Society and Natural Resources, 17:735–751, 2004
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ISSN: 0894-1920 print/1521-0723 online
DOI: 10.1080/08941920490480723

Collaboration Derailed: The Politics of "Community-Based" Resource Management in Nevada County

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Collaborative natural resource management (CNRM) is often portrayed as a way to find "win–win" solutions that move "beyond" bitter adversarial politics. Research on failures of CNRM emphasizes institutional and procedural barriers. In contrast, using a study of a failed CNRM program in Nevada County, California, we emphasize the role of intracommunity politics. We build on work by Few (2001) that examines political "containment" and "capture" of collaborative processes. In Nevada County, we identify another political tactic: the strategic use of "derailment" of CNRM by powerful interests to achieve goals outside the collaborative process. Expanding upon Amy (1987), we suggest that this example illustrates that collaboration is not separate from, or "beyond," politics. CNRM can become an avenue of power that social groups use to achieve broader political ends. This calls into question the general optimism about CNRM and the current emphasis on making it "work" by refining institutions and procedures.

Keywords collaboration, community, natural resource management, political ecology, United States

> They'll use this as just another tool to identify properties and to take properties ... all of you need to take it real seriously: we're in a state of war. They mean to win. They don't believe in compromise ...our goal is to slow these people down on Natural Heritage 2020 or to stop them before [the] November 2002 [elections].[1]

Speaking to the Nevada County, California, Republican Women's Club in 2001, Drew Bedwell, a candidate for County Supervisor, offered this animated condemnation of the county's "community-based" natural resource management planning process, known as Natural Heritage 2020 (NH 2020). In one respect

Received 23 June 2003; accepted 22 March 2004.

We received support from the National Science Foundation (SBR0001964) and invaluable guidance from Richard Krannich, Carla Koons Trentelman, and three anonymous reviewers. Above all we thank the people of Nevada County. Any errors are solely the authors'.

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Bedwell's words were not exaggerated: Nevada County was in a state of "war"—a remarkable fact considering that NH 2020 was promoted on the principle of reducing conflict over resource management through a "collaborative" process. Members of the county's Board of Supervisors, their families, and other pro-NH 2020 leaders were shouted down and physically intimidated in public meetings by property rights activists. Some received death threats.[2] They were accused of being communists and sympathizers with the 9/11 terrorists. Citizens were confused and frightened to the point of tears in public meetings, persuaded that their property would be seized by zealous "Greens."[3] In the near term, at least, the winners of this "war" were clear. In July 2002, county leaders, recognizing the damage to civic dialogue and to their own political futures, ended NH 2020 before the program could achieve its most central goals. In November 2002, two pro-NH 2020 supervisors lost their reelection bids to Bedwell and another conservative candidate who ran campaigns based almost solely on opposition to NH 2020, giving control of the board to pro-growth interests.

This article examines how collaboration became "war" in Nevada County. Natural Heritage 2020 was created to promote "win–win" approaches to mitigating the environmental and social effects of Nevada County's explosive growth. Straddling the majestic Sierra Nevada Mountains, the natural beauty and open spaces of this gentrifying rural county contributed to a nearly fourfold increase in population since the 1970s through "exurban" in-migration. Population growth, and the fragmentation of the landscape by the increased number of residential parcels it generated, led to concern among many residents about the county's livability and ecological integrity. Recognizing the political divisiveness that efforts to mitigate these problems might engender, proponents of NH 2020 argued that the collaborative approach was the best way for diverse groups to "build trust" and "generate more enduring solutions and . . . knit back together the frayed edges of our community" (SBC 2001, 2). In hindsight these words seemed bitterly ironic: The conflicts precipitated by NH 2020 tore the fabric of the community to shreds.

Considerable attention has been given recently to flaws in collaborative institutions and procedures. We suggest, however, that the failure of NH 2020 did not result primarily from procedural flaws. Rather, it resulted from strategic political attacks by "pro-growth" activists who saw in the demise of NH 2020 a vehicle to gain advantage in broader, long-standing political struggles that extended well beyond the scope of NH 2020 itself—in particular, the ongoing struggle for control of the Board of Supervisors. Pro-growth groups used opposition to NH 2020 to instill public fear of the "slow-growth" supervisors, creating a vehicle to bring electoral victory. In this political context, advocates and opponents of NH 2020 agreed, in retrospect, that the prospect of competing political actors in Nevada County collaborating in good faith was remote from the beginning. This case provides insight into potential limits of collaboration for environmental management. Practitioners and scholars of collaborative approaches may be well advised to carefully assess local political contexts and histories before embarking on lengthy and expensive programs that may backfire (see Janofsky 2003).

Collaboration: Containment, Countercontainment, and Derailment

Ideas of collaboration in natural resource management and planning have recently achieved widespread popularity. Some describe the concept of community-based collaboration as the "dominant paradigm" (Gillingham 2001, 803) in natural resource management in the United States and much of the globe today (Singleton 2002; McCarthy 2003). An expanding literature examines and promotes this approach (e.g., Wondolleck and Yaffee 2000; Brick et al. 2001; Baland and Platteau 2000; Yaffee 1996; Western et al. 1994).

Collaborative natural resource management (CNRM) is one of many related concepts—including collaborative conservation, participatory environmental policy, consensus-based decision making, and community-based natural resource management. These terms are not fully interchangeable, but they share the core principle that including affected "stakeholders" in policymaking can help to find "win–win" solutions that move "beyond" polarizing, adversarial approaches (McCarthy 2003; see Yaffee 1996; Dagget et al. 1998). We define CNRM as decision-making approaches that involve participation of multiple stakeholders such as landowners, public agencies, scientists, environmentalists, and others (Conley and Moote 2003).

