Negotiating the Democratic Paradox: Approaches Drawn From Governance Efforts on Yellowstone River

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We analyze perspectives on watershed governance articulated by community leaders along the Yellowstone River (Montana, U. S. A.). These leaders framed watershed governance as a process of negotiating tensions between individual rights and equality for all, embracing diverse viewpoints while achieving broad policy agreement, and acknowledging the constant presence of change. We conducted informant directed interviews and used the theoretical perspective of Mouffe's democratic paradox to analyze the resulting discourse. Their discourse indicated a belief that negotiating tensions between individual liberty and group sovereignty was simultaneously obligatory and difficult. These civic officials struggled to develop a pluralistic democracy that could legitimize heterogeneous perspectives of watershed residents. Their version of pluralistic democracy offers one model for negotiating the democratic paradox that may be especially useful in environmental conflicts where property and other individual rights vie with egalitarian access to shared resources. Their leadership struggles offer lessons regarding ways to position all citizens who wish to effect change through participation in the democratic process.

Keywords: concensus, conflict, democratic paradox, pluralism, watershed

INTRODUCTION

Watershed governance spans from local to international levels, and involves diverse and competing human and non-human users (Rickenbach and Reed, 2002; Flanagan and Laituri, 2004; Cronin and Ostergren, 2007). Conflict among human users intensifies when they perceive scarce resources, incompatibility among different cultural values and goals, and interference with their own values and goals (Peterson et al., 2002).

Yellowstone River Watershed (YRW) governance is wickedly complex. Municipalities, agriculturalists, recreationalists, residentialists, and various biotic communities depend on the watershed to meet their needs. The YRW management is overseen by more than 24 local, state, and federal governmental entities (Gilbertz et al., 2011), each responsible for sustainable management of an iconic natural resource that provides a place for people to live, work, and play. We offer Mouffe's (2000) democratic paradox as a means to better understand YRW community leaders' perspectives on watershed governance and how they negotiate these complexities.

THE DEMOCRATIC PARADOX

Mouffe (2000) describes democratic politics as an "ensemble of practices, discourses, and institutions which seek to establish a certain order and organize human coexistence in conditions that always are potentially conflictual" (p. 101). She cautions against privileging homogeneity over pluralism, imposing allegedly rational thought over passions, and unequivocal preference of consensus over dissent. Under the current democratic model, she cautions that in striving for equality conflict is squelched as a rational thinking is imposed over passions; homogeneous citizenship is privileged over heterogeneous citizenship; and consensus is emphasized over dissent. Her concern with this approach is that it leads citizens to perceive the democratic process as no more than a "mechanism for choosing and empowering governments [that] has been reduced to a competition between elites" (Mouffe, 2005, p. 120). She argues that, in most of the nominally democratic world, this combination has resulted in a citizenry that, at best, doubts whether they have any real means to effect change through the democratic process.

Pluralistic Democracy

Mouffe (2000) offers pluralistic democracy as an alternative to the dominant liberal democratic model that relies on reason to bring all members of the polity into unity. Pluralistic democracy entails recognition of diversity across multiple dimensions, accepting conflict as irreconcilable, and ineradicable, and providing opportunities for passions to play out within the democratic process. Mouffe (2000) suggests that the failure to accept the expression of passions as integral to democracy grows out of an erroneous assumption that rationalist modes of thinking have largely displaced others within modern society. Other scholars have developed similar arguments, ranging from Habermas (2006) contention that religious passion has taken on increased, rather than decreased importance in the contemporary public sphere, to Latour (1993) claim that the notion of modernity is no more rational than so-called primitive beliefs, and is based on its own peculiar passions.

Recognizing the ineradicability of conflict encourages society to make room for passions, discourages overemphasis of homogeneity, and highlights the importance of pluralism. Mouffe (2000) identifies at least two understandings of pluralism One form is polytheism of values, with multiple values some of which are defined in direct contradiction to others and most importantly can neither be reconciled nor even exist concomitantly. She contrasts this form with liberal pluralism which emphasizes harmonies—perhaps discordant or in a minor key—but still a variety of harmony grounded in multiple value-based viewpoints. The key is for individuals to explore issues from multiple viewpoints, which should enable them to realize that multiple values may interact within a system, without the necessity of all members of that system subscribing to the same values (Mouffe, 2000; Álvarez, 2012).

Finally, Mouffe (2000) critiques contemporary democracy's tendency to excise contentious public issues from public discussion to achieve consensus, cautioning that this move marginalizes or removes the public's deepest concerns from the decision-making process and transferring that process to the legal system. She argues that a "well-functioning democracy calls for a confrontation between democratic political positions, and this requires a real debate about possible alternatives. Consensus is indeed necessary but it must be accompanied by dissent" (Mouffe, 2000, p. 113). Thus, although some measure of consensus is necessary for democratic societies to operate, that consensus must be complemented by dissent. Thus, healthy democracy's main objective becomes amelioration, rather than obliteration, of dissent.

