

## Claiming Ownership: A Response to Manning and Ginger

PAUL R. LACHAPELLE

Department of Political Science, Montana State University,  
Bozeman, Montana, USA

STEPHEN F. McCOOL

College of Forestry and Conservation, University of Montana,  
Missoula, Montana, USA

We had two major objectives in publishing our manuscript “Exploring the Concept of Ownership in Natural Resource Planning” (Lachapelle and McCool 2005). First, we hoped to clarify how the term *ownership* has evolved into new meanings as citizens, scientists, and managers sought ways to respond to the weaknesses of traditional rational–comprehensive planning. Our observation was, and still is, that the term *ownership* is used in a variety of ways in different contexts for different purposes, leading to some confusion about what the concept means. Such confusion hinders good practice and good science. Our second objective was to encourage a disciplined dialogue within the social science community, for, as we see it, the concept is still evolving, but could benefit from more deliberation and dialogue. This dialogue would itself enhance the conduct of science on the topic as well as the practice of public engagement.

Manning and Ginger (this issue) raise several issues regarding our notion of ownership: specifically how we expand on existing scholarship, how we address representation and accountability, our need to reflect on advances in existing planning processes, and our suggested role of science both in research and in planning processes. We agree with many of their concerns and hope to show here that our ownership model addresses and responds to these concerns.

Ownership as we define it entails not only a sense of caring and responsibility toward a particular issue, but also identifying who has a voice in a process, who has influence in a decision, and who is affected by an outcome. Our notion of ownership is closely aligned to how power has been characterized and is admittedly far from new, for as (Dahl 1957, 201) notes, “the concept of power is as ancient and ubiquitous as any that social theory can boast.” An ownership model seeks to make explicit power dynamics such as symbolic and material forces that can lead to patterns of domination, and identifies different strategies for dealing with different segments of the public. An ownership model recognizes differences in access, control,

Received 10 March 2006; accepted 10 July 2006.

The authors thank Jill Belsky, Bill Borrie, and Martin Nie, The University of Montana, for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this work.

Address correspondence to Paul R. Lachapelle, Department of Political Science, Montana State University, Bozeman, MT, USA. E-mail: paul.lachapelle@gmail.com

and marginalization by asking and addressing the following: Who defines the problem? Who is involved in the design of the plan objectives and methodology? Who influences the decisions? Who is involved in data collection, analysis, and monitoring? Who is involved in implementation, execution, evaluation, and future planning or management efforts? Who is affected by or benefits from the outcome? Ownership means not only inculcating a sense of citizen responsibility, but also *providing* opportunities for citizens to be public and opening up the public space to a process of linking knowledge to action.

Ownership attempts to expose and address the structural inequities in society associated with who has knowledge, who has access, who has time and who can “sit” at the proverbial table. Implementing public engagement processes that are ownership oriented is far better than expert-driven processes, we would argue, in identifying interests and trade-offs, negotiating resolutions to conflicts, assigning responsibilities, encouraging citizens to lead the implementation of the plan, and establishing accountability. By focusing on ownership as a goal of planning, agencies not only enhance the probability that projects in the public interest can be implemented, but the process itself becomes more open: Planning assumptions are laid out and available for critique; hidden agendas are exposed; creative solutions are identified; and learning occurs. We offered numerous cases in our previous article that demonstrated the application of an ownership model, that were both biologically sound and politically feasible, and that also promoted broad representation and accountability. Application of ownership in these situations resulted in a greater likelihood of plan implementation and long-term success (as we define *success*, based on, among other things, relationship building, enhancing trust, and capacity to confront adversity in the future).

Manning and Ginger repeat many of the arguments put forth by Coggins (1998) and McCloskey (2000) concerning representation, accountability, and fear of abdication of duty. Such fear is often couched in the local–national dichotomy (we note that we never argued for a primacy of local over national interests in our original article) or in terms of control, often corporate and increasingly global in nature, over resources. Engaging diverse publics in ways that engender ownership does not move legal accountability for decisions away from agencies and to a more nebulous and diffuse public. Case law supports the notion that abdication of legally sanctioned authority (subdelegation), federal statutes included, is inviolate.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, redress against government infraction is guaranteed through the establishment and due process clauses contained in the First, Fifth, and Fourteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution. Creating opportunities for a sense of ownership does not entail subverting the Endangered Species Act, scrapping the Clean Water Act, or turning Yosemite National Park over to the citizens of El Portal, CA.

