

# A PARTNERSHIP OF US

## Redefining Our Approach to the Nature - Human Interface Through Community - Based Conservation

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*A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity,  
beauty and stability of the biotic community. It is wrong  
when it tends otherwise.*

Aldo Leopold

The summer of 2002 saw President George W. Bush visit briefly the Applegate Valley in southern Oregon, where there had been a forest fire just a month before. He used the visit as an opportunity to announce a new forest plan concerning fire prevention and salvage logging—an unfortunate one if we keep the above words of Aldo Leopold in mind, but we'll examine that issue later. Several years ago, Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt, under President Bill Clinton, also came to the Applegate Valley to explore new environmental policies. Why are these Federal government people trekking out to one particular watershed in the vast Western region of the United States? What is it that interests these leaders in the Valley?

One of the people on the short-list to meet President Bush and who conferred with then Secretary of the Interior Babbitt was Jack Shipley, long-term “Applegator” and a key person in the founding and running of the Applegate Partnership—an example of a new type of community-based conservation group that grew up in the early 1990s. In a personal conversation with this writer soon

after the Partnership was founded, Shipley said that the purpose of the group was to take over governing the Applegate Valley. In a sense, this purpose is being advanced a decade later, as the Partnership has evolved and morphed into several different organizations that deal with social and economic issues as well as land-use issues within the Valley. I want to look at the Partnership in the context of the shifting visions and strategies of organization dedicated to social change, especially ones concerned with ecology and land-use issues.

Since I live in the Applegate Valley during part of the year, I am considered an Applegator by residents there, and during the course of my five-month stay in 2002, thanks to a grant from Daito Bunka University, I was able to attend meetings, interview key people and gather historical and legal documents related to the Partnership. I especially want to consider the Partnership's organizational style as a new type of grassroots democratic movement, analyzing it from an eco-feminist standpoint.

### **Partnership History**

The Partnership was founded in October of 1992 from a meeting on Jack Shipley's deck. At that meeting were representatives of not just environmental groups, but of the timber industry, the Federal land management agencies such as the United States Forest Service (USFS) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and local farmers and residents. The adopted vision statement reads:

The Applegate Partnership is a community-based project involving industry, conservation groups, natural resource agencies, and residents cooperating to encourage and facilitate the use of natural resource principles that promote ecosystem health and diversity.

Through community involvement and education, this partnership supports management of all land within the watershed in a manner that sustains

natural resources and that will, in turn, contribute to economic and community stability within the Applegate Valley.<sup>1</sup>

The Applegate River watershed covers nearly 500,000 acres in southern Oregon. While farming (hay, dairy, wine grapes) is an important part of the Valley's economy, over 60% of the land is Federal timberlands, thus timber harvest activity has been vital to the economic well-being of Applegators. When I first came to this beautiful valley more than thirty years ago, clear-cutting was still an accepted forest management practice. At the top end of the Humbug Creek watershed, near where I bought land, there had been a drastic clear-cut that left slash timber and resulted in run-off pollution in the creek for years. At that time, the Valley residents were divided along fairly hostile lines of loggers and environmentalists.

In the '80s, one could see "Stumps Don't Lie" or "Save the Spotted Owl" bumper stickers along with "I Like Spotted Owl Fried, Baked or Roasted." When I looked at land along one creek watershed of the Applegate Valley, an old farmer asked me if I was one of "us or them," meaning was I an environmentalist who would threaten the end of logging and bring on harder economic times. The Partnership would later use as one of its mottoes "Practice Trust. Them Is Us."

This us-versus-them mentality might characterize much of the West in the late '70s and through the '80s. The early '90s see a shift in approaches to conservation land-use issues and local control as the political atmosphere of the United States undergoes change. Let's take a brief historical look at the evolution of natural resources management in the U.S.

Cass Moseley identifies three phases of our control of the land in her dissertation for Yale University, *New Ideas, Old Institutions: Environment, Com-*

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<sup>1</sup> "Applegate Partnership," a collection of working papers, articles and documents. p. 1.

*munity, and State in the Pacific Northwest* (December 1997). The first involved what was called “conservation,” which developed out of an awareness of the alarming deterioration of the environment as unbridled capitalism moved west for profit. People rushed to use natural resources (or “use up” might be a better phrase) for their own enrichment. The late nineteenth century is not called the Great Barbecue for nothing. The railroads received wide tracts of free land, and other individuals and corporations also benefited from the free giveaway by the national government that tended to see nature as something apart from human beings, in need of domination and control<sup>2</sup>.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century and coming into the twentieth century, Progressives such as President Theodore Roosevelt felt that there needed to be some protection of our national resources before the wasteful squandering of them left the vast majority of people with nothing but stumps and dirty rivers to live with. This kind of concern led to the concept of sustainable resources management that would continue to supply the people with renewable resources potentially forever. The resources—trees, watersheds, minerals, grazing lands and so on—needed to be managed by expert scientist-types, professional foresters and engineers. “Congress would make general policy in Washington DC and professionals living near the resources would direct management.”<sup>3</sup> Nature was seen as a bounty for us to wisely maintain for our present and future use. This era saw the emergence of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the United States Forest Service (USFS) and the Army Corps of Engineers. The goal was to control and improve nature for the economic good of the people. University of California eco-feminist Carolyn Merchant might term the ethics of this period “homocentric,” as opposed to the “egocentric ethic” that ran wild

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<sup>2</sup> See Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 3rd edn. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982.

