general readers and those with more academic or theoretical interests in collaboration or natural resources management. The inclusion of notes on each chapter, however, should provide necessary information to those readers seeking additional details or more in-depth discussion of issues. While building upon case materials in natural resources management, the theoretical framework advanced in the book should be relevant and beneficial to those interested in a broad range of public policy areas that include a role for collaborative activities.

1. See PUBLIC POLICY FOR DEMOCRACY (Helen Ingram & Steven Rathgeb Smith eds., 1993).

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