Some scholars suggest that such approaches are too often portrayed as a "cure-all," and that "collaborative approaches to natural resource management can but do not always work and . . . at times failure comes at a heavy cost of time and effort (and, perhaps more significantly, in social capital consumed rather than built)" (Conley and Moote 2003, 382, 373–374). Research on the question of why collaborative approaches may fail remains "in the early stages" (Singleton 2000, 1), but Coglianese (1999), for example, observes that collaboration does not necessarily save time, and may require large amounts of organizational staff and resources. Others observe that the collaborative process tends to produce "platitudes" without coming to grips with the nuts and bolts of actual implementation (Kellert et al. 2000; Margerum 1999). Importantly, these critiques emphasize *institutions* and *processes* of collaboration.

In contrast, this article expands on the work of Douglas Amy (1987) and others in calling for greater attention to the role of politics. Amy (1987) suggests that collaboration is best understood not as a way to get "beyond" politics but as a different *form* of environmental politics. Because it makes choices that determine how resources will be used, CNRM is inherently political. People who view each other as adversaries do not forsake competition when they enter a collaborative process. To the extent their power allows, participants can be expected to control the collaborative process to their advantage, including efforts to co-opt the collaborative processes to achieve the same desired control over resources that motivates "adversarial" politics. To assume otherwise, Amy suggests (1987, 162), would be a serious mistake: "Participants sometimes have the illusion that power relations are less important in informal negotiations—that just because they are sitting at the bargaining table with their opponents they have become equals." Thus, Amy suggests that the notion that collaboration causes people to forsake old power struggles, or that the process itself is politically neutral, is a myth. Instead, collaboration is best understood as an extension of traditional adversarial politics—a different means of handling competition. Politics are not separate from collaboration; they are an integral part of it.

In defining politics, we apply concepts from political ecology—a loosely knit, interdisciplinary field that examines the "constantly shifting dialectic" between society and natural resources (Blaikie and Brookfield 1987, 17). Paulson et al. (2003) suggest that a broadly unifying definition of politics as applied in political ecology is the exercise of power as a social relation built on asymmetrical distributions of resources and risks. Specifically, politics are found "in the practices and mechanisms through which such power is circulated" (209). This definition includes the exercise of power between social groups in a variety of arenas and at multiple scales. In this article we argue that the practices and mechanisms of CNRM can become a key arena in which such power is exercised.

The relevant politics that help to explain the failure of NH 2020 in Nevada County include long-standing tensions over "growth" (i.e., expanded residential and commercial development); competing ideological visions ("environmental imaginaries"—Peet and Watts 1996) of how the landscape "should" look and associated competing forms of rural capitalism (e.g., resource-based production vs. an economy based on rural-residential amenities—Power and Barrett 2001); competing philosophies about the appropriate role of government in regulating use of private land; and a long-standing struggle between social groups representing these competing interests, visions, and philosophies over control of the formal institutions of county government.

Our analysis focuses on competition between these groups in a highly heterogeneous community. While NH 2020 never explicitly defined "community," its potential impacts on landowners within the jurisdictional boundaries of Nevada County constructed a community of place that tied together those who shared, if nothing else, concern about NH 2020 and what it might mean for land-use policies (Duane 1997; see also Cohen 1985). However, our research builds on the observation by Leach et al. (1997) that the literature on CNRM too often conflates communities of place with communities of interest—harmonious collectives with shared values, norms, and priorities. Many recent authors criticize the "fallacy" of treating communities as homogeneous (Gillingham 2001, 812; Agrawal and Gibson 1999). Communities are more often diverse social mosaics divided by class, education, occupation, origin, race, gender (see Gupte 2003), and by political ideology and "visions" of the landscape (Walker and Fortmann 2003). Heterogeneity can present a challenge to collaborative efforts (Ostrom 1990), but the greater problem, we suggest, is the failure to adequately assess the politics associated with this diversity.

We build on research that examines two key political strategies that may subvert the ideals of collaboration in heterogeneous communities: the politics of *containment* and *countercontainment* (Few 2001). We also introduce a largely unexplored political dynamic we describe as *derailment*. Ribot (1996) observes that community "participation" often remains in the realm of rhetoric, with government agencies steering the process in directions that suit the interests of government or powerful groups. As Harvey (1996, 174) observes, those in power may "strive discursively as well as institutionally to manage ['contain'] the heterogeneity of discourses," thereby maintaining structures of top-down power. Few (2001, 112) defines containment as "strategic management of public involvement in planning so as to minimize disruption to preconceived planning goals," typically through avoidance of conflict, exclusion of dissent, and control over knowledge and procedure. In strategies of containment, the purpose of collaboration is primarily to "lend credibility and legitimacy to decisions that have already been made" (Hildyard et al. 1998, 32, cited in Few 2001, 118).

As Few (2001) observes, however, even when collaboration is contained, groups within affected communities that feel threatened are rarely powerless or passive. Thus, Few describes the concept of countercontainment as "mechanisms of resistance" that "serve to undermine containment." Planners may be forced to accept delays, modifications, or compromises to preconceived planning goals. Related to countercontainment is the concept of *capture* (Singleton 2000), in which particular social groups are able not only to undermine containment strategies but to commandeer and redirect the collaborative process to serve the interests of a narrow range of stakeholders (typically powerful economic actors). Countercontainment and capture represent tactics whereby members of affected communities seek to redirect the collaborative process for their own purposes. In both strategies, the political objective is not to stop the collaborative process but to direct it in the interests of particular groups.