<sup>3</sup> Moseley, Cassandra. *New Ideas, Old Institutions: Environment, Community and State in the Pacific Northwest*. Dissertation, Yale University, 1999, p. 31.

previous to any conservation efforts taken by the government. She explains egocentric ethics as the idea that “what is good for the individual, or the corporation acting as an individual, is good for society as a whole. Here a discourse of individual freedom to act in one’s own self-interest, rhetoric that lies at the very heart of modernism, promotes human actions in which nature is represented as mere ‘raw material.’”<sup>4</sup> Moving on into the Conservation era, the homocentric ethic introduces a new discourse of “greatest good for the greatest number” and potentially conflicts with individualism. She sees an improvement in the flow from egocentric to homocentric; nevertheless, “nature is viewed primarily as a resource for humans and as a source for commodities.”<sup>5</sup>

The Conservation period lasted post-World War II through the 1960s, when all of the various movements—feminism, Native American rights, Civil Rights, Gay and Lesbian Liberation, and the anti-Vietnam war movement—began to include questions about the environment. What was the relation of human and civil rights to protecting the environment? The first Earth Day was held in 1970. Along with the questioning of all old authority, people began to wonder about the professional conservationists who ran the Federal agencies. Across America was growing an environmentalist movement whose major impact came in the form of new Federal legislation regarding the governance of natural resources. Of great importance were the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA; 1969), the Clean Air Act (1970), the Clean Water Act (1972), the National Forest Management Act (1976) and the Endangered Species Act (1973)<sup>6</sup>. These laws required Environmental Impact Statements to be filed by the appropriate governmental agencies before beginning any project that could affect the

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<sup>4</sup> Merchant, Carolyn. “Partnership Ethics: Business and the Environment,” in *Environmental Challenges to Business*. Joel Reichart and Patricia H. Werhane, editors. The Ruffin Series, no. 2. A publication of the Society for Business Ethics, Georgetown University, 2000, pp. 7–8.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> Moseley, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

environment. So, for example, pursuant to NEPA, the Bureau of Land Management had to file an environmental impact statement (EIS) before selling timber on Humbug Creek near my cabin. It had to notify us that such a sale was planned and that an EIS would be issued. We were invited to present evidence or comments on the sale. Needless to say, these requirements slow down the exploitation of our resources and end up costing the government money in terms of agency time. Yet from the 1970s we began to consider “what is good for nonhuman entities,” what Carolyn Merchant refers to as ecocentric ethics.<sup>7</sup> Environmentalists can call to account agency professionals on whether enough protection is being given to spotted owls or a certain species of salamander if a given timber sale was allowed.

Certainly the nonhuman biosphere benefited from these new operations, but the economic cost proved devastating in many areas. The Applegate Valley as part of the Rogue River basin suffered the loss of timber-related jobs in the 1980s. As a matter of fact, there is a steep decline in average real wages from the peak year of 1974 to the present. The Forest Service and BLM believed in the scientific management of the forests that would allow clear-cutting and replanting—as if a forest were a field of hay. Protests around herbicide-pesticide use, protection of the spotted owl, and clear-cuts virtually shut down lumber mill after mill. The situation pitted “environmentalists” against “loggers,” or as the media simplified the struggle: “owls vs. jobs.”<sup>8</sup>

During the 1970s as the environmentalist movement grew in strength, the demographics of the Applegate Valley also were changing. Many people tired of the fast-lane life of the cities moved to southern Oregon because land was cheap and there was still wilderness and remote country land available. Counterculturists of all sorts flowed into southern Oregon, from California

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<sup>7</sup> Merchant, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> Moseley, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

mainly, but from all over the U.S.<sup>9</sup> Many of these people were the environmentalists who took on the role of watchdogging the agencies to see that they followed the required procedures of NEPA and the Endangered Species Act. In many ways, they were spectacularly successful—ending the spraying of pesticides and herbicides and ending clear-cutting as a management technique. On the other hand, many of the local residents who were loggers found themselves with dwindling job possibilities. Even retraining for service industry employment was not sufficient to replace wages for families who for generations had worked in the forest and forest products.<sup>10</sup> In the Valley, as indeed elsewhere in the West, a confrontation developed between Us and Them. Some of the Valley residents saw nature in utilitarian terms, to be used and controlled by and for the human community—not owls. The others saw nature as its own subject, a potential partner “rather than a passive resource [which] opens the possibility of a nondominating, nonhierarchical mode of interaction between humanity and nature.”<sup>11</sup>