Mouffe (2000, 2005) describes dissent as antagonistic conflict that cannot be resolved, but may be transformed. In its classic presentation, antagonistic conflict is conceptualized as a division between people; some are viewed as friends while others, the opponents, are viewed as enemies. The crux of antagonist conflict is lack of common ground based on shared principles of freedom and equality. Conflict expressed as antagonistic is not compatible with sustainable democracy as the divisions it creates leads to violent acts such as war (Ivie, 2007) or terrorism (Álvarez, 2012). However, antagonistic conflict can be transformed into agonism. In this form of conflict, opponents are seen as adversaries rather enemies (Mouffe, 2000; Carvalho and Peterson, 2012). This approach grants legitimacy to the right of opponents to hold positions different from our own. Agonism stipulates that adversaries agree there will be dissent about different positions that are not reconcilable. Mouffe (2000, 2013) offers agonism as compatible with a sustainable democratic model that seeks to create institutions that provide space for dissent within a political identity that can never be "fully constituted, and it can only exist through multiple and competing forms of identification" (Mouffe, 2000, p. 56).

Political identities are constructed through social interactions wherein citizens express conflicting ideologies and experiences which form the basis for categorizing others as both similar to and different from themselves, thus creating strong *us-them* sensibilities (Stryker and Burke, 2000; McGuire et al., 2013). How the us-them concept is operationalized has important implications for democracy. Mouffe (2000) advocates that the goal of democratic process is "to construct the 'them' in such a way that is no longer perceived as an enemy to be destroyed, but as an 'adversary', that is, somebody whose ideas we combat but whose right to defend those ideas we do not put into question" (p. 101–102). Awareness, and even appreciation, of this adversarial relationship is crucial to pluralistic democracy (Mouffe, 2013).

In this essay, we use Mouffe's concept of pluralistic democracy to guide an examination of whether and how local civic leaders envision the paradoxical elements of the democratic process. We focus on how community leaders of the YRW describe their perspectives of governing in an ever changing ecological and social environment and explain best management practices for the watershed. First, we provide a brief background of changes occurring in the watershed. Second, we describe the cultural inventory research approach. Then, we explain how local leaders frame watershed governance as a process of negotiating tensions between individual rights and equality, acknowledging plural perspectives, and recognizing the constant presence of change.

Finally, we discuss how community leaders offer one model for negotiating the democratic paradox. This model may be relevant in other environmental conflicts where property and other individual rights vie with egalitarian access to shared resources and where citizens wish to effect change through participation in the democratic process.

MANAGEMENT OF YELLOWSTONE RIVER (MONTANA) WATERSHED

Montana's Yellowstone River is the longest undammed river in the contiguous United States. It flows 670 miles from its source in Yellowstone National Park (Wyoming) through scenic Paradise Valley, Montana, and then easterly through Montana's productive irrigated agricultural lands to its confluence with the Missouri River just inside the North Dakota border (McKenzie County). Approximately 84% of the riparian lands are privately owned (Hall et al., 2012) and provide home sites for vacation homeowners and irrigation opportunities for agriculture producers. Additionally, its scenic amenities attract retirees and recreationalists. The river's floodplain is experiencing moderate to significant land-use changes including increased recreational pressure upstream (fly-fishing), riverfront development to accommodate suburban growth in Billings, Montana, and downstream ranch land purchased for leased hunting. Many Montanans fear that unplanned riverfront development and growth of the recreation industry threaten the attractive qualities of the river (Herring, 2006; Hall et al., 2012).

A free-flowing river with diverse ecosystems, the Yellowstone River is prone to spring flooding because of melting snow from the mountains (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 2009), and during the winter months, river debris snags floating chunks of ice that form temporary dams (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 2011). The floods that result from the temporary dams exacerbate stream-bank erosion.

The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) regulates riparian corridor activities under the authority of the Rivers and Harbors Act (1899), and the Federal Water Pollution Control Act (1972). The Corps works in conjunction with state agencies (e.g., Montana Department of Environmental Quality), county conservation districts, and county floodplain administrators to review and grant bank modification[1] permits to stabilize stream banks to prevent erosion. The floods of 1996 and 1997 changed river channels; caused large-scale erosion; and destroyed human structures, pasture, and cropland. Subsequently, over 100 permits for bank stabilization structures were filed by private landowners and subsequently granted by the Corps. Environmentalists contested the permits, arguing that bank stabilization structures intensify erosion problems elsewhere on the river and degrade

fish habitat (Kudray and Schemm, 2006). In a successful lawsuit, the court ruled that the Corps must improve how they consider the cumulative effects of bank stabilization on the integrity of the riverine ecosystem (Montana Council of Trout Unlimited v. U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, 2000). In 1999, the Corps placed a moratorium on stabilization projects until further research could determine the "potential environmental and ecological consequences of channel modification" (Auble et al., 2004, p. 1). An interdisciplinary cumulative effects study with funding from the Water Resources Development Act (1999) was initiated to understand how human activities affect the river and to recommend voluntary management practices designed to promote a healthy river system.