Our case study of Nevada County suggests that yet another tactic may be used: *derailment*, defined as intentional efforts by particular groups to undermine, delegitimate, or stop altogether the collaborative process. A derailment strategy may be used as a strategic alternative to countercontainment or capture in situations where groups within the community perceive that the process will lead to outcomes they do not desire, and they are not able to co-opt the process or steer it in preferred directions. In the following sections we illustrate this strategy in the case of the Natural Heritage 2020 program in Nevada County. We then conclude by discussing the implications of derailment strategies for CNRM scholarship and practice.

The research presented here is the product of qualitative and quantitative methods used by the authors (separately and together) in Nevada County between 1999 and 2003. We visited Nevada County 13 times for periods ranging from a few days to 2 months (we also maintained continuous communication with key informants by telephone and electronic mail). The study presented here is supported primarily by 67 in-depth, open-ended interviews with key informants (including interviews with individuals as well as group interviews with activist organizations). Interview subjects were selected to represent all of the main groups involved in the conflict over NH 2020. Due to the small size of the community, we were able to interview almost all the "key players," avoiding the problem of sampling error within these groups. This qualitative, in-depth interview technique allowed us to assess respondents' own perceptions without imposing our own a priori assumptions or limiting the range of possible responses (Fontana and Frey 2000). We supplemented these qualitative data with 104 semistructured interviews and a mail-in survey of 358 Nevada County households to assess the views of the general public. We attended and reviewed video footage of seven public meetings of the NH 2020 program. We also reviewed public documents and records, including program memos and campaign finance records for the 2002 county elections. We used Creswell's (1998) framework for data analysis using a case study design. We applied categorical aggregation techniques to classify data and verified the accuracy of our observations by triangulating multiple qualitative and quantitative sources. We further tested the accuracy of our data by presenting our main conclusions to key informants for comments and clarification.

Nevada County: The Shifting Politics of Landscape

Located in the oak woodlands and conifer forests of the Sierra Nevada, Nevada County is in the heart of California's historic "Gold Country." Since the Gold Rush of 1849, the region experienced dramatic transformations of its society and landscape (SNEP 1996). Following the Gold Rush, open-range cattle grazing, orchards, timber, and deep-rock gold mining became the economic mainstay. By the mid-1950s, however, the last large commercial mines closed, and the traditional resource-based economy has been in decline ever since. By 1998, employment in agriculture, forestry, and mining (together) in Nevada County dwindled to just 2% of local jobs (SEDD 2001, 11–13). By the late 1960s, however, proximity to Sacramento and the San Francisco Bay Area helped generate a "second Gold Rush" (Duane 1996, 245).

The county's open spaces and scenic qualities are a magnet for "exurban" migrants (Walker et al. 2003). Developers such as the Boise Cascade Corporation created large residential subdivisions on former ranch and timberland in the 1960s (Berliner 1970). Development drew waves of residential migrants to the county in search of investments in cheap land and a better quality of life. Between 1965 and 2001, the county's population grew from 25,100 to 94,361, almost exclusively through in-migration (Berliner 1970, 3; U.S. Census Bureau 2003).

Many open spaces quickly filled up with rural-residential parcels, often at relatively high densities for a rural area. The area of private land under primarily residential use increased from 30% in 1957 to 70% in 2001, with an almost equal decrease in land used primarily for agriculture (Walker et al. 2003, 117–118). The median size of private landholdings in the county decreased from 550 acres in 1957 to 9 acres in 2001, creating a highly fragmented landscape that is likely to become still more fragmented in the future. Under current planning rules the "build-out" capacity of the county is estimated at 233,522—nearly 2.5 times the county's current population. Changes in the physical landscape of the county have been accompanied by equally dramatic cultural and political shifts. Nevada County does not neatly conform to the widely noted divide between "cowboys" and "environmentalists" (e.g., Riebsame and Robb 1997). Only 3% of the current population were born in the county (Walker et al. 2003). Thus, the more important political divide is between far-right conservative in-migrants (who often ally themselves with influential "locals") and more moderate conservatives and liberal in-migrants. Despite the predominantly conservative makeup, slow-growth political candidates have often won support from "green" Republicans. In our survey of 358 rural landowners in the county, 71% agreed that "Nevada County needs strong environmental protection," while 59 percent disagreed that "Nevada County needs strong government control of land use on private property" (Walker et al. 2003, 119–120). Thus, Nevada County has a predominantly conservative population that wants protection of environmental qualities, but without top-down regulation—seemingly fertile ground for collaborative approaches.

Yet the political history of the county suggests important obstacles to collaboration. Particularly important is the history of the county's 1995 General Plan (the county's long-range planning document). In 1992, the county planning director created a collaborative process that included a citizen steering committee, with representatives of all major stakeholders, to make recommendations for the 1995 plan. Five hundred citizens volunteered and produced recommendations that found common ground in policies that would allow growth while protecting the rural quality of life (Duane 1999, 369).[4] In February 1993, however, the growth-oriented Board of Supervisors dissolved the committees and approved a plan that largely dismissed citizen recommendations in favor of its own pro-growth policies—an example of "containing" the collaborative process to fit the government's predetermined goals despite rhetorical commitment to community participation (Ribot 2002).