If a personal comment may be permitted, I had friends and family on both sides of this divide. Some of my family worked in wood products and had nothing but contempt for “environmentalists” who were not native Oregonians, interlopers who would close off the rivers and forests that family members had fished and hunted for generations. Environmentalists would have people sink into poverty to save an owl, it was said. On the other hand, many friends were back-to-the-land counterculturists who loved Oregon’s natural beauty and felt

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<sup>9</sup> For a description of this in connection with the Lesbian Land counterculture of southern Oregon, see Barbara Summerhawk and LaVerne Gagehabib, *Circles of Power: Shifting Dynamics in a Lesbian-Centered Community*, New Victoria, 2001, especially Chapter 2.

<sup>10</sup> For a graphic, personal glimpse of these people’s lives see Beverly Brown, *In Timber Country: Working People’s Story of Environmental Conflict and Urban Flight*. Philadelphia: Temple University, 1995.

<sup>11</sup> Merchant, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

the “red, white and blue” (rednecks, white skins, blue collars) would hack down the forest for a few bucks. It did seem as if the conflict was irreconcilable.

In the 1980s, in other political forums in the U.S., people organized around issues and identities. People might support a Save the Whales campaign but be ignorant of local farming styles. Communities formed around identity politics—the Castro District in San Francisco for gays, Lesbian lands in New Mexico and Oregon, African-American mothers concerned with welfare rights, or Native Americans’ return to various forms of Native American cultural expressions. Up until the 1960s, assimilation and integration were key words and goals, integration into a mainstream that was defined by the white, straight, male middle class. As we moved into the ’70s, separation became a dominant paradigm; the various rights movements fractured along all kinds of lines. Lesbian separatists felt it of supreme importance to organize around Lesbian-only communities. African-Americans went in search of black culture, and these various identities were assumed to have some essential commonality. The women’s movement and the Lesbian movement at this time often spoke of our common sisterhood. In the Lesbian communities of southern Oregon and California, the focus was on women gathering. Sally Gearhart, Lesbian scholar and writer, makes a representative statement of politics of that time:

I believe that the new power that will emerge from re-sourcement will be woman-power, and that it will come from women not only because they are uniquely in tune with internal sourcing but further because there is a uniquely female capacity for collective functioning which will make possible more life-giving uses of energy in the future<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Gearhart, Sally. “Womanpower: Energy Re-Sacrament,” *Womanspirit* 2 (8) 1976, p. 16, quoted in Summerhawk and Gagehabib, p. 69.



She was writing for *Womanspirit*, a magazine that emerged from the southern Oregon Lesbian community. Here we see clearly the essentialist arguments of identity politics. All women, and especially all Lesbians, share something in common. We have “uniquely female” capacities that we should develop for the greater good of all women. The Lesbian land communities of southern Oregon were organized to provide retreats and models of living for women. The communities rarely related to the wider community of southern Oregon or made local environmental issues a part of any political program. The politics of identity, however, began to dissolve as the politics of difference challenged essentialist thought, and the queer movement began to challenge the bipolar conception of sexuality. All this is grist for the mill in another article, but the point is that just when environmentalism was reaching a kind of general malaise or impasse in the late '80s—early '90s with its confrontational strategies, the various identity politics also were beginning to realize that separation tends toward isolation rather than liberation. Coalition-building across identities and issues became crucial to the survival of movements for all kinds of human and nonhuman rights. Scholars and theorists such as Carolyn Merchant, Donna Haraway and Roger Gottlieb are attempting to reconcile the various movement perspectives. Gottlieb, in his article “Deep Ecology and the Left: An Attempt at Reconciliation,” put it this way:

“Deep ecology” challenges the notions of human identity, seeking to add to them by enlarging our senses of our own self-hood. Denying that our essential identity includes only our individuality and our membership in social groups, deep ecology rejects many of the ethical, religious or “scientific” distinctions between humanity and nonhuman nature...this is...sometimes called biocentrism or ecocentrism....[D]eep ecology is not aiming to oppose the value of nonhuman nature to that of people. Rather, it roots the value of both in a fundamental sense of the *identity* of both.<sup>13</sup>

Echoing these emerging emphases on coalitions, understanding human identity as a part of a larger natural world both vital for each other's survival and a consciousness of the importance of organizing at the place, the Applegate Partnership's original vision statement included specific objectives regarding ecosystem health, community stability and economic opportunity. Moreover, it stated that the Partnership would:

- provide leadership in facilitating the use of natural resource principles that promote ecosystem health and natural diversity;
- work with public land managers, private landowners and community members to promote projects which demonstrate ecologically sound management practices within the watershed;
- seek support for these projects through community involvement and education.<sup>14</sup>

