A Practitioner's Guide To Public Deliberation In Natural Resource Management

R.E. Mitchell
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ABSTRACT

This report is a guide to help practitioners and managers to enhance deliberative activities in natural resource management. As a subset of public participation activities, deliberative practices are predominantly concerned with the creation of opportunities for public dialogue. Through consultation and careful consideration of alternative points of view, deliberative activities may result in more reasonable, better-informed opinions within a representative body of citizens or participants. After a brief examination of the strengths and weaknesses of three recent deliberative activities in the forest sector (Special Places 2000, the Alberta Forest Conservation Strategy, and the forest sector public advisory committees), eight specific deliberative tools are described in detail. Finally, a detailed set of guidelines is presented for the three stages of public deliberation: predeliberative activities, the deliberation itself, and postdeliberative activities.

RÉSUMÉ

Ce rapport est un guide conçu pour aider les praticiens et les gestionnaires à améliorer les activités délibératives dans la gestion des ressources naturelles. Dans le cadre de la participation du public, les activités délibératives consistent principalement à créer des occasions de dialogue avec le public. Grâce à la consultation et à la prise en compte prudente des différents points de vue exprimés, les activités délibératives peuvent aider à former des opinions plus raisonnables et mieux informées au sein d'un groupe représentatif de citoyens ou de participants. Après un bref examen des avantages et des inconvénients de trois activités délibératives récemment mises en œuvre dans le secteur forestier (Special Places 2000, la Stratégie de conservation des forêts de l'Alberta et les comités de consultation publique du secteur forestier), huit outils délibératifs spécifiques sont décrits en détail. Finalement, des directives détaillées sont présentées pour les trois étapes de la délibération publique : activités prédéliberatives, la délibération à proprement parler, et les activités postdélibératives.

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INTRODUCTION

Rising public demand for involvement in the management of public and private land has been both an impetus and a challenge for resource managers. In response, public participation activities have gained wider acceptance by government and leaseholders in natural resource decision making. Advisory committees and public workshops on forest planning and management are becoming more commonplace and are even legislated by many regulatory bodies. Furthermore, third-party monitoring bodies, such as the Canadian Standards Association and the Forest Stewardship Council, have made public participation a key component of their certification systems. These public advisory activities are motivated by goals that include improving the quality of decision making in resource management, incorporating local knowledge into the decision-making process, and providing lay people with a better understanding of resource management systems and processes.

To achieve these goals, resource managers and practitioners have at their disposal a wide range of tools to facilitate public input. (The term "practitioners" in this report refers to any person already engaged, or who wishes to engage, in resource decision making of a public nature. Such individuals might include community leaders, volunteers, activists, foresters, technicians, mill and woods workers, recreationalists, and academics, among many others.) The mechanisms used can range from straightforward, small-scale workshops and open houses to complex and time-consuming public hearings or inquiries. Resource managers and practitioners also rely on a wide range of social science research tools designed to systematically elicit information from the general public, including random sample surveys, focus groups, and face-to-face interviews. This report deals with a subset of these wide-ranging public participation tools, specifically, procedures with a strong commitment to public dialogue; that is, where groups of people are brought together to inform each other and to become informed, to discuss and debate issues, and to revise their opinions and preferences on the basis of the best available information.

Participatory practices are informed by an increasingly influential scholarly tradition known as "deliberative democratic theory." This theory is concerned with discussion and debate where individuals not only strive to produce reasonable, well-informed opinion but also reveal a willingness to revise preferences in light of discussion, new information, and claims made by fellow participants (Chambers 2003). Two critical factors here are the diversity of perspectives under consideration and the quality of dialogue that together encourage shared learning. Deliberative practices generally encompass a broad cross-section of citizens who commit to learning from each other and revising their personal opinions in line with a more holistic understanding of the issues at hand. Participants may disagree on a given issue, even after extensive dialogue and critical debate, but working to understand each other's perspectives remains a primary objective.

In spite of these lofty goals, numerous challenges confront the practitioner. For instance, preconditions or rules can be geared toward constructive debate, but if inappropriately formulated or imposed, such rules may impede decisions. Expert information may conflict, and the public's capacity to understand technical information may be limited. Inadequate training, lack of time to commit to a lengthy process, or even the logistic challenges of bringing diverse and often scattered groups together all represent serious challenges to achieving the ideals of deliberative democracy.

Despite these challenges and complexities, diverse participation remains an important component of decision-making processes. Multiple uses and values — including tourism and recreation, traditional lifestyles (e.g., trapping and hunting), watershed protection, timber and nontimber forest products, and spiritual values — are integral components of any planning process, and no single perspective represents the "right" view. Furthermore, diverse values and perspectives make for a complicated planning scenario. Some participants may hold such adverse views about the way in which public resources are being managed that they may prefer to take a radical or obstructionist approach. Activists may fear that their genuine willingness to collaborate will be co-opted by authorities. Environmental nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or indigenous peoples may prefer acts of civil disobedience such as blockades and political demonstrations to structured debate. Others may choose legal or political avenues such as litigation, special interest lobbying, or use of the media.

This guide provides some potential remedies to these challenges in the form of a suite of innovative tools for public deliberation and proposals for a series of activities associated with key stages in the deliberative process. The increasing presence of public participation policies in natural resource management reflects a civic appetite for more direct information and input. Still, while some citizens want to be more involved in how their natural resources are cared for, many others seem content to let forest authorities do the managing or feel a degree of apathy toward public planning processes. Certainly, the rising apathy of citizens toward politics, including the politics of resource management, has been demonstrated through declining voter turnout. Yet apathy or disinterest may be only part of the problem. There may also be a lack of appropriate opportunities that encourage meaningful public participation. Furthermore, sponsors may need professional (outside) assistance or might have to train their own staff to better incorporate citizen input. Accordingly, this document provides a guide to developing public processes that are well organized and rigorous but also fair and meaningful. Democratic openings that emerge from these public processes can allow ordinary citizens with a variety of perspectives to constructively discuss natural resource issues. To be sure, planning and managing for a sustainable environment often becomes what scholars describe as "messy" problems (McCool and Guthrie 2001), which makes it even more critical that public engagement processes are well organized, incorporating diverse public interests, and thoroughly integrated into the larger context of planning and management. This practical guide provides some assistance in moving toward this end.