The dismissal of the citizen recommendations for the 1995 General Plan gave birth to an "environmentalist" backlash that led directly to the creation of Natural Heritage 2020. Many participants on the citizens' committees were educated professionals who had invested a great deal of time and effort and were not accustomed to having their voices ignored. The result was the Rural Quality Coalition (RQC), one of a number of activist groups formed, notably, *not* to reform the "collaborative" process but to campaign against pro-growth political candidates. In 1998, the county elected a four-to-one "environmentalist" majority to the Board of Supervisors. The 150-year grip on local political institutions by pro-growth interests was broken.

The elections of 1998 shocked and galvanized the county's traditional "growth machine" (Duane 1999, 386). For example, a lightning rod that mobilized pro-growth backlash was the designation of a 39-mile stretch of the South Yuba River as a state-protected "Wild and Scenic" resource—a policy strongly supported by the post-1998 "environmentalist" Board of Supervisors. The South Yuba flows through the heart of Nevada County, and had long been viewed as a potential site for dam construction for irrigation, power generation, and flood control. Opponents of "Wild and Scenic" designation included the most powerful business groups in the county. The success in 1999 of local environmentalists in winning Wild and Scenic designation was depicted locally as a stunning "David vs. Goliath" victory. By the time NH 2020 was initiated in May 2000, impassioned advocates of economic growth were politically organized to "take our county back."[5] Collaboration and compromise were not on their political agenda.

The Rise and Fall of Natural Heritage 2020

Natural Heritage 2020 was a response to the view among members of the post-1998 Board of Supervisors and county planning staff that rapid growth jeopardized "the natural and scenic qualities that distinguish [the county] from more urbanized regions" (Nevada County 2000). The program's goals were quite specific: to protect natural habitats, working landscapes (ranching, farming), and open spaces through a county-wide biological inventory, a habitat management plan, and an open space management plan. NH 2020 also specified that key "indicators of success" would include "a process that is inclusive and accessible, with mechanisms for meaningful input by all interested citizens" (Nevada County 2000).

This "inclusive" process created inherent tension with the tightly defined program goals, but both the goals and the process of NH 2020 had specific histories. Following rules under the California Environmental Quality Act, the county's 1995 General Plan (enacted by an earlier pro-growth Board of Supervisors) called for studies to mitigate the impacts of development on open space and natural resources. However, the previous Board of Supervisors included no provisions for funding or implementing these studies or any substantive policies that might result. The post-1998 Board of Supervisors considered this lack of implementation of the General Plan to be "verging on illegal behavior."[6] In early 2000, the Sierra Business Council (SBC—a private nonprofit group that promotes the region's "new" economy[7]) offered to seek funding that would help the county to comply with the requirements of the General Plan. Through the SBC, the Packard Foundation awarded the county a $600,000 grant[8] that required the use of "collaborative, solution-oriented approaches."[9] The Board of Supervisors embraced Packard's terms. Natural Heritage 2020 was born.

The collaborative planning effort under NH 2020 was structured around five committees: a Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC), a Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC), and three "working groups" for forestry and mining, agriculture, and recreation. The CAC was intended to be the gatekeeper, with responsibility for assessing and approving recommendations from the other committees that would be passed on to the Board of Supervisors. The Board of Supervisors and the planning staff invited applications from the general public for the 11 voting members (later expanded to 13) on the CAC. An ad hoc committee appointed by the board selected members said to represent interests that included development, conservation, business, farming, timber, and ranching. The SAC was charged with generating the necessary scientific information for collaborative decision making to take place, and was composed of scientists selected by the county planning staff, the Board of Supervisors, and the Sierra Business Council. Each working group included members of the CAC, but was also open to any interested member of the public.

Public participation quickly revealed that not everyone supported the goals of NH 2020. Property rights advocates loudly objected to the biological inventory and the proposed habitat management plan. Despite denials by NH 2020 leaders, opponents argued that these planning tools were precursors to "takings" of private land. Reflecting the claims of an "environmentalist" conspiracy that characterized much of the anti-NH 2020 rhetoric, at the height of the controversy one local farmer claimed the intent of NH 2020 was to "bring under absolute control the social and economic aspects of our society in the guise of environmental preservation," and compared land-use regulation to collectivized farming and the murder of peasants in Stalinist Russia.[10] Billboards declaring "No on NH 2020" became ubiquitous throughout the county. A recall effort was launched against Supervisor "Izzy" Martin—a leading NH 2020 proponent who was described as the "leader of the gang" (the epithet "gang of four" was used against the four slow-growth supervisors). Almost daily, letters to the editor in the county's largest newspaper ran headlines such as "NH 2020 is socialism," "Enviros after your property," "Pagan Greens control county," "U.N. threat to our freedom," and "Enviro Leninists."[11]

Having failed to recall Supervisor Martin in July 2001, opponents of NH 2020 turned their attention to the 2002 elections, in which Martin and Supervisor Bruce Conklin, a supporter of NH 2020, were running for reelection. Property rights activist Drew Bedwell declared his candidacy for Conklin's position, and political newcomer Robin Sutherland challenged Martin. Both ran campaigns almost solely built in opposition to NH 2020. The acrimony escalated, and on 30 April 2002, Supervisor Martin, declaring a wish to "no longer split the community in half," requested that the program be quickly ended,[12] without achieving the goals of an open space or habitat management plan (the biological inventory was eventually completed). Yet NH 2020 remained a potent political symbol: "No on NH 2020" billboards across the county were amended with bright green placards declaring "It's alive!" On 5 November 2002, Martin and Conklin lost to Sutherland and Bedwell by margins of 12% and less than 1%, respectively (Conklin lost by 19 votes). A new 3-to-2 pro-growth majority had taken back control of the Board of Supervisors. A few conservatives still insist that NH 2020 "is alive,"[13] but to most the program appears very dead. Following this divisive experience, the prospects for further collaborative resource management in Nevada County appear to be in the same condition.