METHODS

We used a cultural inventory (Gilbertz et al., 2006; Hall et al., 2012) to learn whether and how local decision-makers along the Yellowstone River recognized and negotiated the democratic paradox. First, we describe the study area that encompassed the river's length. Second, we discuss the informant directed interview process. Finally, we explain how interview transcripts are analyzed.

Study Area

Local civic leaders are tasked to negotiate competing demands of various river user-groups that hold multiple value-based viewpoints about YRW management (Hall et al., 2013). To create a purposive sample to discover these differing viewpoints, we divided the river's reach into five segments that encompass 11 Montana counties, one North Dakota county, and are delineated by topographic and cultural differences (Gilbertz et al., 2006). We begin in Park County at the northern entrance to the Yellowstone National Park (Gardiner, Montana). Here, the river is fast-moving, flowing in a northerly direction through Paradise Valley. The river turns easterly near Livingston, Montana, where it supports a cold-water fishery that is well-known for its fly-fishing potential. This segment is segment A. The next river segment (segment B) begins at the northeastern edge of Park County and flows through Sweet Grass, Stillwater, and Carbon Counties. It also supports a cold-water fishery. Here, agricultural lands are being replaced by home sites for retirees and vacationers. Segment C includes Yellowstone County, with an urban population (Billings, Montana). This stretch has important out-takes near the town of Laurel, Montana to divert water to irrigation projects further east and is experiencing urban development encroaching upon agricultural bottomlands. River segment D includes Treasure, Rosebud, and Custer counties and begins at the Big Horn River tributary and ends at the Powder River tributary. Unlike the previous river segments, segment D has warm water fishery characteristics. It also has significant agricultural presence. The last segment (segment E) begins at the Powder River tributary and ends at the confluence of the Missouri River (North Dakota). This segment includes the Montana counties of Prairie, Dawson, and Richland, along with McKenzie County, North Dakota. It is dominated by a broad, relatively slow-moving river that serves an agricultural community and

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[1]Common bank stabilization measures include armor, which is a cover of resistant material such as large rocks placed along the bank and extending into the river to protect the soil; channel structures are walls built into the active channel of the river to divert the fastest portion of the current away from the banks; vegetative methods usually use tree trunks angled into banks to redirect swift currents away from riverbanks (Ellis, 2002).

is important habitat for paddlefish (*Polyodontidae*) and Pallid sturgeon (*Scaphirhynchus albus*) (Gilbertz et al., 2006).

Informant Directed Interviews

We recruited community leaders in each of the five river segments to discover whether and how local decision-makers recognized and negotiated political tensions. We attempted to interview at least 10 community leaders in each river segment. First, we defined community leaders as full-time residents of the municipalities and counties that were located between the confluence of the Yellowstone River (Gardiner, Montana) and Missouri River (North Dakota). These leaders were either elected or appointed by the elected officials and included city mayors, council members, and planners; county commissioners and planners; and public works managers. Second, we focused on counties and cities that were affected by changes in stabilization permits, those interested in and likely to participate in riparian planning, and those directly impacted by management changes (Hall et al., 2012). Third, we searched public records to obtain contact information for civic leaders in these stretches of the river (Gilbertz et al., 2006) and used snowball sampling to obtain additional names of potential informants (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002). Finally, we sorted the resulting names by county to ensure that we included informants from every county that borders the river. We interviewed a total of 68 informants.

We used informant directed interviews (Peterson et al., 1994, 2002) to enable informants to share with us their perspectives on whether and how democratic governance operates along the Yellowstone River. Because we wanted to meet our informants in places that were most comfortable for them, we traveled to informants' counties to conduct interviews in a one-on-one setting so they could control both the macro and micro aspects of the conversation (Bsumek et al., 2014). The interviews were ∼45 min long. We allowed the informants maximum opportunity to fully explain their individual perspectives. To minimize collapsing their voices into predetermined frames for watershed management (Bsumek et al., 2014), we followed our informants' lead so long as they continued talking about governance in the watershed. We audio-recorded the interviews and made detailed field notes immediately after each interview. We then transcribed the interviews to provide a verbatim record.

Interview Transcript Analysis

We wanted our analysis to document how local civic leaders describe their governing approaches to management of the river and watershed. Analysis of the interview transcripts was guided by a combination of techniques for fragmenting and reformulating the data (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Hall et al., 2012). In each geographic segment, we began by identifying phrases, words, and stories that clearly articulated each informant's main ideas. Based on these main ideas, we identified important themes. We used frequency of appearance and connectedness between frequent themes to build a composite list of salient themes. We then supported each theme with individual informants' quotes to reflect the narrative structure created by the informants. We maintained vernacular quality by keeping local phrases, terms, and axioms intact. We used

responses to the final question on the interview protocol, which asked informants to summarize their thoughts on what was most important to them regarding management of the Yellowstone River, to provide internal validation of our judgment about thematic importance. We compared themes drawn directly from answers to the final question with our emergent themes to provide additional validation for the themes we had identified as most important. Since, we knew our analysis would create a representation of these community leaders, we continued to critique our claims by asking if our informants would recognize their voices in the themes we had identified (Gilbertz et al., 2006; Hall et al., 2012).

