

Futuring Community Forest Management: Change Concepts & Sense of Community

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The one common, constant feature of the future will be accelerating change. Community natural resource management is changing as fast as the nation's demographics and quality of life technologies. As natural resource managers, we must be prepared for change, expect change, and allow change to help us manage more effectively.

Only the ignorant, and those who find comfort in ignorance, can be blind to the dramatic changes occurring in our society. Some of the ignorant may serve in decision-making roles and provide an educational target of opportunity. Let us agree to not be ignorant and use well designed educational programs to help people understand their environment.

Examination of community, cultural, and social trends are critical for successfully running a community natural resources management program. We must determine where individuals are going within the diverse communities in which they identify. Everyone is a futurist with their own concepts of change and their own reaction to change. Managers need to share ideas and prepare strategies to meet the future.

What Is A Community?

The term "community" is loosely and superfluously used in many contexts. Many times the term "community" is jargon for assuring inclusion and a delineator of political boundaries. A concept of community is required to clearly understand how community natural resources are managed. Demographically it is clear that community concepts are changing.

A natural resource manager must continuously examine the needs of individuals and of associated communities. Lack of fully appreciating or delineating communities, their leaders, and individual members can lead to management mistakes and wasted efforts. Lacking managerial notice of community differences can cause disillusionment across many communities and within management ranks. Management is not about resources, but about the economics of resource use within a social structure filled with many communities and individuals.

Many Different Communities

How do we managerially define "community" in this rapidly changing world? In the past, a sense of community has been tied to:

- A) nationalism with patriotism and flags;
- B) tribalism which could represent a person's state, heritage, religion, race, ethnicity, gender, culture, gang, school, university, organization; and
- C) any strong sense of identity usually bounded by a geographic or political line, social order, unique shared attribute, or working guild (like a neighborhood).

In addition to these older forms of community, new community lines are being drawn by single social issues, electronic communication and network associations, and by common addictions, hobbies and specific life-styles.

We all belong to a number of different communities where we find identity. Seldom are these communities as large as the political and legal boundaries surrounding wards, towns, cities, and counties. These artificial delineators are having less impact on identifying individuals with every passing day. A community is not a town or city. These politically bounded units are not effective educational or management units, although they can be effective fiscal units.

Identifying Communities

Boundaries a manager must identify and work within to be effective are social identity lines. These lines are becoming more difficult to ascertain because of electronic interactions. These social identity groups are "communities." It is clear managers must interact positively at this community level. Additionally, within each community are community leaders and innovators critical for supporting management activities. These individuals must be identified and targeted for information and education.

Demographics and public polling show society is evolving (de-evolving) into smaller identity groups. The splintering of large groups into smaller can be seen as factions in clubs, religions, political parties, and organizations. There is a clear trend of individuals identifying more strongly with smaller and smaller groups. With factionalization and fragmentation of society, the old, large-scale, administratively bounded community natural resource management units (and associated grand, wide-sweeping plans) are not effective nor efficient.

Counselor & Facilitator

When communities are clumped together for management activities, the best result that can be expected is to facilitate individual community activities, or evaluate them. Sometimes it may be necessary for larger groups of communities to regulate activities in maintaining some norm. Under these circumstances, community natural resource managers should provide guidance to allow communities to find their own way in meeting their member's needs. A manager's role is changing.

County, state and federal organizations facilitate change in community behaviors by education and regulation. Communities of people and individuals will be active if they think it is important to them. Just because an educational program or resource management activity is important to you does not mean this activity is important to a community that can not assure the safety of their children.

Individual Motivations

After examining the changing community roles and boundaries, the next step in community natural resource management is to determine the needs of individuals. Community natural resource management must represent solutions to real or perceived human needs. What do people truly want and

need. If managers ignore needs, they are ignoring the reasons and motivations for people and their communities taking care of trees, forests, other natural resources, and the environment.

Needs of individuals can be summarized in many different ways. One way is called “Maslow’s hierarchy of needs.” This hierarchy of needs begins at the bottom or most basic level of needs, and climbs toward a top, self-actualized level in five steps.

Level #1 are the psychological needs of a person. Items such as food, water, shelter, sex, and clothing are needs at this levels.

Level #2 are safety related. Personal needs of security, stability, freedom from fear, avoidance of pain, and peace are components.

Level #3 are social needs such as friendship, affection, acceptance, and group membership.

(Note: Much of the population functions at or below these first three levels. If you can help in providing these needs, your management activities will succeed.)