Moving on from the environmentalist era, the 1990s saw many groups similar to the Partnership, with similar goals emerge as community-based conservation became the key phrase. Local communities hereafter would take the lead in shaping policy related to land-use together with industry and the governmental agencies responsible for land management. Jack Shipley said the question was, how can communities of interest together with communities of place work together to get the job done? The main thing was that everyone love the Applegate Valley. Indeed, at the first meeting, Shipley asked the crowd—nearly sixty people—to “introduce themselves not by affiliation but by hopes and dreams for the Applegate, and it quickly became clear that this was an exciting and rare

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<sup>13</sup> Gottlieb, Roger. “Deep Ecology and the Left: An Attempt at Reconciliation,” in *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, Roger Gottlieb, editor. Routledge: New York, 1999, p. 518.

<sup>14</sup> “Applegate Partnership.” Collection of working papers and documents, p. 2.

opportunity for a local, cooperative approach to forest management and forest politics.”<sup>15</sup> The early leaders of the Partnership insisted on nonconfrontational, equal participation by all concerned local residents. Meetings were open, and the first board of directors reflected all the diverse interests of the Valley with timber industry representatives, environmentalists, scientists and just plain old residents sitting down at the table to try listening to one another for a change. At first, it seemed to work far better than anyone expected. There was a spate of news stories such as the (Medford) *Mail Tribune* Sunday, February 14, 1993, article “Peace in the Forest,” in which Jack Shipley, then vice-president of the environmentalists group Headwaters, and Dwain Cross, a partner in the Croman Corporation logging company, were standing together smiling. They were “joining forces to end the war in the woods....Their peace treaty is the Applegate Partnership.”

Over the course of the next decade, this community-based alliance faced many tests and crises. In the early days through 1994, many people participated with renewed hope and optimism, and it seemed that the Partnership as a model was the way to go. In 1993, the Partnership caught the attention of the Clinton Administration, and Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt flew out to Oregon to meet with Applegate Partnership members. Babbitt reported back to President Clinton who then used the Applegate Partnership as an example of the type of effort that he wanted to see as a part of the solution to the forest crisis. Several Partnership participants were drawn into contributing to the assessment of the ecological, social and economic conditions of the Northwest by the Forest Ecosystem Management Assessment Team (FEMAT).<sup>16</sup> Early meetings saw the presence of the BLM and USFS as well, but in 1994, these groups were

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<sup>15</sup> Sturtevant, Victoria, and Johathan Lange. “Applegate Partnership Case Study: Group Dynamics and Community Context,” a research report submitted to the USDA-Forest Service, June 1996, p. 10.

required to leave the Partnership. As governmental agencies they could not actively undertake policy-making under the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA). With the withdrawal of the agencies, the Partnership almost died, according to several key players I interviewed in the summer of 2002. I recall being in Oregon in the summer of 1994 and hearing of the withdrawal of the agencies and the Headwaters environmental group as well. There were conflicts within the Headwaters group itself as to what kind of role the group should act out in relation to the Partnership. That year, when I saw Jack Shipley, I asked about the young Partnership's premature death. He replied, however, that it was far from dead, that it would go forward. The agencies and Headwaters simply redefined their relationship to the Partnership as informal or as "advisory," but in effect, the Partnership became even more community-based. The Federal agency people eventually were allowed to participate in the meetings, as long as they didn't serve as board members. As for Headwaters, Chris Bratt, who was and still is its head, participates as an individual resident but brings his "Headwaters" perspective.

In this early period, the Partnership accomplished many things including the establishment of a bimonthly newspaper that is delivered free to all Applegate residents; the Ramsey Thin timber sale; and the founding of the Applegate River Watershed Council. The newspaper, *Applegator*, plays an extremely important role of keeping everyone in the Valley up-to-date with the various projects under way and provides a balanced presentation—even going out of its way to do so—of various points of view of the Valley residents.

When I asked informants in interviews in the spring and summer of 2002 to name the successes of the Partnership, nearly everyone mentioned the *Applegator*. The newspaper has been instrumental in building the intangible but real increase in consciousness among residents of the Valley of ongoing

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<sup>16</sup> Moseley, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

projects, timber sales and activities of the Federal agencies as well as the community groups that grew out of the Partnership. Two informants said this consciousness was perhaps the biggest accomplishment of the Partnership. People are aware that there are weekly Partnership meetings and know what will be on the agenda and the various sides to an issue. One informant said the real focus, the real issue, is power—“decentralized power which puts decisions in the hands of local people”—and without the newspaper, building awareness would be that much tougher.