Because we wanted to learn what civic leaders believed was important about watershed governance, we selected text to create categories that captured concepts related to their leadership roles (Peterson et al., 1994, 2010). The categories that emerged from this process were tension between individual rights and the common good, plural perspectives, and change. We used constant comparison (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) to challenge the formulation of categories and to document and analyze ideas about categories as they emerged and were refined.

We used NVivo 10.0 qualitative software (QSR International, Doncaster, Victoria, Australia) to code the text. Anecdotes served as the unit of analysis, with the same anecdote being coded in multiple themes if it fit more than one. We define anecdote as a brief account of an incident that includes action and individuals functioning as actors. The length of the anecdotes ranged from 3 to 12 sentences. We continued to use constant comparison to challenge the categories during the coding process to document and analyze how the text was coded.

RESULTS

Transcript analysis revealed community leaders framed watershed governance as a process of negotiating tensions between individual rights and equality, acknowledging plural perspectives, and recognizing the constant presence of change.

Dialectic Tension Between Individual and Collective

In 62% of the anecdotes, local civic leaders talked about negotiating tension between protecting individual rights and working for the common good as they made decisions about watershed management practices. For these community leaders, priority afforded to individual rights or to the common good varied.

Some community leaders strongly believed in protecting private property rights from government interference.

> I still believe very strongly in property rights, and I still think that if you own it, and if somebody wants to cross, and if I say, "I'll let you cross.… That's up to [the landowner]. I don't think that the government should step in and say we're going to pass a law that says you have to give access to that private land.… (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment E, 38).

This leader suggests that ownership grants the right to decide who can enter and use the land to certain individuals. This sentiment, however, was not limited to public access to private property. One example is the individual's right to protect property from erosion. One local civic leader stated, "erosion is very serious, and, because of the laws, it's almost impossible to protect your land…. The Greater Yellowstone Coalition and … environmental groups sued because… [the bank stabilization method] was supposedly ruining the river…. They didn't care about the landowner losing his property" (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment D, 10). Community leaders also emphasize individual rights when discussing zoning regulations. One civic leader explained, "we're kind of in the mode of not a lot of zoning because we don't want to put a lot of restrictions on the property" (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment D, 43). Similar concerns were expressed about infringing on individual rights to develop property. One community leader stated, "The government has to be careful that controls don't go overboard… [And] start infringing on private development rights" (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment C, 66). This infringement concern was not only reserved for the present property owner but also for future owners. Another leader commented, "I don't agree with conservation easements because it takes away the power of the future generations to make a decision" (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment B, 40). Throughout the river segments, these civic leaders' comments reflect their emphasis on individual rights when dealing with various issues such as public access, erosion prevention, zoning, and property development.

Although, as illustrated by these quotations, community leaders clearly respected individual rights, they also stressed the need to promote the common good. One community leader shared a scenario where a landowner was going to destroy a petroglyph. The leader argued that,

> do not have the right to…do anything they want…. This is a cultural resource. It belongs to all of us…. [We can] force this guy to do a cultural resource inventory, which would be really expensive….(Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment C, 36).

This anecdote demonstrates the belief that individual rights should not extend to decisions that could harm or destroy cultural and natural resources that belong "to all of us."

The idea of looking out for the common good extended into other topics. For example, civic leaders stressed that floodplain regulation was important for the safety of the public. One commented, "[The] floodplain ordinances, people forget that it's not just because somebody wants to keep you out of some place…. It has to do with loss of life" (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment D, 42). Civic leaders also expressed an ecological and social responsibility to the river and people downstream. One said, "I think the river is threatened…. We need to update our regulations. We need to look at them and revisit them" (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment A, 22). Another civic leader commented, "We also respect the fact that the river is going to flow where the river deems that it needs to go. And if you build homes in the floodway… you are probably going to get wet…, we need to make sure that people are safe and that they don't affect this

river (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment C, 28). Another who spoke of the common good added, "We do have minimum standards for the floodplain by state law. One of those is public health and safety; you can't permit something if it is a public health and safety threat" (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment B, 19). In these cases, a utilitarian definition of the common good clearly surpasses individual rights.

Civic leaders also explained how planning and regulation help them balance individual rights and the common good. One local leader commented, "We just need to balance regulations and rights…. We need rules… that have some teeth. The [rules] that are in place… we need help enforcing (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment A, 34). As this comment suggests, balancing individual rights with the common good is not easy; planning, establishment of rules, and then enforcement of those rules help balance individual rights and the common good. One community leader stated, "If we don't have regulations we're going to have development right next to the river. I think development is the worse of the two evils, so we wind up accepting the regulation (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment D, 23). Another commented, "I hate to say it, but the usage is going to have to be limited. You can't just send 200 boats a day down that river…. It will have to be limited or on a permit basis" (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment A, 9). Another civic leader stated, "[We need a] collaborative plan that ensures varied use for all users, just so there was adequate planning to address all of the needs fairly for all" (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment D, 25).

