

Place-based planning: A participatory, collaborative process for integrating social, economic, ecological issues

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Issues of scale, multiple ownerships, jurisdictions, land tenure, and shifting populations with changing expectations can result in controversy and challenges for managers attempting to implement sustainable forest management. From a social perspective, landscapes encompass more than ecological, economic and aesthetic values. This paper explores the importance of conceiving of landscapes as places with which people develop relations and to which people ascribe meaning and significance beyond meanings associated with ecological, aesthetic, or economic values. Because landscapes are the product of multiple perspectives, a variety of stakeholders must be involved in determining what to sustain and how and what indicators will adequately measure success. This paper reviews innovative approaches to forest planning in the western United States.

Engaging the public in collaborative planning, stewardship activities and other participatory processes are strategies that promote shared learning and informed action. They also serve to bring people together to deliberate options and explore potential outcomes. Such collaborative processes work to link local knowledge of places with scientific knowledge, help provide better information for decision makers, and enhance understanding, and support for, decisions and actions.

Shared meanings can evolve through collaborative planning and other participatory processes that incorporate whole systems thinking. An understanding of how users define a place, how these meanings are shared with others, what norms develop, and how this affects personal behavior and expectations for the behavior of others (including management) may shed light on controversies over land management and community change. Developing this understanding has become increasingly important as residents migrate to new areas and bring with them meanings and values that may be different from than those held by long-term residents.