The *Applegator* got its start in 1994 with funds from the Oregon Watershed Health program using Oregon Lottery funds. The first few issues stressed the new Partnership’s goals of bringing everyone to the table to practice trust in working with the agencies to restore forest health to the region. Environmentalists write for the paper, as do farmers and loggers. There was even an essay on the end of “the discontented onlooker, a disgruntled individual, unhappy with forest practices, feeling powerless against outside forces, consumed with self-interest, and offering little assistance to solving the problem....” In the same issue are a variety of letters to the editor about specific land-use questions. The present-day *Applegator* has columns representing environmentalists (Behind the Green Door), the Resource Area Manager’s Perspective and the timber industry (Timberline...). Each issue has a community calendar of upcoming public meetings in which everyone is encouraged to participate.

There are position papers and informative pieces on local history, past and current flora and fauna, chatty bios of Valley people and columns concerned with the future of the watershed. J.D.Rogers, the editor, says he usually will print anything he gets—eventually. If there is a shortage of space, he will bump a less timely article to the next issue. Rogers has been the editor since the first issue, but he insists many people help out. He solicits articles and receives the regular columns but does not seem to have any particular editorial policy. As a matter of fact, another informant wondered how the content of the *Applegator*

is decided. She said that she tried to meet with the editorial board several times, but to no avail. Rogers says there is an editorial board that does get together from time to time, but the *Applegator* appears regularly largely thanks to J.D. Rogers. In the summer of 2002, the front page featured a long-time well-known Valley family. Rogers said this kind of article pulls readers in. Recently, the paper's focus has been on fire—reporting the two big fires that have struck the Valley in the past year, and the development of a Valley-wide fire plan.

To focus briefly on one more early success of the Partnership, the Ramsey Thin, we may note that it was the first timber sale that the group negotiated. Instead of clear-cutting patches, the timber company involved did helicopter logging. Although some old growth was taken, it was far less than had originally been planned. Space does not allow for an in-depth analysis of this first success, but it helped set the stage for all future negotiations on the forests in the Applegate Valley. While other areas of the country suffer horrendous timber sales with no environmental review, the Applegate Valley is unique in that each and every timber sale here has a full environmental review, largely “because of our relationship with the agencies.”<sup>18</sup> The Partnership approaches all sales from the point of view of “how we want it to look in the end, then let the timber industry work things out.”<sup>19</sup> Because the Partnership stressed management of the land through the community, sales like the Ramsey Thin are not popular with environmentalists, who want to “confront, sue and shut down” any cutting in the forests. Consequently, environmentalists are often reluctant participants in the Partnership process. As for the Ramsey Thin, two environmentalists condemn the sale, saying that it took too many old-growth trees, although they do concede that fewer were taken than originally planned. Too, the helicopter log-

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<sup>17</sup> Interview #1.

<sup>18</sup> Interview #1.

<sup>19</sup> Interview #5.

ging saved the forest from new roads being bulldozed. Nonetheless, the head of one environmentalist group who is still on the board of directors of the Partnership said that the Ramsey Thin was controversial and led to the withdrawal of the organization he represents as a formal member of the Partnership.<sup>20</sup> Even so, environmentalists are still at the table today, along with all their neighbors who are retired or who work in wood products or who do business in the Valley.

Who set the early agendas? Who became board members and leaders? The Partnership meetings were and still are open to anyone. In the early days, there was no facilitator, and discussions tended to be open-ended, without resolution. People were just learning to listen to one another and recognize the value of the various networks—informal (kinship, friend and neighborhood support systems) to grassroots organizations (community improvement, environmental, community churches) to formal organizations (Elks, Grange Historical Society, Applegate Christian Fellowship).<sup>21</sup> After a while, people felt a need for a facilitator to keep the meetings focussed. Today's meetings are also facilitated, which makes clarification of various points of view easier and tends to lead to resolutions or suggestions for solutions to particular problems under discussion. Yet two of the people quite active in the early Partnership feel that the facilitator has limited discussion and closed out the possibility of considering the Applegate's place in the larger scheme of things. "Discussion is too controlled. I liked the wilder days," said one interviewee. The agenda was ostensibly open for anyone to add items, but in reality the board and "interested few who had time" set the tone. Also, the early Partnership meetings were often held in the daytime, when people who work regular jobs could not attend. Two women I interviewed said that it ended up being people "who had time and money to be independent," and one commented that she felt increasingly

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<sup>20</sup> Interviews #2, 3 and 4.

<sup>21</sup> Sturtevant and Lange, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

marginalized. Several women I interviewed felt that women were not listened to or taken as seriously as men, while other women noted that many leaders of the Partnership were and are women. If we look at the first board membership, 1992, we see that of the eighteen members, six were women. There was a conscious effort to balance the interests of Valley residents and their various approaches to the natural environment. The Federal agencies were represented by seven people, the logging industry by two and the environmental groups by five. There was overlap between the interests as well.

### **How It Works**

As an example of a grassroots democratic coalition dealing with all kinds of problems of concern to local residents, how does the Partnership work today? How have the dynamics of the group changed over the past decade?