Overall, our informants indicated that planning helps them balance between the rights of individuals and the good of the entire community. As one explained, "[you're] trying to promote survival of the community; we want the power plant and… 150 new jobs…. How does that impact the farmers, the users of the resource? How does that impact the recreation? (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment D, 30). Although our informants rarely provided answers to these questions, the important point is that they raised the questions, and considered them salient to their responsibilities as community leaders.

Present and Future Change

As community leaders strive to negotiate the competing demands of river user-groups, they also deal with present and future change. In 56% of the anecdotes, community leaders talked about changes in the river, changes in its management, or both. One civic leader explained attempts to designate a floodplain of a meandering river:

> We're lucky that we had a 100-year flood along the Yellowstone back in '97 and '98. There were photos taken at that time, so the photos help substantiates where the [flood] boundaries were. That is allowable evidence when trying to determine where a floodplain is. You can use historical records…water lines… [and] anecdotal stories about where the flood was. In this case, we've got pretty good evidence of where it was….It's useful to use the photos. Many of the maps were created in the '70s and '80s, and there hadn't been a 100-year flood….Also, the river has shifted quite a bit. The Yellowstone is a typical graded stream, it really is a very dynamic stream [that] can shift quite a bit, and it has (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment C, 87).

This anecdote illustrates how civic leaders recognize that policy regarding floodplain designation is contingent on the river's boundaries, which change during times of high and low water. Community leaders are concerned policy does not account for the meanderings of the river. One civic leader stated, "[When] a river channel has changed… there gets to be a gray area [where] one part of the law will say an island is public, and then you've got landowners that actually have deeds to islands…[that] weren't always islands" (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment D, 28). Other community leaders are concerned policy is created without regard to changes in the river. When discussing construction in close proximity of the river, one civic leader commented, "I [am] in favor of [a] setback [policy]… when you start building along that river… you've got to protect them… now you're forced with making decisions that are contrary to the natural flow of the river" (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment C, 69).

Community leaders explained that the "river experience" changes as more people build near the river. One local civic leader commented, "The experience of floating the river changes dramatically if you have houses on both sides of the river.… How do we encourage understanding that there is the possibility of losing… the culture of Montana?… How can we articulate that?" (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment C, 34). Another civic leader expressed concern about homes' septic systems and water wells potentially impacting the riparian areas (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment D, 6). Finally, civic leaders acknowledge that future changes will potentially alter the river and watershed. One stated, "A future issue is how much traffic that river can stand. When I was a kid we never thought much [about recreational use]. There wasn't any guides, now you have hundreds of them" (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment A, 51). Another civic leader explained that with change comes tough choices about water use, "There is a potential, looking into the future, for… coal generation plants that use high levels of water.… The question becomes… 'How can water be used?' Right now, there aren't tough choices being made. Everyone gets what they want around here" (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment D, 33). Although they have nothing against people getting "what they want," they are concerned that such a condition is not sustainable, especially with the proliferation of perspectives toward the river.

Plural Perspectives

Community leaders talked about diversity of viewpoints in 36% of the anecdotes. They acknowledge that perspectives about watershed management issues are varied. One local civic leader explained the multiplicity of viewpoints:

> One of [the local groups]…are loyal to their community,… Whatever the issues are, they are 'opposed.'… [Then] you have a definite environmental group.…I think they are helpful in the sense that they create a perspective.….The other group, that shows up, is not organized,…but would be what I would call the 'Native Montanan' group. The first two groups include native Montanans, but they also include folks that aren't.…[The]

third group tends to be the people that have lived here year-in and year-out for decades;.…they tend to be 'the don't-get-in-my-way-I-won't-get-in-your-way' sort of folks. They aren't hyper-environmentalists or hyper-development people.…There is a stark contrast between those that have been here for generations and those that haven't.…They tend to be more in the middle. They would be the folks that wouldn't want to see you cut down all the trees for the sake of cutting down all the trees.…They kind of have this balanced approach, whereas a lot of times the ones that you hear from are on the extremes: you shouldn't cut down any trees, or you should give me a license and a chainsaw and let me cut down whatever I want (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment A, 39).

As community leaders contemplate how best to govern the YRW, they encounter and interact with individuals that support various causes whether those causes are oriented toward environmental preservation or development. The broad variety of viewpoints and extremity of those viewpoints stem from their diverse backgrounds.

Community leaders explained they deal with "a very complex stew of interests" (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment A, 35) because people have multiple uses for the river. One civic leader commented, "This is a diversified county, and we need diversified use of the river, … agriculture, the recreation and the industry (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment E, 29). Other community leaders described pluralist views as positive and negative but nevertheless important to acknowledge. One local leader stated, "People have to realize that there are two sides to every story, maybe one good, one bad, but there's two sides. I learned a long time ago when I was working that I had to listen to both sides" (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment C, 75).

Interactions

Community leaders recognize that change brings into sharp focus the tensions among individual rights and the common good, while always existing, become sharper under conditions of rapid change, especially as those changes introduce additional perspectives. One local civic leader commented:

> We need to find a way to protect the river assets because there is getting to be… more and more of us. And we all want a piece of the river for our own private purposes and…you can't do that. I think we need to do some planning on the river before you destroy what you love.…And I think you have to work together with agriculture, and recreation, and industry. I don't like to see the either/or options being thrown around. No one ever benefits by that (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment C, 57).