THEORIES OF PUBLIC DELIBERATION

Important distinctions exist between different types of public participation processes in terms of the extent to which public deliberation is a key component of the process. This variation means that it is useful to conceive of these processes as occurring on a spectrum from weak to strong deliberation (Table 1). On the weak end of the spectrum, participation may involve passive activities with minimal social interaction, for example, listening to others speak, giving opinions in a survey, and reading information reports.

Low-intensity public participation activities may be used simply in recognition of the need to involve the public somehow, "assuming that involvement is an end in itself" (Rowe and Frewer 2000, p. 10). Furthermore, weak deliberations may apply to important data collection activities, where large sample sizes and random sampling techniques are more appropriate.

Conversely, participation at the strong end of the spectrum may involve substantial and productive interaction among participating citizens. Informed discussion and debate in a collective, consensus-building context may be characterized as strong deliberation, and the results of such exercises are likely to have a major influence on the final decisions. While these ends may be somewhat idealistic, the key point is that collaborative, shared learning experiences tend to shape and steer the outcome of any deliberative process. Deliberation and mutual learning can move people beyond simple compromise to solutions built on new knowledge and understanding. Such outcomes are often much better than those generated by compromises between individual interests (London 1995; Parkins and Mitchell 2005). Deliberation, then, is a matter of degree and of intended outcomes.

Table 1. Contrasting modes of public deliberation

Weak deliberation	Strong deliberation
Generally large groups or many individuals	Generally small groups
Passive	Active
Listen, read, answer	Discuss, debate, decide
Information received by participants	Information digested and generated by participants
Low intensity of interaction	High intensity of interaction
Little or no influence on outcome	Potential influence on outcome

In designing public participation activities at the community level, several important considerations can be derived from the literature. As adapted from Carr and Halvorsen (2001), these considerations fall within the following three topics:

- The process should be open to participants from all sectors of the selected community or region. In Canada, where most forest resources are publicly owned, representation from both local and nonlocal interests will be an important consideration.
- The techniques should be responsive to a variety of social settings and modes of communication to provide some variation in the type of information that is considered. To communicate ideas and promote understanding, these types may go well beyond technical and scientific reports to include formal and informal presentations from community groups, storytelling by elders and youth, or even dramatic presentations.
- The methods must be straightforward enough to be adopted by managers for future use with minimal assistance from social scientists or practitioners.

In addition, researchers have identified several benefits from these kinds of public participation activities. These benefits relate not only to the fulfillment of bureaucratic requirements, but also to some key social goals. Essentially, such benefits are exemplified by the participants, a group of citizens who become aware of forest management issues, can understand multiple perspectives on those issues, and have arrived at their personal opinions through debate, personal reflection, and a more informed and balanced understanding of the issues at hand. Beierle (1999) identified five specific social goals (potential benefits) that are associated with deliberative activities:

- incorporating a broad range of public values, which may contrast with experts' values and private interests
- improving the quality of decisions by incorporating local knowledge and generating alternative solutions
- resolving conflict among competing interests to avoid more adversarial approaches
- building trust in institutions through fair and equitable processes of public engagement
- educating and informing the public through scientific information along with local knowledge and experience

Although certain activities that are marked by low deliberation (see Table 1) may help to achieve some of these outcomes, greater potential for success rests with activities where two or more individuals have an opportunity to engage in dialogue. Some guidelines have been developed to evaluate public participation activities or to make natural resource management more participatory and effective (Grimble and Chan 1995; Shindler and Neburka 1997; Tuler and Webler 1999; Rowe and Frewer 2000), yet much of this literature applies to specific contexts such as forest or watershed planning or the conduct of a stakeholder analysis.

In contrast, the present report concentrates on the "how-to" of applied deliberative practices in natural resource planning and management. The report is divided into three main sections: a brief review of recent Alberta experiences with public deliberation, an introduction to commonly used deliberative tools, and a detailed set of guidelines for each stage of the deliberative process. Throughout this guide are reminders that no perfect protocol exists for public deliberation. Each specific set of circumstances will have its own best approach. As public values become more diverse and the science of resource management becomes more complex, processes involving public deliberation will become even more demanding. However, the challenges are not insurmountable. Through the development and use of more robust deliberative designs, key objectives such as a better-informed public and improved decision making may be achieved, resulting in turn in renewed energy and enthusiasm for lay involvement in natural resource planning and management.

Even the experienced practitioner faces challenges in developing processes for public participation. To illustrate, this section outlines three recent experiences with public participation in the management of Alberta's forest resource. The examples — Special Places 2000, the Alberta Forest Conservation Strategy, and public advisory committees — are not fully explored in this report. Rather, the brief descriptions provided here are intended as reminders of recent and continuing exercises in public participation and the particular challenges associated with these complex social and political activities. It is also important to note that public participation activities in Alberta are many and varied. Dating back to the early 1970s, and the successes of the Environmental Conservation Authority, the province continues a colourful history of public dialogue on natural resource issues.

Special Places 2000

From its inception in 1995, the Special Places 2000 program was intended to balance the preservation of Alberta's natural areas with outdoor recreation, heritage appreciation, and tourism and economic development. The program's specific aim was to complete a conservation system that would "represent the environmental diversity of the province's six natural regions (20 subregions) by the end of 1998" (AEP 1992, p. 5). Special Places 2000 was expected to serve as a public consultation model based on a multipartite concept, an increasingly popular method of obtaining resolution to environmental controversies (Stefanick and Wells 2000). The stakeholders represented industry, government, environmental NGOs, and citizens from across the province who directly contributed to the program. Over 400 nominations were submitted for unprotected parcels of provincial Crown land to be designated as "special places." By the time the program concluded in 2001, 81 sites had received the new designation, which added nearly 2 million hectares to the province's network of parks and protected areas.