It should be mentioned at this point that the Partnership has evolved into several different organizations. There is the Applegate Partnership itself which meets weekly and is concerned with land-use issues. The Applegate Watershed Council was incorporated as a nonprofit organization, receives grants and develops various projects to improve the Valley environment. The Watershed Council employs a director and staff that reports to the Partnership meetings. Valley-wide tree planting and the Farmer's Ditch project, which will remove fish ladders from the Little Applegate River and allow a freer flow of the river while guaranteeing irrigation rights to farmers who had diverted the water generations ago, are two of the present activities funded through the Council. The Greater Applegate Community Development Committee (GACDC) and the Applegate Forum deal with social and economic issues affecting the Valley. The GACDC meets once a month and administers grant monies for various projects including the management of two regional parks the community took over when the county ran out of funds, the annual Wine and Arts Festival and the new Applegate Business Consortium. GACDC also has supported Cody



Couch's efforts to develop Grayback.com, the Valley's unofficial Web site. The Applegate Forum assembles once a month to deal with whatever is of concern to the community. Within this past year (2002), the Forum has dealt with Extended Area Service for long-distance calling that will redistrict and save residents money, an economic survey of local Valley businesses, fire prevention, and the continuing concern over a local conservative Christian church's illegal use of its land for parking lots. These Forum meetings along with the Partnership meetings themselves have had a shelf-life of over a decade now. How is it that the Applegate Valley has become a national model for a new kind of politics, one that has led to the local involvement of policy-making decisions on the use of place-based resources?

I have attended many of the Partnership, Forum and GACDC meetings. Let me focus on two Partnership meetings to show how it works. This will be a brief blink-of-the-eye snapshot, but it should give us a feeling for the operation of the group. That it works is not really a question. Why it works blends in with the question of how it works. Victoria Sturtevant comments: "We believe that the community's social and economic diversity, along with social and environmental activism in an organization setting of tolerance and progressivism, combined to sustain the individual initiatives that created the Partnership."<sup>22</sup>

To begin each meeting of the Community Forum and the Partnership, the facilitator calls the meeting to order and the Partnership's Statement of Mission is read. (The Forum also reads a modified Statement of Mission.) Put up on the wall are the principles of practicing trust and listening to each other. All those who are present then introduce themselves and how they wish to be represented. Many participants come as representatives of the various Valley interests: environmental groups, industry and business, the agencies or just individual residents. People usually give their watershed by way of introduction as

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

well. Thus Pat G. may be “board member and China Gulch watershed.” I introduced myself as being from the Humbug Creek watershed. The Partnership and Forum are looking toward a long-term strategic plan in which there would be a quasi-formal representation system based on the watersheds. According to one informant, this makes sense, since people tend to talk with their neighbors and work out many localized problems together along the watersheds. There is even a list of current representatives of the watersheds, most of whom “volunteered” for the job. How this representation system will unfold in the future is a subject of interest to residents and scholars, but for now, suffice to say, Valley people seem to be increasingly conscious of this localized identity along the creeks—a Humbucker, a Thompson Creek person, Slagle Creeker, and so on.

The agenda is then open for additions. Actually, the agenda is set by the board and posted before the meeting on Grayback.com, the Applegate Valley’s Web site. Anyone on-line is free to question the agenda or make suggestions for change or additions. One can also contact the Applegate Watershed Council. For the June 12, 2002, Partnership meeting, the focus was “Forest Management, Research and Monitoring.” Many representatives of environmental groups were present because the BLM and USFS were also going to be in attendance, supposedly to explain the status of the Quartz fire salvage timber sale. The Quartz fire burned thousands of acres of forest the previous year, and one contentious topic across the Valley had been whether to allow the timber industry to buy and log the partially burned or fallen timber. Environmentalists felt that this kind of “salvage logging” only degrades the environment further, with more roads required to be built and more potential pollution of the waterways from runoff increased. Agency representatives at the beginning of the meeting announced that there would be no salvage timber sale of the Quartz fire. They had opened the bidding process, but there were no takers from the timber industry, mostly because of the perceived expense. This was a great relief to environmentalists and other residents present, and there was an immediate relaxing of

the tension.

After a presentation on using goats for fuel reduction as an alternative to controlled burns, the agency representatives gave an overview of “the comment process and the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA),” or how to frame an issue so that the agencies have to respond. The BLM representative, John Gerritsma, said, “We want to work towards good ways of getting comments on sales,” but reminded us that “‘listening’ to the public doesn’t equate to agreeing” One key to local, public participation in the process is the amount of information available. The more information out, the more individual comments increase. According to Gerritsma, if individual comments are “properly framed as issues” then the agencies can respond by doing more analysis or create alternatives to mitigate the issues. Environmentalists interrupted his presentation many times to object to the time-consuming “proper comments” procedure, but the facilitator intervened to keep the meeting on track and allow the agency representatives to finish what they wanted to say. Environmentalists then had some hard questions for the agency people, the basic concern being “why should the average citizen have to frame an objection in terms set by the BLM?” If people along a watershed that has suffered a burn like the Quartz fire write into the BLM that they want no salvage logging, that should be enough to trigger further consideration of the environmental impact of a salvage sale. The agency representatives countered that it wastes too much time to go over every comment, especially if “the comment doesn’t propose a clear dispute, or is outside the scope of the proposed action.” Environmentalists wanted to say more, but the facilitator asked them to suggest specific actions the agencies and all of us could take to mitigate the clash between the bureaucracy and the citizenry. Some suggestions were made, but no one was entirely satisfied with the meeting’s outcome. Later, one environmentalist said to me that, in his opinion, the Partnership process is not a success. “We talk past each other all the time.” Yet, everyone was at the table. Cass Mosely noted that “cross-education was par-