Legal scholars posit representation and accountability exists through our electoral system and checks and balances by the separation of powers (Coggins 1998; McCloskey 2000). Yet we agree with (Ostrom 1997, 3) that the “one person, one vote, majority rule” approach is “an inadequate and superficial formulation for constituting viable democratic societies. The condition of popular election of officials who form governments is necessary but it is far from the more fundamental conditions for establishing and maintaining the viability of democratic societies.” Similarly, citizen “participation” in planning by casting a ballot in a referendum, providing a 3-minute testimony at a “hearing,” or filling out a survey is also far from

the more fundamental conditions necessary for a viable democracy or in creating a sense of ownership.

We suggest that representation and accountability also imply a responsibility to engage the public in a *meaningful* way. We note that the political power to implement plans has generally been disassociated from natural resource agencies and is held by interests and groups with enough political strength to exercise a *veto* over a decision. Further confounding this situation is a lack of statutory guidance (i.e., the Multiple Use, Sustained Yield Act of 1960 is vague, the National Park Service Organic Act of 1916 is partially in conflict), often leading to overreaching administrative discretion (Nie 2004). Concurrent are centralized, overly bureaucratic, and politically malleable administrators. These indictments have driven many citizens, scientists, and managers to consider ways of constructing an ownership model of planning. Of course, fears of abdication of duty are real, but no different in substance from other fears expressed by the public when, for instance, certain interests with political power focus solely on resource extraction or are no longer speaking for the *mute* generations to come. Ownership moves power away from current to future generations and away from technocratic institutions to the public, where, in a democratic society, it belongs.

Regarding the role of science in our ownership model, we recognize its critical role in any deliberative and disciplined planning process. A first step in science is to better understand the character of the issue and frame it in ways that enhance understanding, promote additional research, and engage a community of practice, which was the objective of our initial article. As argued by McCool and Stankey (2003, 5), "Discourse and pluralism are important qualities of any needed revision in our models of land use planning and management, but so too is competent scientific inquiry." We agree that research and scholarly activity will help provide a better understanding of what is meant by ownership, the variables affecting it, and how its presence affects other variables. Our intent in the original article was not to stimulate empirical data collecting per se but to advocate for disciplined inquiry into the concept, which of course involves both conceptual and empirical scholarly activity.

In most natural resource planning situations, planners serve as "experts" to design, lead, and direct the planning process. Public participation is often viewed by planners as only another type of data collection, and, to be hypercritical, is frequently viewed as simply one element of a process checklist. Traditional rational-comprehensive planning is defined as a linear process of relating ends to means with heavy reliance on mathematical models and quantitative analysis (Hudson 1979). Traditional rational-comprehensive planning can marginalize participants who hold experiential knowledge about places; often only those with skill at understanding mathematical and symbolic models can effectively participate, and those who raise questions about the nature and purpose of a planning project can be (and have been) ostracized by the planners. In any planning process there will be certain values and knowledge that prevail, but various forms of knowledge and value judgements are often incommensurate, particularly those characterized as commodity versus noncommodity values (Williams et al. 1992). In those situations, diverse publics cannot assert their meanings and interpretations, if only because they are stated in ways that do not conform to the variables and pixel sizes chosen by professional planners for their predetermined models. Citizens, scientists, and

managers are differently positioned, frame problems differently, and express the world in diverse and often contradictory ways. An ownership model requires public engagement that places the planner in the position of facilitator and technical assistant rather than as director. While rational comprehensive planning views a planning process and diverse publics as two parallel lines bisected by occasional public interaction, an ownership model sees the two more as a double helix with continual and symbiotic interaction.

In this respect, we agree with many authors (i.e., Williams and Matheny 1995; Fischer 2000) that there is a need to move away from the “culture of technical control” (Yankelovich 1991) that has dominated natural-resource decision making since the Progressive Era. While some may think this shift in paradigms of planning entails some risks (one manager told us that “things would get out of control”), staying the course with an outmoded, ineffective, and confrontational style planning process carries considerable risks itself. If ownership becomes an objective of a planning process, then planners have great latitude in how that objective is achieved. While transactional style planning (see, for instance, Friedmann 1987) will move quickly to that end, other styles and public engagement processes may also be effective. There are concerted demands for more experimentation in natural resource planning (Lee 1993; Gunderson et al. 1995; Kemmis 2003). Experimentation is a key element in adaptive management, along with the crucial role of learning from policy experiments, the iterative link between knowledge and action, the integration and legitimacy of knowledge from various sources, and the need for responsive institutions (Stankey et al. 2005). In many ways, the response of Manning and Ginger constitutes a call for experimentation through a rigorous research agenda—frequent mention of needed investigations, highlighted needs for research, and a variety of questions needing answers fundamental to addressing the notion of ownership in natural resource planning.

In advocating the notion of ownership, we are not suggesting that rational-comprehensive planning processes be entirely discarded. Such processes can effectively examine diverse issues, focus information gathering, identify alternatives, and assess consequences. However, we suggest that these processes *used alone* do not necessarily resolve the complex, value-laden problems confronting natural resources today. Used in combination with public engagement processes that encourage ownership, they become more effective in garnering the public support needed for implementation.