Designation of a region as a special place was a six-step process (Stefanick and Wells 2000). First, any Albertan could nominate an area for the special place designation (step 1). The multistakeholder Provincial Coordinating Committee, appointed by the Alberta minister of environment and structured to represent "the broad interests of Albertans" (with representatives from over 20 provincial stakeholder groups, including local governments, industry, and environmental organizations), reviewed these nominations (step 2). After the Provincial Coordinating Committee granted approval, the Interdepartmental Committee, a director-level committee that provided advice on existing government policy, legislation, agreements with tenure holders, and related matters, had 45 days to provide feedback on the site nomination. Volunteer local committees were then asked to examine candidate sites and provide advice on boundary options, site-specific management guidelines, and appropriate land use (step 3). This was the most critical stage in the process: "It is here that the local community and the general public can influence decisions that will have a direct impact. … [It] is also the stage that can cause the most difficulty for the public consultation process, and thus has the most potential for bitter conflict" (Stefanick and Wells 2000, p. 376). The local committee report was then sent back to the Provincial Coordinating Committee and the Interdepartmental Committee for final comments (step 4). After receiving ministerial and cabinet approval (step 5), a new site was established as a special place (step 6). However, preparation of detailed management plans for each designated site takes several years. Preliminary biophysical inventories and assessments of some new sites have been completed, but management plans have been initiated for only a few (Archie Landals, Director, Heritage Protection and Recreation Management Branch, Parks and Protected Areas, Alberta Community Development, personal communication, telephone conversation on 8 April 2004).

For many, the process for Special Places 2000 fell short of both environmental and social expectations. Although overall targets for the designation of protected areas were met, full representation of the province's environmental diversity was not achieved (representation of environmental diversity in protected areas did increase, however, from about 45% to about 80%; Archie Landals, personal communication, telephone conversation on 5 June 2003). Environmental concerns were blended with the reality of economic development, leading to a process that was perhaps more akin to "a multiple-use policy for public lands than a conservation policy" (Stefanick and Wells 2000, p. 374). In addition, several civil sectors were dissatisfied (Archie Landals, personal communication, telephone conversation on 5 June 2003), and the Alberta Wilderness Association

criticized the process and accused the government of failing to achieve civic involvement in conservation management: "[The government of] Alberta lacks public accountability in establishing and managing parks and protected areas" (AWA 2000).

Although many individuals and groups participated in the Special Places 2000 program, several analysts have pointed to weaknesses in the deliberative process. A lack of balanced, representative public diversity was one major shortcoming. Decision making consisted mostly of key negotiations between government and industry, with limited public involvement (ACBS 2000). For example, Aboriginal groups were invited but chose not to participate, because they felt that the process was flawed from the beginning, with minimal facilitation (Peter Lee, National Coordinator, Global Forest Watch Canada, personal communication, telephone conversation on 18 July 2003). At one point, 20 environmental groups were boycotting the process (Wellstead 1996).

One documented nomination, the Castle wilderness area in southwestern Alberta, encapsulates some of these concerns. In that case, the consensus-based process was considered so flawed that the environmental coalition that originally nominated the site, the Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition, withdrew its support in 1997. According to then-president of the coalition, Klaus Jericho, "The local procedures of Special Places 2000 are such that we think it might actually harm our efforts to protect the Castle Wilderness, not help them" (Stefanick and Wells 2000, p. 382). At least four serious concerns in the Castle nomination process were noted (Stefanick and Wells 2000): (1) Key actors were excluded from the local process. For instance, no representatives of any environmental groups were invited to participate. (2) One representative of the local government was the facilitator and chair of the local committee but was also a participant with full voting privileges. (3) The committee reserved two of its nine seats for local government, which accentuated the perspectives of this stakeholder. (4) The consensual decision-making model was compromised because the chair changed the terms of reference to invoke a majority vote in the case of an impasse, a process that favoured the status quo over any minority viewpoint. The shortcomings in the process included a lack of local representation on the committee, "sacrificing" of neutrality or autonomy, and a feeling that "the local committee had been hijacked by the Municipal District, which manipulated the process for its own purposes" (Stefanick and Wells 2000, p. 384).

Alberta Forest Conservation Strategy

Like Special Places 2000, the Alberta Forest Conservation Strategy (AFCS) was created to fulfil commitments made by the Government of Alberta under the National Forest Strategy (Government of Alberta 1997). In the late 1980s, the government appointed an expert panel to advise on the state of forest management in Alberta. In 1992, the Canadian prime minister signed the Convention on Biological Diversity in Rio de Janeiro, and Alberta partnered in the development of the National Forest Strategy, cosigning the Canada Forest Accord. In 1994, the provincial minister of environmental protection established a multistakeholder steering committee to consult with Albertans and develop a long-term vision for sustaining Alberta's forests, the AFCS.

The AFCS took 3 years of dedicated effort and had input from over 800 Albertans. More than 60 groups participated, "representing essentially every organization in the province with an interest in forests" (Schneider 2001, p. 9). Participants worked within the following AFCS entities:

- The Stakeholder Advisory Group, comprising more than 100 Albertans, who provided direction and developed agreement on what the AFCS should accomplish.
- The Steering Committee, comprising individuals nominated by and acting on behalf of governments, industry, environmental NGOs, recreational interests, and Aboriginal and academic communities.
- Seven Strategic Issues Working Groups, which reviewed key forest issues and developed reports to form the foundation of the AFCS.
- Sixteen Rural Community Working Groups and other, less formal groups, which met across the province to provide input during development of the AFCS.

The AFCS was intended to outline a vision for how the citizens of Alberta wanted to see their forests managed. This meant balancing economic, social, and ecological objectives while maintaining forest health and biodiversity. A key recommendation was that the provincial government, in partnership with forest stakeholders, review and clarify processes for decision making about forest activities. The government and others involved in the AFCS felt that greater emphasis on community-based involvement and participation by advisory groups throughout Alberta's forested areas

would help to achieve this end. The advisory groups would integrate public participation processes already in place with new functions identified in the AFCS.

Unlike the Special Places 2000 program, with its highly criticized public participation process, the AFCS consultative process was much more thorough and enjoyed popular support from a diverse range of participants. Decisions were made in a transparent manner with "meaningful public involvement," and citizens obtained "accurate, pertinent, and timely information about the forests and proposals for its use" – or at least that was the plan (AFCSSC 1997, p. 24).