ticularly important because environmentalists, industry and agencies had been operating independently and combatively for so long that they did not know much about the needs and constraints that each other faced. They viewed the physical landscape differently, and it was hard for people to understand the dilemmas facing others in the room.”<sup>23</sup> Here at this one meeting in June of 2002, if people were really listening they could have heard how (1) the agency personnel are bound by the NEPA regulations, but that they wish to educate people on how to communicate with them so they can act together with the local people in the best interests of the Valley; and (2) environmentalists are concerned that if they do not follow proper framing instructions, their concerns will be ignored. They also are concerned with a bigger picture—how forestry health here may contribute to a lessening of global warming; (3) the timber industry’s nonpresence seems to reflect their concern that processing endlessly with locals and the agencies just is not worth it. In any case, the meeting was a lively drama (sometimes with humorous interludes) that illustrates how this grassroots interfacing of a local area’s interests unfolds new ways of managing resources and dealing with problems such as fire.

Fire and fire prevention were the topics of the next Partnership meeting I attended. On July 12, a storm passed through southern Oregon, igniting hundreds of lightning fires. One grew to be the biggest forest fire in the nation in 2002—the Bisquit fire. Another, the Squire fire, burned over 7,000 acres in the Applegate Valley, and President George Bush came to view its aftermath.

Between 180 and 400 fires occur every day in the U.S., with two or three becoming big. Through July of 2002, there were 490 large fires in the forest lands of the country. The Squire fire began on BLM land on a Saturday night; by Sunday the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) had an incident commander on site. The Bisquit fire eventually burned over 600,000 acres of forest,

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<sup>23</sup> Moseley, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

while the Squire burned just 7,000. There is always a wide diversity of burn in any fire, depending on climate, terrain and fuel load (trees, fallen brush and undergrowth). As a rule, what happens in one fire cannot be generalized to the next fire.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, there are some lessons to be learned from the Squire fire. One is that the consciousness about fire among Valley residents, mainly raised by the Partnership, led to more coordinated civilian support of the professional fire-fighters who came in. The ODF was surprised, then impressed by the local residents' demands for fire updates every two hours. There was a meeting of Applegate residents every night during the fire. People volunteered at all levels of support and helped keep up a Valley-wide information line. I went into the Applegate Store in Applegate and saw the current update posted on the check-out counter. Similar updates were at the local businesses and in the parks. Grayback.com posted pictures and information on the direction of the fire. Everyone across the Valley seemed to know where the fire was and what it was doing and what we all should do if the fire shifted direction. Further, the Squire fire provided a contrast of "treated" and "untreated" areas of forest and how these burned during the fire. "Treated" means the area has been cleared of dangerous underbrush and fallen timber that have built up fuel loads because of a century of fire suppression by the agencies. In the early conservation period, fire was seen as bad, a threat to resources, rather than the natural control to fuel load that we now are coming to understand. In the past few years, the agencies have been experimenting with thinning and controlled burns to reduce fuel load. In the Squire fire, the areas treated supposedly saw a less catastrophic burn, while some of the forest areas left alone and fire-suppressed grew very dense and burned hot, causing more damage. This is what President Bush was interested in viewing. His preset agenda led to a preset conclusion that we need to do

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<sup>24</sup> All the fire information was included in the presentations and responses by participants at the Partnership meeting in July 2002. The figures are from various agency sources.

more “treating”—which, in his terms, means more salvage logging, which, again in his terms, means more cutting of big-diameter trees.<sup>25</sup> He was also impressed by the degree to which the locals had organized a fire plan. The Applegate model was actually taken to other fires.