This anecdote illustrates how the addition of more and differing perspectives makes the tension between individual rights and the common good both more immediate and more visible. In this story, the common good risks being subordinated to individual rights of private property ownership. The need to using the river for multiple purposes brings to the forefront multiple perspectives about river management, including those expressed by farmers, recreationists, and industry. Community

leaders found this dynamic especially dangerous when referring to the floodplain:

> They are…completing a study in the valley trying to re-establish the actual floodplain.…[One set of designations affected] a lot more land area than what they had anticipated…and … kicked a lot [of property]…into the floodplain and.…nobody really wants to be in the floodplain…because you can't do any building.… The as an insurance part… We don't really know [when DEQ, Army Corps of Engineers, and FEMA will make the final determinations]. It is still pending. I would guess within the next two to four years.…Not having a floodplain [defined],…we have no idea what to expect from year to year, especially since we have been in a seven- to nine-year drought in this area (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment A, 16).

DISCUSSION

Healthy democracy builds in ways to change the system. Local community leaders are wary of assumptions "that problems will solve themselves. The only thing that happens with that passage of time is… [various] sides of the issues become more concrete in their positions and less willing to look at the common elements of interest."… (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment A, 37). Thus, all informants, and especially those in segment C, articulated their continual striving to negotiate the dialectic tension between the rights of individuals and the good of the collective that underpins Mouffe's democratic theory. From their perspective, this tension both necessitates the provision of a space where multiple and often dissenting voices can be heard, and underpins the governance challenges posed by plural perspectives and change.

Dialectic Tension Between Individual and Collective

Throughout the YRW, community leaders discussed difficulties of negotiating the paradox between protecting the liberty of individuals and protecting the collective good of the community. Local leaders expressed awareness that private property rights and consideration for the common good are both valid, and sometimes appear diametrically opposed. When managing the YRW, however, they feel responsible to move beyond the either/or choice. They must deal with this dialectic tension where moving toward individual rights appears to be a move away from the common good or vice versa (Endres et al., 2009). One civic leader described this as a "tussle":

> It's a real tussle sometimes between property rights and community values and who owns community resources. The river, like it or not, is fundamentally and primarily a community resource with very private sector edges, and that dynamic is not going to go away. The problems [are] there and the conflicts are only going to intensify (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment A, 26).

As part of negotiating this dialectic tension, some civic leaders noted passions expressed about contentious issues were especially tough to manage and often impede decision making. One leader

demonstrated exasperation with emotionality when describing how people can, "get caught up in the emotion, rather than… facts … [when making] the decision that's for the betterment of the community. … if you get caught up in the emotional decisions, you walk away and say, 'What did I just do?' (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment C, 76).

Despite frustration over the complexity introduced by people's tendency to bring emotion into the decision venue, these community leaders prefer that these controversies be openly argued in the public sphere rather than through the court system, with its potential to marginalize local voices and rarely provides the promised permanence. One leader offered water rights as an example. He explained that Montana's state constitution stipulates individuals do not own water, but they do own the right to use water. The civic leader stated, "a full court decree [defines] who is first, and … how much water can they take … the older basins' history has shown that sometimes you have to [go to court] more than once because they [courts] never get it quite right" (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment C, 5).

Present and Future Change

Throughout the watershed, community leaders explain that acknowledgment of and adaptation to current or future change is necessary to responsibly govern the watershed. However, the mismatch between temporal and spatial scales of change challenges their ability institute policy that enables them to negotiate the democratic paradox. For example, both ecological and cultural changes occur on different temporal scales than policy changes, making it difficult for local civic leaders to develop, implement, and enforce appropriate policies.

Discussion of the floodplain illustrates the intricacies of responding to these changes amidst this mismatch of scale and highlights community leaders' struggles to negotiate the complex field of democratic participation. Local leaders explained that floods rapidly change the topographical features of the floodplain. However, an important information source, the floodplain maps are static. One noted that the maps are outdated and not site-specific; "They don't take in consideration difference in topography" (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment B, 42). The discrepancies between the maps and materiality of the sites makes it difficult to define the floodplain. Community leaders' efforts to clarify floodplain boundaries are frustrated by various agencies defining boundaries differently. Redefinition of floodplains and definitional discrepancies calls into question what can and cannot be done with property and escalates already existing tensions between individual rights and the common good. As noted in the results section, one community leader tried to explain that,

> a study in the valley trying to re-establish the actual floodplain … has been fairly controversial.…[One set of designations affected] a lot more land area than what they had anticipated.…It kicked a lot [of property] into the floodplain .…Nobody really wants to be in the floodplain…because you can't do any building. On the flip-side, [an area] above Emigrant was in the floodplain

[before] and when they redid [the designation] it was out of the floodplain....So, which one do you go by? (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment A, 16).