Although the AFCS public participation process was well received, two shortcomings can be noted. First, although most information for the strategy came from the provincial government, one major barrier in achieving meaningful public input was the inaccessibility of relevant information from industry (Schneider 2001, 2002). In the summer of 2000, for instance, only 4 (25%) of 16 holders of Forest Management Agreements were willing to cooperate in a survey of operating practices spearheaded by the NGO Forest Watch Alberta (Forest Watch Alberta 2001). Second, although information that was generated from the AFCS was used by the Alberta Forest Management Science Council, many participants from NGOs did not realize the kind of change from status-quo forest management that was expected from their involvement in this public process. This experience served to alienate committed volunteers from future processes of a similar nature. One anonymous AFCS participant, formerly affiliated with a major environmental NGO, commented that the AFCS process required thousands of volunteer hours but was an incredibly frustrating experience that led to few tangible results.

Public Advisory Committees

Unlike the previous two government-sponsored examples, public advisory committees are sponsored by the private sector. This mode of public participation marks a significant shift toward more decentralized and privatized activities. Government decentralization policies, along with forest certification initiatives such as the Canadian Standards Association Sustainable Forest Management Standard, have provided a significant impetus toward this shift. Moreover, for large leaseholders throughout much of Canada, public involvement has become a legal, contractual requirement for obtaining and maintaining access to timber allotments.

In Alberta, the first public advisory committees were initiated in 1989, when several large forest companies established monthly meetings with diverse groups of local residents, who provided input into the companies' forest management planning processes. These groups served in an advisory capacity only. By 1999, 14 such groups were meeting regularly in the province. Membership typically includes representatives from the local labour union; educational, medical, and religious institutions; recreation clubs; the business community; Aboriginal groups; and nonprofit environmental organizations. Members are not paid for their time, but the company often provides a meal before each meeting. Most of those who participate have time, intellectual curiosity or a concern for forest management activities in their region, as well as the support of a constituent group, although the latter is not always the case (for example, a doctor might represent the medical community without a formal reporting mechanism or constituent group). Several researchers have identified strengths and weaknesses in these company-sponsored processes. Parkins (2002) reported that these committees include a wide range of local representatives, provide a forum for discussion and debate, and appear to access a wide range of information sources, not only information from the forest company. For instance, in one study a large proportion of advisory committee members reported receiving information about forest issues from personal visits to the forest, forest scientists, and government agencies (Parkins et al. 2001).

On the other hand, Schneider (2002) pointed out that committee members often struggle with highly complex and technical forest management issues, since many laypeople do not have the capacity to analyze and critique technical information and offer alternative proposals to company officials. Committee discussions are also constrained by the mandate of the forest company to harvest trees in accordance with provincial legislation, whereas many laypeople are more interested in discussing land management and policy issues that extend beyond the scope of company control. Finally, McFarlane and Boxall (2001) demonstrated that the forest values of advisory committee members are often inconsistent with the values of the general public and called into question the representativeness of these small groups. Advisory committee members were also more trusting of information from industry and forest scientists, whereas the general public was much less trusting of information from industry but shared a sense of trust in forest scientists (Parkins et al. 2001).

Lessons Learned

These three examples illustrate some of the benefits and pitfalls of deliberative practices in natural resource planning. While many difficulties are evident with these public deliberations, there has also been encouraging progress. Several lessons can be learned from these case examples.

- Each process has its strong and weak points. Perhaps the most inclusive process was the AFCS, which achieved extensive public involvement with a high degree of constructive dialogue, shared learning, informative debate, and consensual decision making from a diverse group of participants; only in the later stages of implementation did it fail to live up to expectations. Unfortunately, this lack of commitment to implementation caused considerable frustration and burnout among some participants.
- In contrast, Special Places 2000 achieved some of its goals, but attempts to develop an open and inclusive process were largely unsuccessful. A top–down structure and specific political priorities failed to provide the necessary space for constructive public participation. The low number of participating citizens and the minimal group diversity were serious shortcomings, although this varied depending upon the site considered.
- Public advisory committees, as an alternative to large-scale government-sponsored deliberative activities, provide opportunities for a variety of citizens to influence the decision-making process. As government decentralization continues, and forest certification initiatives become more widespread, these private sector processes are becoming increasingly important. Some research suggests, however, that committee members are not truly representative of the general public and that discussion and debate is highly constrained by the narrow mandate and jurisdiction of forest company operations. The "localness" of these deliberations creates some challenges in stimulating dialogue between local and nonlocal interests.
- In addition to the individual attributes of the three processes described above, it is also important to note their timing. Special Places 2000 and the AFCS overlapped for several years during the 1990s, and several public advisory committees were getting under way during the same period. As such, many of the people involved in one process were also involved in one or both of the others, which led to burnout within several key stakeholder groups and a limited capacity to engage. This potential for burnout speaks to the extensive use of stakeholder-based processes in natural resource management, even though such processes represent only one general type of public dialogue. To avoid this type of burnout in the future, several mechanisms involving a broader cross-section of the public may be required.

Set against these theories of, and experiences with, public deliberation, eight specific deliberative methods are described in this section, organized from the relatively simple to the more complex and time-consuming. Three of these methods (citizen panels, deliberative polling, and electronic group discussions) are largely untried within the context of natural resource management, but they hold considerable potential in specific circumstances. For each method, a brief introduction is followed by tips on how to conduct the activity, lists of the strengths and weaknesses of the activity, and suggested references for additional information.

Community Dinners

The community dinner (an approach pioneered by the Wisconsin Clearinghouse for Prevention Resources [Carr and Halvorsen 2001]) is an event where people interact over the dinner table to discuss natural resource management. An open invitation to such an event is generally advertised locally, and all interested residents are asked to attend. The sponsors usually assume the meal costs, but if the program budget is small, participants may be asked to purchase an inexpensive ticket.

What's Involved?