The response to natural-resource planning dilemmas should be more ownership, not less. There is growing evidence that we have become a nation characterized by the “unencumbered self” (Sandel 1984, 81): the notion that our liberal democracy affords citizens the power not to be involved or citizens whose only responsibility is to vote occasionally, fill out surveys, or provide fleeting testimony to the experts. The social pathologies undermining citizen involvement are countless, and providing a detailed critique is beyond the scope of our work here. In particular, we recognize that agency budgets are tight, personnel overburdened, and time limited. Yet we also recognize in existing statutes great latitude to engage the public and a public desire to engage.

We think the acts of “owning” a planning process and participating in a democracy are mutually constitutive and, like a strand of DNA, self-confirming and reinforcing. The act of ownership is the act of both being public and allowing for the opportunity to be public: an act that is absolutely critical in both planning and democracy, because as Arendt (1958, 58) reminds us, an overemphasis on being

private “means above all to be deprived of things essential to a truly human life.” An ownership model attempts to challenge the notion that the “unencumbered” citizen with little opportunity for meaningful interaction is not only vacuous but fundamentally antithetical to the loftiest ideals of a robust democracy.

## Note

1. See specifically *National Park and Conservation Association (NPCA) v. Stanton*, 54 F. Supp. 2d 7 (DDC 1999), where the court held that the Secretary of the Interior cannot wholly delegate responsibility to a local entity that is not bound by the statutory obligations applicable to the Secretary in administering NPS land and components of the National Wild and Scenic River System. For more, see Barker et al. (2003).

## References

- Arendt, H. 1958. *The human condition*, 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Barker, A., H. Chamberlain, J. Eyre, B. Gomez, J. Hofberger, J. Jones, A. Kingston, M. McBride, K. Robinson, D. Smith, M. Smith, M. Smith, and R. Ressler. 2003. The role of collaborative groups in federal land and resource management: A legal analysis. *J. Land Resources Environ. Law* 23:67–141.
- Coggins, G. C. 1998. Regulating federal natural resources: A summary case against devolved collaboration. *Ecol. Law Q.* 25(4):602–610.
- Dahl, R. 1957. The concept of power. *Behav. Sci.* 2:201–215.
- Fischer, F. 2000. *Citizens, experts, and the environment: The politics of local knowledge*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Friedmann, J. 1987. *Planning in the public domain: From knowledge to action*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Gunderson, L. H., C. S. Holling, and S. S. Light, eds. 1995. *Barriers and bridges to the renewal of ecosystems and institutions*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hudson, B. M. 1979. Comparison of current planning theories: Counterparts and contradictions. *J. Am. Plan. Assoc.* 45(4):387–398.
- Kemmis, D. 2003. Region 7: An innovative approach to planning on or near public lands. *Land Use Law Zoning Dig.* 55(8):3–9.
- Lachapelle, P. R. and S. F. McCool. 2005. Exploring the concept of “ownership” in natural resource planning. *Society Nat. Resources* 18(3):279–285.
- Lee, K. N. 1993. *Compass and gyroscope: Integrating science and politics for the environment*. Washington, DC: Island Press.
- McCloskey, M. 2000. Problems with using collaboration to shape environmental public policy. *Valparaiso Univ. Law Rev.* 34:423–434.
- McCool, S. and G. H. Stankey. 2003. *Advancing the dialogue of visitor management: Expanding beyond the culture of technical control*. Paper read at George Wright Society Biennial Conference, April 14–18, San Diego, CA.
- Nie, M. 2004. Statutory detail and administrative discretion in public lands governance: Arguments and alternatives. *J. Environ. Law Litigat.* 19(29):223–291.
- Ostrom, V. 1997. *The meaning of democracy and the vulnerability of democracies: A response to Tocqueville’s challenge*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Sandel, M. 1984. The procedural republic and the unencumbered self. *Polit. Theory.* 12(1): 81–96.
- Stankey, G. H., R. Clark, and B. T. Bormann. 2005. *Adaptive management of natural resources: Theory, concepts, and management institutions*. Portland, OR: USDA Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station. PNW GTR-654.

- Williams, B. A. and A. R. Matheny. 1995. *Democracy, dialogue, and environmental disputes: The contested languages of social regulation*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Williams, D. R., M. E. Patterson, J. W. Roggenbuck, and A. E. Watson. 1992. Beyond the commodity metaphor: Examining emotional and symbolic attachment to place. *Leisure Sci.* 14(1):29–46.
- Yankelovich, D. 1991. *Coming to public judgment: Making democracy work in a complex world*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.