NH 2020: Containment

NH 2020's demise and the electoral defeat of two of its key proponents stem at least in part from the success of opponents in creating a public perception that the NH 2020 was a "stacked" process that served the predetermined goals of a small group of environmental "extremists." That is, NH 2020 leaders were accused of "containing" the collaborative process. Importantly, local political and social history favored a presumption of containment. The dismissal by an earlier Board of Supervisors of recommendations from hundreds of citizens for the 1995 General

Plan created an expectation—not least among NH 2020 opponents—that the post-1998 board would use its new power to reciprocate with equal disregard for public opinion.[14] Thus, containment had a strong precedent in the county, making NH 2020 suspect before it even began.

Nevertheless, NH 2020 leaders provided opponents with opportunities to amplify these suspicions. One of the most loudly voiced criticisms of NH 2020 was the lack of representation on the CAC of some of the county's largest private landowners, including the Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI) timber corporation and large-scale ranchers. Leaders of NH 2020 claim they tried to recruit large landowners for the CAC but were turned down.[15] Opponents claim, however, that these invitations were belated token gestures. The local district manager for SPI, for example, stated that he was informally invited to participate *after* the CAC had been selected. When asked why he declined, he stated that he considered it a "waste of time" at that point because the "deck was [already] stacked." The district manager described the board's "stacking" of the CAC and working groups as an "abuse of power."[16] Leaders of NH 2020 acknowledge that they "could have been much better at including people like SPI," but argue that "the reason [NH 2020 leaders] didn't want to is that they knew that SPI would veto everything."[17] This acknowledges that containment was present, but suggests that it was necessary to make the process work and avoid the possibility of "capture" by powerful groups. Whether or not this argument is valid, the choice to limit participation by certain groups clearly gave opponents support for their claims of containment of (or "stacking") the process.

Complaints of stacking the process also focused on control by NH 2020 leaders of both the "vision" and the subjects discussed in public meetings. This issue was most visible in disputes about the requirement that members of the CAC and the working groups sign written statements supporting the goals of NH 2020. CAC members were required to sign a statement that they would "work cooperatively with people of different interests [and] set aside personal interests and institutional relationships to serve the broader community interest," and that they would "support the goals, objectives, and process" of NH 2020.[18] Working-group members were required to attest that they "agree with the intent of the Working Groups and the consensus-based process."[19] Even proponents of NH 2020 acknowledged that the "statements of support" became a problem because the goals of the program were complex and amorphous, making it difficult to know what was being supported.[20] For opponents, asking participants to sign an "oath" fueled flamboyant claims about NH 2020's "true" objectives. When Drew Bedwell spoke to the Republican Women's Club in 2001, for example, he passed out maps that depicted in red areas of the county that would allegedly be closed to all human activity. While this was explicitly *not* a goal of NH 2020, it was a generally accurate representation of the goals of the Wildlands Project,[21] a creation of Dr. Michael Soulé, whom the Board of Supervisors and planning staff had appointed to the SAC. Soulé's presence appeared to lend some credibility to claims that NH 2020 secretly harbored an "extremist" environmental agenda. Whether through "extremist" conspiracy or through the missteps of politically naive leaders, this appearance of containment allowed opponents to deride the "collaborative" intent of NH 2020. As one anti-NH 2020 activist claimed, "The decisions were already made, and this [NH 2020] was a dog and pony show to get there . . . they just wanted it to look collaborative."[22]

While opponents of Natural Heritage 2020 complained relentlessly that the program excluded dissent, there were few efforts by allegedly excluded groups to work within the process through strategies that Few (2001) identifies as countercontainment. This contrasts with Few's discussion of marginalized groups in Belize who strenuously attempted (with varying success) to turn the collaborative process to their advantage. However, a handful of opposition groups in Nevada County did attempt to work within the collaborative process—most notably the Nevada County Contractors Association, which, as we discuss in the next section, joined in the NH 2020 process but worked simultaneously to derail the program and its leadership.

NH 2020: Derailment

In the CNRM programs in Belize described by Few (2001), peasant communities appear to have had little choice but to work within the collaborative process. In contrast, the powerful pro-growth opponents of NH 2020 in Nevada County had a wider range of resistance options. Our study illustrates that those opposed to the goals of collaboration, if they have sufficient power, may choose to *derail* the process altogether or harness it for fundamentally different objectives. That some opponents were intent on derailing NH 2020 was clear from the start. For example, one citizen at a meeting of the Board of Supervisors stated, "You [the Board of Supervisors] will be holding me hostage in a terrorist attack on my rights as a property owner [audience erupts in emotional outbursts] . . . [and like] the passengers on [United Airlines] Flight 93 [which crashed in the 9/11 terrorist attacks], I will do my best to thwart this attack."[23]

The derailment strategy derived its strength in part from the containment of the NH 2020 process. By limiting the role of certain groups, NH 2020 leaders opened the door to a political backlash that ultimately doomed the program. A timber industry representative suggested that the backlash was justified because the initial exclusion of large landowners made it clear that "the deck was stacked,"[24] and therefore the program lost all legitimacy (see Mascarenhas and Scarce 2004). This claim of bad faith by NH 2020 leaders gave license to opponents to try to derail the process. As one leader of the NH 2020 process looks back on it, "[NH 2020 leaders] biased the selection process in favor of people who had more environmental backgrounds, which from my point of view wasn't a bad idea, but *politically* it wasn't very astute or savvy."[25]