- Participants are divided into small groups of four to eight per table. Each group is self-facilitated, although a professional facilitator could help provide overall direction.
- After dinner, participants discuss a set of open-ended questions, such as "How do you use and enjoy your region's forests?" and "How do you want to see the forests managed here?" One volunteer at each table records the responses to each question.
- Care is taken not to introduce topics into the discussion, but instead to allow the conversation to flow where participants wish it to go.
- At the end of the evening, each table reports responses to the entire group, and these answers can then be recorded on a flip chart. Table and flip chart notes serve as a record of participants' responses for future participatory sessions and planning.
- A variation of this technique could be a breakfast or lunch meeting. Even a local coffee establishment may work for smaller groups.

Strengths

- Relatively easy and inexpensive.
- Innovative approach lending a more relaxed "social" atmosphere to the process.
- May be preferred by some over more structured methods that require a much greater time commitment.

Weaknesses

- Perspectives gathered are unlikely to be representative of all potential participants.
- May be considered too social for some.
- Cost, if present, may prevent low-income residents from attending.
- May not be an ideal setting for deliberation (serving of food and chatter from nearby tables may be distracting).
- Limited time to engage in meaningful dialogue.

Further Information

- Carr, D.S.; Halvorsen, K.E. 2001. An evaluation of three democratic community-based approaches to citizen participation: surveys, conversations with community groups, and community dinners. Society of Natural Resources 14(2):107–126.

Town Hall Meetings

Today's community meetings date back to the 18th and 19th centuries in the northeastern United States. Politicized discussion and debate were carried out in public spaces such as publishing houses, libraries, clubs, and coffee houses. In these "town hall meetings," patterns of communication were characterized by norms of inclusivity, compromise, and relatively horizontal power sharing (Boyte 1995). In theory, the social status of the speaker was unimportant. Instead, arguments were judged by their fit, pragmatic considerations of anticipated consequences, excellence of logic, and so forth.

Still in use today, town hall meetings (more commonly called community meetings or public forums) offer a way to engage a potentially large group on an issue of relevance. Numerous political theorists claim that town hall meetings represent an excellent example of participatory democracy.

What's Involved?

- A sponsor-led panel of experts, officials, and citizens are asked to speak in a community setting (e.g., municipal hall, conference centre, school gymnasium, hotel). Those who cannot attend but wish to participate can provide written submissions that are incorporated into the discussion.
- The event usually takes place during an evening or weekend to increase potential public involvement, with ample time for questions and answers.
- When the gathering is large, the process is more effective if smaller groups (four to eight people) discuss the issues first. Group results are then brought to the main forum and incorporated into the large-group process.
- Town hall meetings have also been conducted in community "visioning" projects across North America, in which participants gather to discuss and develop a collective vision of where their particular community is headed (e.g., Ames 2001).
- A town hall meeting can also be used to gauge public opinion and can be combined with small-scale deliberative activities such as public advisory groups and community dinners.

Strengths

- Can help to generate broad-based discussion and increase awareness of the issues.
- Potentially more inclusive and may attract a greater number of participants than other techniques; meetings tend to be nondiscriminatory since generally anyone interested in the issue at hand may attend.
- Sponsoring agency or facilitator can make detailed presentations in a relatively short period; instant feedback provided by types of questions and the passion with which they are asked.
- Relatively inexpensive, depending on the frequency of meetings held and the type of location needed to accommodate the event (often a public space).

Weaknesses

- Careful facilitation and organization required. Deliberative quality limited by (potentially) large numbers of people and shortage of time, which limits understanding of the complexity of the situation. May also be used as information-sharing or opinion-gathering forums — useful, perhaps, but only in conjunction with other public participation activities.
- If open to all interested parties or poorly facilitated, may turn into a forum for disgruntled participants to vent frustrations or even incite confrontation.
- Also a risk of being hijacked by special interest groups and catering to those that are the most vocal (or the most powerful).
- Increase in community awareness of natural resource issues may be insufficient to motivate citizens to invest their time in attendance. Introductory meetings can help generate awareness and interest in the issue, help build contacts, and better position sponsoring agencies to hold a future town hall meeting with increased involvement.

Further Information

- Canadian Rural Partnership. 2002. Rural and urban communities working together with our youth to build stronger Alberta communities [Internet; rural dialogue town hall meeting report]. Government of Canada, Ottawa, ON. <http://www.rural.gc.ca/dialogue/report/ab/edmonton_e.phtml>.
- Ames, S.C., ed. 2001. A guide to community visioning: hands-on information for local communities. American Planning Association, Oregon Chapter, Oregon Visions Project, Portland, OR.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are widely used for gathering information and describing aspects of a given problem. They are increasingly being used in policy and programming areas by government and industry alike. Focus group discussions are generally relaxed, with participants who enjoy sharing their ideas and perceptions. Group members influence each other by responding to the ideas and comments of others. It is worth mentioning, however, that any focus group represents a trade-off between groups of like minded individuals (homogeneous) and groups of individuals with highly contrasting views (heterogeneous). It is always easier to reach a consensus within a homogeneous group (for example, urban environmentalists), but this setting offers little opportunity for social learning and shared understanding.

What's Involved?

- Participants are selected on the basis of several criteria, such as similar interests (e.g., forest conservation and management).
- The recommended number of participants is 6 to 12.
- A facilitator or moderator must be chosen, and that person must be capable of gathering necessary information and managing the process, from start to finish, through appropriate techniques.
- Points to be discussed are listed and organized according to the objectives of the session. The facilitator tries to move the discussion from the general to the specific, cognizant of the time required for reasonable discussion and debate (generally two to three hours).
- After the session, a summary report is prepared for the sponsoring agency.

Strengths

- With the assistance of a trained facilitator, relatively inexpensive and easy to conduct.
- Can provide insight into complex topics.
- High quality of discussion, given that focus groups generally comprise a small number of interested participants.
- Series of sessions allows many different voices to be heard, especially those who might be silent in a larger or more exclusive setting. Greater heterogeneity is preferred for obtaining diverse perspectives, for shared learning, and to compare and contrast personal experiences.
- Close interaction opens communication and helps build trust among participants.

Weaknesses

- Groups may be too small to adequately incorporate wide-ranging interests.
- Potential reluctance of participants to express personal views in a small-group setting.
- High potential to stray off track without careful monitoring by a skilled facilitator.