Level #4 are esteem needs including self-esteem, recognition, respect, sense of accomplishment, and responsibility.

Level #5, self-actualization, is the pinnacle of the needs hierarchy. This is the realizing of one’s full potential, creativity, independence, self-expression, and intellectual curiosity.

Humans function within and among the various needs levels to survive and to thrive. Contentedness and happiness are goals. But, these needs are fulfilled in order beginning at Level #1.

Allowing Participation

Management activities intended to change behavior patterns and modify paradigms must be designed for the specific needs levels where the community or individual is functioning. Grand designs and motivational efforts fail miserably when the needs level of the audience is, at most, an afterthought. In addition, managers must work with community innovators and leaders at all levels. People will not participate in management activities or educational programs if their other needs are not being meet. If food, housing and safety are not attainable, people in a community will not be motivated to put on a tree planting program.

Remember inclusion in management activity planning and execution is not about pity, charity, or management alibis. Meeting people’s needs require empathy and real opportunities for change where widely varying management outcomes are allowed. For management activities to be successful, managers need to emphasize and facilitate a clearer definition on-the-ground of people needs, delineate individual communities (social identity), and examine specific community values. These items then become part of effective community natural resource management.

Futuring Trends

From demographic materials and public polling, I prepared a synthesis of some of the changes occurring across the United States. All of these items will have an effect on how community natural resource management is viewed and applied to communities and larger political and social organizations.

Current trends suggesting proactive changes be made in community resource management include:

- A) Communities (social identity lines not political boundaries) are becoming more isolated due to resource use, population growth, and security/safety concerns.
- B) Individuals are electronically interacting over wider scales. This means that community isolationists are wired to the world.
- C) Communities are becoming smaller interacting units and rapidly proliferating. This means more community leaders and innovators need to be reached in order to change behaviors.
- D) Resource management concentration will be on diversity, habitats and system functions. Sustainability is critical. New ecological paradigm are arising.
- E) Carbon taxation or incentives, and water-use taxation or incentives will be logical progressions of conserving resources.
- F) Increasing scrutiny and regulation of activities on private lands, and greatly increasing regulation of public activities, will occur.
- G) Decreased societal privacy will occur to meet basic psychological and safety needs effectively.
- H) Decreased quality of life stemming from our orgy of resource use since the industrial revolution. We have spent our kid's and grand-kid's heritage.
- I) Modification of behaviors and regulations based upon continuous rates of resource change instead of measuring and shepherding static states of resources. Development of applied concepts in society about how chaotic systems function.
- J) Information will be provided for extensive self-help to individuals for a fee within a competitive marketplace. The technical consultant will be an information specialist, not a scientific technician.
- K) It is information that is important. Information is (will be) universally available through electronic technologies. Critical to behavior changes and quality of life will be the proper translation, synthesis, and brokering of information to use in management and educational programs.

Summarizing the Future

The management expectations arising from these trends above are summarized into four points.

- 1) Effective community size is decreasing and the number of communities are greatly increasing. This points out there are a rapidly increasing number of innovators and community leaders that need to be included in

management planning and activities, especially the increasing regulatory control aspect. Inclusion "as usual" in management processes signify a geometrically increasing failure to represent many communities.

2) Rapid, responsive communications are critical now more than ever. The telephone-tag or out-of-the-office delays in responding to communications will send people to other instant sources of information and demonstrate a managers lack of responsibility. Instant information exchange and response tailoring will be required.

The first human to get the message must respond in an appropriate and measured way, whether by voice or electronic means. Other electronic means of response delay, such as voice mail loops, periodically checked e-mail, and/or hardcopy FAX, destroys empathy and positive perceptions (on both sides of the communications). The results are feelings of victimization and worthlessness that breeds many negative emotional (and some irrational) reactions.

3) Communities and their leaders are potentially much more informed than previously expected. People can quickly become informed and check details overnight electronically. Intellectual intimidation, regulatory bluster, designed ignorance, and selective omission/commission will no longer serve as management strategies.

4) Community natural resource management must be empathic and responsive to changing community and individual needs. Concepts involved are inclusion, listening, empowering, activating, and facilitating people to change their lives through the prudent use of the natural resources around them.

Conclusions

Change in our communities and their natural resources is normal, follow natural and social process (including chaotic behaviors), and is inevitable. Natural resource managers must recognize and utilize change for the betterment of their human and natural resource portfolio. Our communities deserve a forward looking and adjustable natural resource management process, and a natural resource manager who is an agent of change