Adaptation of Rural Communities to Postmodern Context and the Role of the Northwest Forest Plan

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Objectives

- Define community
- Describe context of community adjustment
- Hypothesize how communities are changing in response to changing context
- Describe implications of NWFP
- Suggest scenarios for anticipating possible futures
Community Defined

Communities are like ecosystems:
- not “real,” but mental models
- with “reality” always changing in response to surroundings

Communities represented as
- Places
- Networks
- Identities

Are identities and networks becoming more important than place?

What might be causing this change?
Postmodern Society as Context for Community Change

Key attributes of Postmodernism

- Shared faith in rationalism is declining
- Acceptance of “messiness” of human affairs
- Expanded role for emotion, morality, and spirituality
- Unique solutions to common problems
Public Forestry Epitomized
Modern Rationality

- RPA’s Assessment
- NFMA’s Forest Plans
  - FORPLAN
  - Econometric “morality”
- Shared vision of desirable future conditions
  - Common morality
  - Rationality valued as means to future
Why did NWFP Supersede NFMA Planning?

- **Decline in liberal democracy**
  - NFMA plans were “liberal social contracts”
  - Loss of faith in bargaining and compromise
  - Loss of shared vision

- **More affirmative role for centralized authority**
  - Presidential leadership for NWFP
  - Affirmed value of biodiversity and natural processes
  - State made moral judgments
  - State helped create and destroy “communities”
How did decline in liberal democracy change ‘communities’?

- Loss of integrating “center”
  - Representative decision-making
  - Societal morality
- Consciousness of moral pluralism
  - Diverse moral claims
    - Social morality (sexuality, reproductive rights, etc.)
    - Environmental morality (biocentrism, anthropocentrism)
  - Inability to accept anthropogenic foundation to morality
- Rise in new forms of fundamentalism
How have rural people responded to decline in liberal democracy?

- Postmodern fundamentalism
  - Focus on restoration of order (return to “original” meanings)
    - Social morality (conservative Christian fundamentalism)
    - Nature (environmental fundamentalism)
  - Working for shared future less important; diminished rationality

- “Place” no longer as effective as integrator
  - Social segmentation
    - Social networks
    - Identities
  - Loss of effectiveness by rural politicians
    - Political fragmentation
    - Political centralization
Fundamentalist Beliefs Provide Templates Coping

- Loss of shared, central meaning
- Fragmentation
- Moral pluralism promotes anxiety
- Issue framing becomes new source of political power
How are rural people likely to respond in the future?

- Sociologists cannot predict changes
- Can anticipate responses to some scenarios
  - Politicization of science
  - Continued loss in faith in rationality and liberal democracy
  - Affirmative moral leadership by government
  - Return of timber economy with shrinking dollar
Postmodern society may be fundamental source of change; federal forest policy secondary
Decline of faith in liberal democracy may bring more autocratic/theocratic role for state
Moral communities may supplant communities of place; moral communities require enemies
Not possible to return to modernity
Therefore, forest planning must adopt new forms for promoting social and cultural dialogue