Further Information

- Morgan, D.L.; Krueger, R.A. 1998. The focus group kit. Vols. 1–6. Sage Publ., Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Wagner, T. 1995. How to conduct a focus group: structured dialogues about important questions. New Schools New Communities 11(3):19–26.

Advisory Committees

Citizen committees are popular for ongoing public participation in natural resource management. Government decentralization and various certification initiatives have meant that company-sponsored advisory committees have become a dominant feature of many forest management operations. These committees involve a wide range of citizens who provide input into local and regional forest management and planning. Forest companies and government agencies often sponsor these groups as a useful and relatively inexpensive way to invite a small number of interested individuals into an advisory process.

What's Involved?

- Groups range in size from 10 to 20 participants.
- Groups often have formal terms of reference that outline the overall mandate, procedures for new membership, formal decision-making procedures, and agenda-setting activities.
- Members are rarely paid for their time, but sponsoring agencies may cover out-of-pocket expenses, and premeeting dinners are common.
- Professionally facilitated meetings, a clear mandate, and strong agency support usually improve the effectiveness of committees.

Strengths

- Important mechanism for incorporating local knowledge and values into the decision-making process.
- Long-term group activity provides opportunities for group learning and the development of trust in committee processes.
- Cost-effective.
- If facilitated properly, can foster positive social relationships.

Weaknesses

- Often difficult to incorporate a broad range of public values into a small-group setting.
- Sponsoring agencies can tightly constrain discussions and limit the information to which participants are exposed.
- Learning is limited to a small number of participants and does not easily transfer to the larger group of constituents with a stake in the outcome of advisory committee processes.

Further Information

- Jabbour, J.R.; Balsillie, D. 2003. The effectiveness of public participation in forest management: a case study analysis of the Morice Innovative Forest Practices Agreement. Forestry Chronicle 79(2):1–12.
- Parkins, J.R.; Stedman, R.C.; McFarlane, B.L. 2001. Public involvement in forest management and planning: a comparative analysis of attitudes and preferences in Alberta. Natural Resources Canada, Canadian Forest Service, Northern Forestry Centre, Edmonton, AB. Information Report NOR-X-382.

Citizen Panels

Citizen panels have been gaining popularity since the mid-1980s. These are also called "citizens' juries" and "consensus conferences," although these three entities may differ substantially in form and content. For example, consensus may not be required in a citizen panel; instead the focus may be on shared learning followed by a vote. Citizen panels have perhaps had the most influence in Denmark; the Danish Board of Technology organizes consensus conferences that routinely feed into government policy and legislation (Prairie Grains 2001). In the late 1990s Canada, England, France, and Australia held citizen panels on the introduction of genetically modified foods. In another example, the Southeast Community Research Center in Atlanta, Georgia, is planning to hold citizen panels representing a cross-section of four types of communities — urban, suburban, exurban, and rural — with community leaders, elected officials, representatives from advocacy groups, and researchers and practitioners from fields relating to environmental health and built environments (see www.cbpr.org/CP_Project.htm).

What's Involved?

- An independent facilitator is asked to set up and moderate the panel, but the citizens themselves play the leading role.
- The panel is usually open to the public and the media.
- Panel (or "jury") members are generally identified through a quota sampling procedure to ensure that the sample matches the demographic (e.g., age, gender, education, ethnic background) and attitudinal (i.e., opponents, supporters, undecided) characteristics of the population in question. The sponsoring agency is usually responsible for carrying out this background work and deciding which demographic and attitudinal parameters to use.
- Panel members are usually paid to attend sessions, which normally run for four or five days.
- A problem statement (or "charge") is provided by the facilitator and/or sponsor. Different experts (or "witnesses") representing opposing views are invited to speak. Panel members decide which questions to ask the experts, and the experts receive these questions in advance. Each expert has a set number of minutes to answer the question(s).
- If a consensus is not sought, panel members are instructed on which voting technique to use (e.g., a two-step vote, the first being a weighted vote). After voting, panel members present their informed opinions and recommendations to the sponsor.
- After the deliberations, panel members are usually asked to complete a questionnaire to evaluate how the process was run.

Strengths

- Can help to obtain a loosely representative cross-section of natural resource preferences or perspectives from a selected group of people.
- Can be used to inform policy development and set priorities.
- Especially useful for controversial or "messy" issues.
- Provides an opportunity to involve more than the usual stakeholders in a debate, in that ignorance of the issues at stake is seen as a benefit or even a prerequisite for panel members.

Weaknesses

- May not be entirely representative, because of self-selective method of recruitment; panel might have to be increased with "booster" samples of youth, Aboriginal, or other minority or "silent" groups.
- If the process becomes lengthy, members may drop off the panel because of apathy or other reasons.
- Difficult to assess time requirement; sponsor(s) must balance potential gain in understanding and potential drop in participation if more time is allowed.
- Can be costly, depending on whether panel members are paid (e.g., expenses, catering costs).

Further Information

- Andersen, I-E.; Jaeger, B. 2002. Danish participatory models, scenario workshops and consensus conferences: towards more democratic decision-making. Pantaneto Forum [on-line journal] Issue 6. <http://www.pantaneto.co.uk/issue6/andersonjaeger.htm>.
- Crosby, N. 1995. Citizens juries: one solution for difficult environmental questions. Pages 157–174 in O. Renn, T. Webler, and P. Wiedemann, eds. Fairness and competence in citizen participation: evaluating models for environmental discourse. Kluwer Academic Publ., Dordrecht, The Netherlands.

Negotiated Rule Making

Negotiated rule making is a process by which representatives of an agency and "relevant stakeholders" (as opposed to the more broadly defined "participants") attempt to reach consensus in two areas: the terms of a proposed rule and the process by which it is negotiated. It has occasionally been used for contentious issues that require legislation but may also be useful for inclusive and discussion-oriented natural resource decision making. It requires the active participation of negotiators who can speak for their organizations. The following characteristics that are usually involved in any negotiated rule-making process have been adapted from the State of Washington Office of Financial Management (2003).

What's Involved?