As with any situation, floodplain management continues in the face of uncertainty. In this case, civic leaders continue to govern the watershed, relying on local knowledge as they await updated information. One community leader stated, "FEMA has told us they are producing new maps... We are holding our breath, actually. This has only been going on for 5 years... but being a local, I understand this place floods, this place doesn't... So, even if it doesn't say so on the floodplain map, [I know it is] not a good place to build" (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment D, 46). Changing ownership, however, means that new property owners are at a distinct disadvantage, especially given the delay in producing updated floodplain maps. This has the potential to hurt both individuals and the community.

Plural Perspectives

Changes such as those noted above led our informants to emphasize the value of maximizing local control, rather than relinquishing decision making to distant government entities, as a way to enable them to identify, understand, and work with their constituents' increasingly plural perspectives. One civic leader stated, "these federal mandates tend to get scary because, at the federal level, they are very gifted at the one-size-fits-all style of regulation" (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment D, 39). However, even local governance of the YRW demands juggling multiple heterogeneous valued-based perspectives. One leader hinted at those demands asking, "Are we willing to cut our local economy for the Pallid sturgeon? If you're from Missoula you'll have a different answer than if you're from Miles City" (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment C, 13). In this case, individual place identification explains the challenge, with residents who identify with one place in conflict with those who identify with another place. Community leaders explained that collecting and attempting to harmonize these diverse viewpoints takes time, the need for which is further multiplied when State and Federal mandates are figured into the mix. One community leader stated, "Slow is a relative term.... If it's a very complex project, ... you have to go to the State or some other agency to help make a determination... that this is ok. That takes a while" (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment C, 4). Another civic leader commented, "[it] took them [the Corps of Engineers] a long time to pay attention" (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment B, 25). Rather than presuming the possibility of extinguishing the divisions among their constituents, these community leaders imagined an agonistic space where each individual would have "a different answer," and their political responsibility was to "pay attention" to those different answers.

At the same time, national and global shifts lead to other governance challenges. For example, several respondents noted they are experiencing new ownership patterns consistent with national, and perhaps international, trends. As historically production-oriented landowners sell to new owners whose primary use of the land is recreational, community leaders

are faced with constituents who bring different expectations and priorities. One explained that, although "native" Montana landowners tend to grant the public permission to hunt on their land or cross their property to access the river, new owners more frequently deny that access. He stated, "I have seen a major change in ownership along the river. We [now] have private landowners with a lot of money... buying up large tracts of land.... We've got different people now controlling what's going on" (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment E, 39).

The continual ecological and social changes of the YRW create a need for stable yet flexible plans to effectively govern the pluralistic perspectives that arise from various changes. Local leaders explained planning offered guidelines that may enable them to negotiate the tensions exacerbated by the pluralistic perspectives toward floods, development, and changing uses of the river. A civic leader stated, "there will come a time when zoning will be needed.... So, if you buy property in a certain area, you can kind of predict some stability" (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment B, 50). However, they also noted that appropriate guidelines had to be flexible. One civic leader commented, "The growth policy [compiled by the Planning Board], essentially tries to forecast growth and allow for some flexibility" (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment D, 38).

Further, local leaders find themselves distracted from their constituents by the need to appease numerous entities with different jurisdictions and often with conflicting mandates. One offered floodplain governance as an example. He commented, "The interesting thing is the Corps of Engineers and the Montana State definitions of the floodplain are different" (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment A, 16). Another community leader remarked, "The problem is... the sturgeon...band the fisheries issues are not State [issues]. Even though the state is supposed to manage these streams, the Federal government has to be part of it" (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment C, 13).

Although there is no question that our informants tended to prefer that management decisions for the YRW occurred locally, local control was more than an end in itself. They were painfully aware that the rights of individuals and the good of the community sometimes collided, and accepted responsibility for ameliorating the destructive elements of this inevitable collision. They also recognized that change, especially as it added new perspectives into the mix, further complicated their jobs. From our perspective, their inclination to ameliorate the more toxic dimensions of the dialectic tension between individual and communal needs and desires, rather than ignoring or hiding those tensions offers hope for future ecosystem management.

ENVISAGING PLURALISTIC DEMOCRACY FOR WATERSHED GOVERNANCE

These community leaders have, perhaps unwittingly, fashioned an agonistic model of pluralist democracy for governing the YRW; a way to negotiate the democratic paradox. They acknowledge complex relationships within their communities

that provide opportunity for agonistic conflict; creating a symbolic space where dissent is encouraged when considering what changes to current situations would foster improvement in the watershed. Further, they recognize that this conflict is messy and do not attempt to avoid such. One local civic leader commented, "[We] are trying to construct facilities that are safe for the river, in terms of fish habitat, etc., but [also] trying to protect the agriculture users.… Some people say they don't care about ag[riculture], they care about the viability of the river.… I understand that can be messy, but I can't think of anything that isn't [messy] when you are doing grassroots planning. You can't exist in a vacuum" (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment B, 28).

When local civic leaders embrace agonistic conflict, they encourage the "we" and the "they" to view each other as adversaries rather than enemies, thus granting legitimacy to each member of the polity. One civic leader commented, "[I] even suggest [to agriculturalists] that they become members of environmental groups… Or, at least go to their website once in a while and look at their mission [statement]" (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment A, 36).