The resulting strategy of derailment was explicitly understood by both proponents and opponents. One of the chief architects of NH 2020 noted that in "our [earliest] meeting, guys showed up wearing yellow armbands . . . they were organized, they had an agenda, and they were going to bomb us."[26] A leading member of the NH 2020 Citizens Advisory Committee observed, "I didn't expect them to come out and literally try to sabotage the program from day one . . . I expected them to come to the table in a more professional way, and actually attempt to dialog and have input rather than sit outside the conversation and just throw rocks at it . . . . They stalled our meetings just in any way, shape, or form that they could stop us or slow us down."[27] A representative of a prominent local business group noted that from the beginning the attitude of many opponents was, "They won't come to the table—it's 'stop it, don't do it,' 'we're not even going to talk about it.'"[28] In a letter to the editor in the main local newspaper, one property rights activist stated explicitly, "Stop it before it starts."[29] In a group interview with the leaders of a prominent local property rights group, one speaker stated bluntly, "Derailment became our conscious policy . . . we were committed to derailing the thing."[30] As activist and candidate Drew Bedwell put it, from the outset opponents were "in a state of war" with NH 2020 and its leaders.

This rush to "war" was based in part on animosities that existed long before NH 2020. Many claim that NH 2020 became a proxy for long-simmering antipathies between the county's environmentalists and slow-growth advocates and the pro-growth business interests that had long dominated county politics. The election of the slow-growth Board of Supervisors in 1998, conflicts such as the fight over "Wild and Scenic" designation for the South Yuba River, and ongoing fighting over local forest management merely capped tensions between those with very different ideological views and economic interests in the county (Walker and Fortmann 2003). County Supervisor "Izzy" Martin came to personify these tensions. As one former supervisor later observed, "The people who hate her *really* hate her. Whew! ... I think she was toast before [NH 2020]. It was cultural stuff. 'She dresses like a hippie' ...and she was in a redneck district ...a *really* redneck district."[31] Natural Heritage 2020 appears to have become a stage on which a battle with deeper cultural and ideological roots was brought to a head.

At stake in this conflict was more than cultural difference, however; the ferocity of the anti-NH 2020 backlash reflects the enormous political and economic stakes. Derailment of NH 2020 dovetailed with the broader goal of pro-growth conservatives to retake control of county government. One citizen argued at a meeting of the Board of Supervisors that "the conflict existed long before NH 2020 and will continue to exist long after the NH 2020 program ...the opponents are made of a coalition of the enemies of the Supervisors ...they use [NH 2020] to serve their purposes which has been to regain the majority on the Board of Supervisors for the last several years ...I propose that that's really what's going on here."[32] A former supervisor concurred: "It wasn't the [NH 2020] *process* ...it was who was there [on the board] ...they had to find a way to get rid of us ...[NH 2020] became a vehicle."[33] A representative of an anti-NH 2020 business group argued that not all opponents shared this motive, but acknowledged that "you did have an extremist group that was using this issue for other purposes."[34]

Control of the Board of Supervisors had enormous economic implications, and many businesses made no secret of their dislike of the post-1998 leadership. In reality, the slow-growth Board of Supervisors created few new regulations, but they did enforce existing rules more rigorously. The owner of a local gravel mine, for example, observed that "Twenty years ago you walked into the county [for a permit] and it was a service ...they said, 'oh, yeah, go ahead, we know you, you know what you're doing' ...now they say, 'you can't do that because you don't have one of these [the correct form].' Until a few years ago nobody ever told me I had to have one."[35] A former county supervisor recalled that when the post-1998 board turned down a development proposal for a local business owner, the owner was shocked: "He'd never had a Board of Supervisors turn down an [environmental impact report] for any reason."[36] Supporters of NH 2020 claim that anger and fear of lost profits motivated some business owners to use NH 2020 to defeat the new board. A member of the slow-growth board stated, "Of course those guys wanted me off ...I mean we're talking many, many millions of dollars in difference in development expenses."[37]

The claim that the derailment of NH 2020 became a strategy to regain control of county government for conservatives and pro-growth business groups is supported by the pattern of campaign financing in the two county supervisor elections in 2002. The groups most active in opposing NH 2020 were also the biggest financial supporters of anti-NH 2020 candidates Drew Bedwell and Robin Sutherland.[38] The largest independent expenditures were made by Nevada County Citizens for Responsible Government (NCCRG), which reported $63,032.49 in cash expenditures used to support candidates Bedwell and Sutherland and to attack NH 2020 and Supervisors Martin and Conklin. The largest contributors to NCCRG were an employee of Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI), the Nevada County Contractors Association (NCCA), and an independent political organization that made a large ($28,258) contribution from sources that cannot be traced and are now under investigation by the California Fair Political Practices Commission. The largest direct cash contributions to the Bedwell and Sutherland campaigns came from the NCCA. The second largest direct cash contributions to both Bedwell and Sutherland came from SPI (which also contributed $700 in campaign training to each candidate). Bedwell and Sutherland also received large donations from members of the Robinson family, who are among the county's largest landowners and developers. In contrast, pro-NH 2020 supervisors Martin and Conklin were shunned by the traditional "growth" lobby. Significantly, while most large businesses (such as SPI) were active only from *outside* the collaborative process, the NCCA appeared to pursue a dual strategy: The group's Executive Director acted as vice-chair of NH 2020's CAC, but the organization refused to endorse NH 2020 and contributed heavily to candidates Bedwell and Sutherland and to NCCRG, the most active opponents of NH 2020. Unlike Sierra Pacific Industries and other pro-growth political organizations in Nevada County, the NCCA depends on a customer base that is deeply concerned about maintaining the county's environmental quality,[39] and therefore had a strong interest in maintaining at least the appearance of working with the community to protect the environment, and also had a strong interest in having a direct hand in shaping any land-use policies that might have emerged from the NH 2020 process, had it not been derailed.[40] Thus, the NCCA pursued a safeguard strategy of countercontainment through public participation *and* behind-the-scenes derailment. The overall pattern of campaign financing supports the view that NH 2020 was, at least in part, a victim of deep political currents (in particular, the passionate desire of pro-growth conservatives to retake control of the Board of Supervisors) that extended well beyond the scope of NH 2020 per se.