- Before the sponsoring agency convenes the process, it must determine its willingness to share control over the process and resolution of the issue. All participants should agree to any proposed modifications to the ground rules.
- All necessary interests must be represented in, or at least supportive of, the discussions. Participants usually represent specific groups or interests and not simply themselves. Spokespersons should be able to represent interested parties in a negotiation. If these interests are not sufficiently organized to be represented, the agency should develop the rule in some other manner. If the proposed rule making is not a priority for certain key players, they may send someone else to take notes, stay alert in case anything important happens, and maintain good relations with the sponsoring agency.
- A facilitator or mediator accountable to all participants manages the process (but is paid by the sponsors). The intent is to make decisions through consensus rather than by voting.
- Participants share responsibility for both process and outcome. The product is a proposed rule (e.g., regulation or legislation) that all parties can support or at least accept.
- Several questions get to the crucial matter of motivation: Do all parties view the process as beneficial to their respective causes? Does each believe that it has something to gain by negotiating and something to lose by not negotiating? Do any believe that another process would be better for them? Is the subject of rule making a priority for all concerned? Above all, the parties must want to negotiate.
- The issues must be negotiable: Is the outcome genuinely in doubt, or is it reasonably clear what the terms of the rule will be? Could agreement require any party to compromise a fundamental value? Would the failure to reach consensus favour one group of interests over another? Is it in anyone's interest to participate only to be obstructionist?

Strengths

- A consensual rule can establish roles and responsibilities, outline steps, and/or set boundaries within a natural resource management framework.
- Regulations drafted through this process tend to be more technically accurate, clear, and specific, and less likely to be challenged in litigation than are rules drafted by the agency without input from outside parties.
- Flexible structural requirements: participants decide how much structure is needed to create a setting for productive negotiations and commit to negotiating in good faith only after they have agreed upon the process, and clearly understand the scope of their commitment and how they will proceed.

Weaknesses

- Can be resource-intensive. Can dominate the schedule of key agency personnel, so those considering the process must be realistic about the time commitment. May also be necessary to contract for additional professional assistance such as an experienced, independent facilitator and outside technical experts.

- Sponsoring agency is a party at the negotiating table, so some may feel that neutrality will be suspect. Hence, the facilitator should not be asked by the sponsoring agency, or any other participant, to serve as its agent or to act in any manner inconsistent with being accountable to all participants.
- May turn off potential participants if they feel that their preferred options will be watered down by too much compromise. People may also feel uncomfortable with the concept of a binding decision with legal ramifications. Agency representatives must give reasonable assurance that they can and will use the consensus if one is reached.

Further Information

- Office of Financial Management. 2003. Guide to negotiated rule making [Internet]. State of Washington, Olympia, WA. <http://www.ofm.wa.gov/reports/nrm/nrm.htm>.
- National Policy Consensus Center. 2005. Oregon Consensus Conference: Resources [Internet]. Portland State University, Portland, OR. <http://www.odrc.state.or.us/resources.php>

Deliberative Polling

Deliberative polling is a more recent development in public consultation. As a variant of opinion polling, this method is suitable for large-scale consultations with several hundred individuals, especially when the topics are complex, scientific information is uncertain, and policy options are contested. Developed by the political scientist James Fishkin (see, for example, Fishkin 1991), this method has been used throughout the world, mainly by government agencies hoping to gain insight into critical public policy issues. For instance, the National Issues Forum in the United States hosted a deliberative poll on America's role in the world. It has also been used in Australia to gain insights into the future role of the monarchy and in Britain on issues of crime and punishment (Fishkin 1991).

- Organizers invite a large random sample of individuals to participate in an extensive, often weekend-long, exploration of issues and policy options concerning an issue of significant public concern.
- A balanced portfolio of written materials is provided to participants in advance, with extensive input from divergent, often conflicting groups or individuals.
- These materials, along with extensive question-and-answer periods between experts and lay people, form the basis of extensive group deliberations.
- Usually, at the beginning and the end of the deliberative period, participants complete a questionnaire (poll) and provide an informed opinion on the matters at hand.
- Changes in public opinion, indicated by the predeliberative and postdeliberative polls, provide an indication of changes in public preferences based on a well-informed discussion of scientific evidence and related policy options.

Strengths

- If scientific random sampling techniques are closely followed in the initial selection of participants, results can be extrapolated to the general population.
- Useful in bringing a representative sample of citizens into a public process to deal with a large and often complex array of information.
- Well suited to situations in which important and potentially costly trade-offs are at stake and where major changes in policy may be warranted but are not yet publicly acceptable.

Weaknesses

- Costly and difficult to implement; travel, food, hotel, and daily stipends for day- or weekend-long sessions can be very expensive.
- Developing a balanced portfolio of materials on a particular issue can be time consuming and may involve intensive discussions among many participants.
- Few social scientists or consultants have relevant experience; may require a multiagency initiative between government, industry, and academic institutions.

Further Information

- Fishkin, J.S. 1991. Democracy and deliberation: new directions for democratic reform. Yale University Press, New Haven, CT.
- Fishkin, J.S. n.d. Deliberative Polling®: toward a better-informed democracy [Internet]. Stanford University, Center for Deliberative Democracy, Stanford, CA. <http://cdd.stanford.edu/polls/docs/2003/executivesummary.pdf>.

Electronic Group Discussions

Although somewhat uncommon in natural resource management, electronic group discussions represent a potentially useful means of engaging a broad cross-section of public interests. Electronic group discussions, or Internet study circles, provide opportunities for public dialogue on certain issues that would not be possible otherwise. These are not the same as listservs, which are on-line discussions generally open to anyone and commonly used to share information and opinions, with minimal moderation. Conversely, an Internet study circle functions as "small democracy," with an emphasis on active speaking, listening, considering, and deliberating to make choices among competing alternatives. The following features (adapted from Kleiber et al. n.d.) usually characterize electronic group discussions.

What's Involved?