YRW leaders also have attempted to foster complementary relations wherein adversaries understand how their knowledge and interests may be different, without necessarily being oppositional. Efforts to recover the endangered pallid sturgeon (*S. albus*) provide an example. Recovery efforts include intake diversion structures and multiple adversaries such as a federal government agency, agriculturalists, environmentalists, and recreationalists. Agriculturalists in the lower Yellowstone river area use intake diversion structures to divert a portion of the river flow from its natural course to provide water for irrigation purposes. The structures block river channels and affect distribution and movement of the pallid sturgeon (*S. albus*) (Yellowstone River Conservation District Council, 2007). Modifications of the intake structures could contribute to endangered species recovery by enabling fish passage. One civic leader pointed out to the agriculture community, "You need to listen to the Feds on this deal.… It doesn't cost you anything, and you get your diversion structure rebuilt… The fish get to pass around it… you need to be at this discussion [and say] that's an appropriate use of Federal dollars." This leader went on to explain that, "an environmental community will agree with that… The recreationalists on that river… there shouldn't be an issue there. They both, the recreationalist and the environmentalist, want the ag guy out there" (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment C, 50).

Our respondents offered several ideas for managing the YRW in ways that respected and included a plurality of voices. Working together was a common approach offered by civic leaders. For example, one stated, "you don't force things down people's throats. You sit and work with them and you work on a solution to get it done (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment C, 77). Others noted the importance of providing appropriate opportunities to participate in decision-making process. Another commented, "You have to be open and receptive to public comment—you have to be empathetic without necessarily having to agree" (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment A, 25).

All of them emphasized the need to consider alternative viewpoints, and to look for commonalities that can emerge amidst those often-contradictory viewpoints. One civic leader stated, "I really believe in people respecting others' thoughts, and not doing things just because the law is on their side… There isn't a problem that can't be solved if we work on it and reach a little consensus" (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment B, 3) while another leader explained, "There are just a whole lot of people who can't see anything but black and white. The rest of us see grays… Thankfully … there's a… majority that have seen the grays for periods of time.… There's a general consensus that things ought to be better" (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment C, 74). Note that in both examples, consensus was offered as a partial, but neither complete nor permanent solution. In many different ways, our informants articulated their efforts to govern the YRW through a model of pluralist democracy. They endeavor to manage the dialectic tension of liberty and equality and to embrace plural perspectives in an ever changing cultural, social, economic, political, and ecological environment to ensure their citizens have equal opportunity to influence decisions.

Our analysis also led us to an idea that, while not antithetical to Mouffe's theory of democracy, goes beyond it. Although civic leaders throughout the YRW powerfully illustrated the ongoing struggle to negotiate dialectic tensions in ways that embrace an increasingly pluralistic human polity, their focus was almost exclusively on the human denizens of the watershed. Extrahumans (soils, waters, plants, and animals) remained largely outside the system they considered relevant. In the results, we noted a rare example of a civic leader whose discourse illustrated a perspective that included an extrahuman among the beings to be directly considered. This leader said it was important to "respect the fact that the river is going to flow where the river *deems that it needs to go* (Gilbertz et al., 2006, segment C, 28; italics added). This person's insight may suggest a relatively untapped potential for expanding the options available for building pluralistic democracy. Aldo Leopold's (1949) land ethic offers one way to expand membership in the YRW, as well as membership in other communities entangled in the democratic paradox. Leopold (1949) states,

> The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land… In short, a land ethic changes the role of Homo sapiens from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members and also respect for the community as such (p. 204).

In such an integrated community, there is no prohibition against joint participation by interdependent human and extrahuman citizens (Peterson et al., 2007). In fact, environmental communication scholars have explored this possibility from a variety of positions (Rogers, 1998; Salvador and Clarke, 2011; Burford and Schutten, 2017; Debelo et al., 2017). Most directly relevant to this analysis, Callister (2013) suggests such an integrated approach may offer numerous advantages for dealing with environmental conflict.

Although beyond the purview of this article, further research in how local governing bodies define membership in their communities may help them imagine new ways to negotiate the tensions of democratic governance from a pluralistic perspective. Public struggles ranging from the urban/rural divide (von Essen et al., 2015), to the suite of discriminatory practices associated with the intersectionality (Hancock, 2016) of characteristics such as ability, age, ethnicity, gender, and race surely indicate the pressing need for such approaches (Clark, 2001). That exercise in reimagining the polity may include ways to recognize and include extrahuman voices in the community. Whether or not it facilitates inclusion of extrahuman voices, this understanding may enable more pluralistic approaches to governance on Earth.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Office of Research Compliance-Montana State University-Billings approved study (IRB 11-015). Written informed consent was obtained from all participants.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

SG conceptualized and designed the overall study. SG, DH, and CH collected the data, organized the database, and performed preliminary data analysis. CH conceptualized, conducted data analysis, and wrote the first draft of this manuscript. CH and TRP revised the manuscript.

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