Part of the reason that the Applegate Valley is getting itself together around fire is thanks to the Partnership and especially to its “Balancing Act: Living with Fire in the Applegate,” the Applegate Fire Plan drafted by Jack Shipley and Sandy Shaffer. This 100-page document goes to every resident in the Valley. It opens with the goals of the plan and a summary of social aspects of the Valley and our fire risks. It then moves to a fairly thorough look at current conditions in the Applegate, and finally moves to strategies for fire prevention. It gives information to private landowners and how we can evaluate our fire risk and reduce it on our own property. There is also grant money available from the ODF to help us pay for clearing brush from our lands. I applied for and got such a grant in the spring of 2002, hearing about it from Humbuggers who worked on the fire plan. This information-packed book is an important education tool for us. The next step that was discussed at the July 2002 Partnership meeting was what we can do to fit into the legislative push toward regionalization of resources. With Title III funding for a pilot project through the county, the Valley can develop a call-down system or telephone tree for emergency notification and call for assistance. The tentative system would be organized along the watersheds, following the organizational structure proposed by the Forum in its Strategic Plan for the Applegate Valley. Interestingly enough, at the time of this writing, Humbug Creek is the only watershed 100% organized with its phone tree. These phone trees are localized for us but useable by agencies. An Emergency Communication Coordinator would be trained in first aid and fire

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<sup>25</sup> The conclusions about Bush’s new forest plan expressed here are mine and are very heavily influenced by Valley environmentalists. For a more balanced view, one should turn to President Bush’s exposition on the new forest plan.

procedures. In effect, the whole Valley would go out with the firefighters. Several suggestions were made at the July Partnership meeting: (1) Creation of a map of the Valley with all property lines, water resources, ponds, streams and houses clearly marked. This is being done because the Applegate now has the attention of the agencies. (2) A community committee to consider training issues for residents and for “warm shots” who would be ready to respond to local fires. A liaison between the agencies and residents is needed—a local “quasi-official team.”

### **Empowering Local People?**

In connection with fire we can see how much of a role the Applegate Partnership is playing in empowering local people (or rather, local people are empowering ourselves, if we believe the Partnership credo “Them Is Us”). Across the Valley, people communicate better, respond to emergencies and help develop policies together with the agencies that will affect the Valley’s economy, safety and sense of itself in the world as we “think globally, act locally.” My all-too-short description of the Partnership as a new example of a community-based conservation group empowering local citizens may seem lacking a more critical perspective. For example, the larger, urban-based environmental groups like the Sierra Club are wary of this new direction of the local nature-human interface. In fact, the Sierra Club chair, in a position paper on partnership-style groups, warns that

“enthusiasts make the case for reliance on stakeholder collaboration...[they claim] will produce more creative and acceptable solutions...by moving beyond ‘failed adversarial approaches,’ they argue, polarization and stress in communities will be reduced...many in our ranks have a different take on the impact of moving too far in this direction. They want to know whether these collaborators are basically acting in an advisory role with respect to

public resources or whether they are being given power...[and] this redistribution of power is designed to disempower our constituency, which is heavily urban. Few urbanites are recognized as stakeholders in communities surrounding national forests.<sup>26</sup>

These cautionary concerns by one of the nation's largest environmentalist lobbies need to be answered. Space does not permit an adequate response here, but let me outline what that response might look like. The first concern is whether groups like the Partnership are truly empowering local citizens and involving us in actual policy-making decisions. In the interviews this summer, I asked participants about this and most did feel that the Partnership has been and will continue to be a shaper of policy with regard to land-use issues in the Applegate. My observation as a participant as well is that the Partnership indeed interfaces with local governments and the Federal agencies and is creating solutions consistent with NEPA and a land ethic that wishes to protect the natural environment, at the same time being realistic about the need for some timber harvest to sustain the local and wider economies. Perhaps the Sierra Club confuses authority and power because if we are to ask whether the Partnership has any authority, that is a different question. The Watershed Council is a recognized quasi-governmental agency funded by the state, among other sponsors. So in this sense, it has finally some recognizable authority. In the example of the Fire Plan, however, individual members acting for the group are putting together a Valley-wide emergency response system. It is being developed by local people who literally have no "authority" to do this other than what they give themselves. Yet the agencies seem to recognize it as a valuable plan and are working with the Partnership on it. The Partnership certainly has power and

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<sup>26</sup> McCloskey, Michael. "Report of the Chairman of the Sierra Club to the Board of Directors," San Francisco, California, Nov. 18, 1995.



seems to be working up to granting itself authority. Does it have the right to do this? The Sierra Club says that if, in fact, groups such as the Partnership take leading roles in shaping policy toward the natural world, they face the risk of co-optation by industry and representation without taxation. In other words, people who are active in the Partnership are not elected and have no constituency to answer to. Industry representatives could seize power within these groups and the vast urban American electorate would have no recourse to repair any local "policy-making" that threatens the forests, the fear goes. In the decade of Partnership history, industry has faded from the picture as a participant, exactly the opposite of what the Sierra Club worried about. As for the disenfranchisement of the urban population, we need to explore how to bridge this gap between communities of interest and communities of place. Local-based community action around all kinds of issues is a powerful trend in America today, one that Thomas Jefferson would have been happy with. Consciousness of how to build a better community located within a natural world expands outward and can link together the Partnerships beginning to appear everywhere. Neighbors have begun to talk to neighbors again, and this time we know we have the power to create a better neighborhood, a better biocracy.