Discussion

Scholarship on collaboration emphasizes the institutional and procedural dimensions of collaborative programs—how representatives are selected, how public ideas are conveyed, the skills of facilitating group discussions, and mechanisms to assure accountability, among others (see Wondolleck and Yaffee 2000; Baland and Platteau 2000). Scholarship on collaboration has been less attentive to the role of power and conflicting interests as they shape the success or failure of collaborative programs (Paulson 1998). Our research from Nevada County suggests that the collaborative process, though it may have been flawed, was not at the root of NH 2020's demise. The demise of NH 2020 was a deliberate outcome of a bitter power struggle that was amplified, rather than circumvented, by the intended collaborative process. As a process with the power to potentially reconfigure fundamental relationships between people, places, and resources, NH 2020 functioned, in the words of Paulson et al. (2003), as a "mechanism through which power is circulated" within the community. Through NH 2020, advocates attempted to implement particular visions of the landscape (Hurley and Walker forthcoming), while pro-growth interests successfully used the demise of NH 2020 as an avenue to reestablish their political dominance.

Our research found an almost deliberate failure of NH 2020 proponents to consider these political dimensions—the ways the program would "play" in the political context of Nevada County. Opponents, and much of the general public, perceived NH 2020 as the exertion of power by those who defined its "vision." Yet when asked why much of the community reacted so negatively, the county planner in charge of NH 2020 responded, "I really had no understanding of the history . . . or the contentious political nature of the county . . . I think there's some kind of social dynamic going on that we haven't quite figured out."[41] Some suggested that this naiveté bordered on incompetence: A member of the Scientific Advisory Committee observed that this same planner "kept telling me . . . 'I don't care a damn about politics; all I care about is the science'"[42]—an attitude with serious consequences. For example, the planning staff widely used the term "empty box" to describe NH 2020, suggesting it had no predetermined agenda, and that it would be fully open to input from the community. In fact, the program had quite specific goals,[43] leaving NH 2020 leaders open to charges of deceiving the public by making the process appear more open than it was. These leaders later agreed that this "very unfortunate language" was misleading and a political blunder.[44] Opponents relentlessly exploited such naiveté, recasting the "empty box" metaphor as a Pandora's Box that concealed a hidden agenda, including conspiracy between the Nevada County government, the United Nations, "extremist" environmentalists, and communists to confiscate private property.

This failure to recognize the political dimensions of NH 2020 left county leaders not only startled by the visceral hostility directed at them, but it also left them unprepared for the political resistance that ensued. The research we have presented supports the view that the derailment of NH 2020 became a vehicle used by opponents to publicly vilify the slow-growth Board of Supervisors and thereby retake control of county government. Yet county leaders continued to push the program well after the point where it should have been clear that opponents would "collaborate" only to the extent that it served the purpose of undermining the program and its proponents. As one former supervisor observed in retrospect, "Those guys did not want [slow-growth Supervisors Martin and Conklin] on the Board of Supervisors, and they were looking for any way to get rid of [Martin and Conklin] . . . it didn't matter what it was."[45] NH 2020 served this political goal well. Moreover, NH 2020's long, drawn-out demise provided a public platform to air the political grievances of the county's pro-growth conservatives. As one NH 2020 proponent later lamented, "We *gave* them that forum, for two solid years."[46]

The obstacles to effective collaboration in Nevada County were in fact daunting, but it was the lack of political awareness among program leaders that probably drove the nails into NH 2020's coffin. A local planning official observed, "The biggest mistake was that [the pro-NH 2020 County Supervisors] should have stopped the process [because] the train [was] already sliding off the tracks.' And they didn't do that; they just kept pushing their little train sliding down the tracks, because they felt they had the power, and the votes."[47] The failure of these leaders to fully understand (until it was too late) that their own actions were widely perceived as political efforts to contain the process, and that from early in the process opponents intended to derail the program as a means to achieve other political goals, proved fatal to NH 2020. This lack of political awareness also describes much of the CNRM literature: There has been little or no discussion of the possibility, illustrated by the experience of NH 2020, that the collaborative process may *deepen* precisely the kind of vitriolic conflicts that it is often said to avert. The case study of Nevada County illustrates that, rather than "knitting back together the frayed edges of the community," the CNRM can precipitate explosive conflicts and deepened old political divisions. As one exhausted NH 2020 leader observed in hindsight, "What a lesson!"[48]

Conclusions

One conclusion from NH 2020 in Nevada County is that a heightened awareness of political context should draw our attention to the intrinsic character of the collaborative process as one of numerous avenues of political power; as such, CNRM cannot be assumed to "rise above" long-existing political conflicts. Where such conflicts exist, CNRM may be viewed opportunistically by some groups as a new avenue to power. Where powerful groups perceive that they are unable to "capture" the collaborative process, they may determine that their interests are better served by derailing it. The open and public nature of collaboration makes it vulnerable to such strategies (looking back, a leader of NH 2020 summed it up this way: "We pitched this low ball—low, slow, fat ball—for them and they were completely ready to hit it out of the stadium").[49] The experience of NH 2020 suggests that inattention to this possibility can doom attempts at collaboration. If, as we have argued, collaborative natural resource management is inherently political, this suggests that careful assessment of the political terrain is at least as critical to the success of collaborative programs as assessment of appropriate procedures and institutional requirements. Those who sponsor and manage such projects need to be sensitive to the ways their own motives are perceived within this political context, and how this perception shapes the actions of the various parties who enter into the collaborative process. Inherent in this proposition is the need to ask whether a collaborative approach might actually create a more contentious management climate inimical to finding mutually agreeable and effective solutions.

More broadly, a heightened awareness of the role of politics in CNRM suggests that it may be appropriate to call into question both the sweeping optimism about collaborative approaches and the rather narrow focus on procedure and institutions that characterizes much of the present literature about what makes collaboration "succeed" or "fail." If, as Douglas Amy (1987) suggests, politics infuse whatever process is used to resolve struggles over resources, then it may be fair to ask why we have collectively placed such a high degree of faith in this one particular approach. It also casts into doubt whether the present emphasis on studying the collaborative *process* can ever provide an adequate understanding of why collaboration may succeed or fail. If we simply assume that collaboration gets "beyond" politics, and that success or failure hinges on procedural questions, we may be building a conceptual "toolbox" that is missing critical tools—and we may find ourselves disappointed with the results.

Notes

1. Speech to the Republican Women's Club of Nevada County in Penn Valley, CA, broadcast on Foothills Community Access Television, Channel 11, January 2001.
2. Interview A. Penn Valley, CA, 7/6/01.
3. Personal observation. NH 2020 Community Advisory Committee Meeting, Nevada City, CA, 3/28/02.
4. The process won an award from the American Planning Association.
5. "Property rights in the fore." *The Union*, Grass Valley/Nevada City, CA, 12/20/00, p. A1.

6. Interview B. Penn Valley, CA 3/20/03.

7. See http://www.sbcouncil.org/, accessed 5/19/03.

8. Under the terms of the grant, the county would provide matching support of $230,000.

9. The grant was awarded under Packard's Conserving California Landscapes Initiative through the Resource Law Group. See http://www.resourceslawgroup.com/about/about.htm. Last accessed 5/19/03. Some local environmentalists emphatically warned that a collaborative process would "blow up in our faces" because of the anger of the local pro-development groups that had recently lost power. Interview C. Nevada City, CA, 3/19/03.

10. Interview D. Chicago Park, CA, 06/25/01.

11. *The Union*, Grass Valley/Nevada City, CA, 10/5/00; 11/6/00; 9/18/00; 5/14/02; 7/27/02.

12. *The Union*, Grass Valley/Nevada City, CA, 5/8/02.

13. Interview E. Grass Valley, CA, 3/20/03.

14. Personal communication with NH 2020 Community Advisory Committee member, Nevada City, CA, 5/16/03.

15. Interview B.

16. Personal communication from Grass Valley, CA, 5/19/03.

17. Interview F. Nevada City, CA, 7/25/02.

18. Nevada County, "Community Advisory Committee Application Form, NH 2020: A Vision for Nevada County."

19. Nevada County, "Working Group Participation Form, County of Nevada Development Agency."

20. Interview G. Nevada City, CA, 3/19/03.

21. See http://www.twp.org, accessed 5/25/03.

22. Interview E.

23. Meeting of the Nevada County Board of Supervisors, Nevada City, CA, 10/9/01.

24. Personal communication from Grass Valley, CA, 5/19/03.

25. Interview F.

26. Interview B.

27. Interview K. Grass Valley, CA, 7/25/02.

28. Interview H.

29. Ruth Bedwell, *The Union*, Grass Valley, CA, 10/5/00.

30. Interview E.

31. Interview J.

32. Meeting of the Nevada County Board of Supervisors, Nevada City, CA, 10/9/01.

33. Interview J.

34. Interview I.

35. Interview L. Near Grass Valley, CA, 7/3/01.

36. Interview J.

37. Interview B.

38. All information on campaign contributions was collected from campaign finance statements (California Forms 410, 460, 461, 700) provided by the Nevada County Elections Office, Nevada City, CA.

39. Author survey data from 358 Nevada County households, 2001.

40. Interview M. Grass Valley, CA 5/24/02.

41. Interview N. Nevada City, 3/28/02.

42. Interview F.

43. Proponents agreed that NH 2020 had a specific "vision," but argued that this vision was imposed under the terms federal, state, and county law (the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Water Act, the California Environmental Quality Act, and the county's 1995 General Plan). This raises important questions about how truly open CNRM can be when particular outcomes are predetermined by law.

44. Interview B.

45. Interview B.

46. Interview C.

47. Interview O, by telephone from Nevada City, CA, 12/7/03. The authors would like to emphasize that the respondent was not prompted and was entirely unaware of their use of the "derailment" metaphor.

48. Personal communication from Penn Valley, CA, 5/6/03.

49. Interview B.

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