- People are selected from different backgrounds and viewpoints. They meet on-line several times to relate experiences and perspectives on a given topic. They try to understand each other's views, but consensual agreement is usually not a requirement.
- They generally comprise about 20 participants or fewer.
- Participants are expected to read any preliminary information that is provided, to be somewhat familiar with using the Internet, to follow "netiquette" and ground rules, and, above all, to listen to and respect one another's perspectives and experiences.
- As in most other deliberative techniques, a facilitator helps the group to consider different views and helps to ensure that the discussion goes well.

Strengths

- Easy-to-use, low-cost web-based technology can encourage and support a thoughtful and respectful exchange of ideas. Participants can take more time to reflect before responding to questions. There may be fuller participation through greater involvement of shy individuals.
- Could be used to involve citizens who live or work in rural or remote areas and who might otherwise find it difficult to attend regular meetings.
- Flexibility in the choice of when to participate, especially if "real-time" discussion is unnecessary.

Weaknesses

- Somewhat "faceless" nature of on-line discussions. In an open list, this anonymity may attract Internet users who are less serious about the issue or who take a confrontational approach. However, this problem should be minimized by careful selection and facilitation.
- Potential technical problems; absence of emoting; impersonal, unnatural dialogue; and less chance for clarification.
- Exclusion of potential participants, since even in today's high-tech environment, not everyone has access to a computer system with a good Internet connection.

Further Information

- Kleiber, P.B.; Holt, M.E.; Swenson, J.D. n.d. The electronic forum handbook: study circles in cyberspace [Internet]. Civic Renewal Movement, Waltham, MA. <http://www.cpn.org/tools/manuals/Networking/studycircles.html>.
- Royal Roads University. n.d. Public forum series [Internet]. Victoria, BC. <http://www.rrupublicforum.ca>.

Summary of Deliberative Mechanisms

The main features of these deliberative methods are summarized in Table 2. In addition, a few caveats are worth mentioning. Given the wide range of deliberative techniques, the list of methods described here is not all-inclusive. Many other types of deliberative processes are available, and more are developed every year. As noted, each of these mechanisms has its strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, not every mechanism will work for a given situation, and some will be more appropriate than others.

No deliberative process or tool is entirely comprehensive; therefore, the choice will depend on a variety of social, economic, and political factors. The most appropriate technique will depend on issue complexity, available time and resources, extent of required deliberation, and just how inclusive the sponsoring agency wishes to be. In the final analysis, it will be up to the sponsoring agency, and also the participants, to determine the appropriate method or methods for each particular set of circumstances. No matter which deliberative mechanism is initially selected, it is likely that a suite of public participation activities will eventually be required to engage a wide range of citizens in natural resource management. The following guidelines are offered to assist natural

resource managers and practitioners in selecting an appropriate mechanism.

- If a relatively speedy and cost-effective process is desired, consider a deliberative mechanism such as a focus group or a more informal community dinner.
- If a more inclusive and speedy process is called for, then a town hall meeting may be most appropriate. Such a meeting would be even more effective if preceded by introductory meetings, to generate awareness and enthusiasm, and followed by "debriefing" sessions.
- If gathering broad-based support for a given issue or having a highly diverse (possibly randomly selected) group of citizens to discuss and debate the issue is considered crucial, then three highly innovative approaches to consider are deliberative polling, citizen panels, and electronic group discussions.
- If time constraints are less important than maximizing the quality of deliberation and working with a dedicated group of committed participants, then the longer process of advisory committees is worth considering.
- If the issue involves legislation for a highly controversial issue and if well-defined interests can be identified, then consider deliberative polling, negotiated rule making, or a citizen panel.

Table 2. Comparison of deliberative mechanisms

	Deliberative mechanism							
Key feature	Community dinners	Town hall meetings	Focus groups	Advisory committees	Citizen panels	Negotiated rule making	Deliberative polling	Electronic group discussions
No. of people	<100	Several dozen or more	6–12	10–20	10–20	Several dozen	Several hundred	Up to 20
Degree of complexity	Low	Low	Moderate	Moderate	High	High	High	Moderate
Representativeness	Low to moderate	Potentially high	Low to moderate	Low to moderate	Potentially high	Potentially high	High	Low to moderate
Deliberation quality	Low to moderate	Low to moderate	High	High	High	Moderate	High	High
Cost	Low	Low to moderate	Moderate	Moderate	High	High	High	Low

Predeliberative Activities

This section presents information about what should be done before deliberative activities take place. The two most important questions are "Who are the participants?" and "What are the issues?" After a brief discussion of these two areas, basic predeliberative procedures are outlined.

Defining the Participants

Generally speaking, the participants in a deliberative exercise can be any citizens of a given jurisdiction, as well as people from outside that jurisdiction. The term "participants" is preferred over "stakeholders" in this context because the latter may be more narrowly interpreted to include only those directly affected by resource management and only those who might be granted legal status in court or intervener status in a public hearing; as such negotiated rule making is more likely to consider those involved as stakeholders.

Potential participants are a diverse lot, even within a given interest group. For instance, environmental NGOs may range from mainstream advocates to grassroots activists, from nationally to locally based interest groups, from community health advocates to wilderness preservationists. Organizers of a deliberative activity must consider questions such as the following: Which of these groups should be contacted? Can a maximum size of the deliberative group be set, or would it be better to use a prespecified number? How will people be invited, and who will come? If the search is improperly conducted, potential discussants can be missed or those invited may be upset by how their participation was solicited. Personal contact by a telephone call or visit to gauge interest, followed by a letter of invitation, may be required for specific groups.

Shindler and Neburka (1997) have suggested that group members be selected for their understanding of the issues and their willingness to commit to the participatory process. They also suggested that these factors, combined with a commitment to a year's worth of meetings, may make for a more streamlined process. Understanding and willingness may be overrated, however. Preselection on the basis of "understanding" can be criticized as elitist, and some participants with potentially worthy contributions may not be represented at all. Traditional or local forms of knowledge can be just as valuable as any scientific or technical understanding of the issues, possibly more so. Also, for certain processes such as citizen juries and deliberative polling, participants with little prior knowledge about or expertise on the topic or issue at hand are preferred.

Opportunities for participation may be limited in at least four ways: procedural impediments (as when time allotted for discussion and debate is limited), strategic motives (communication and information may lead the group in predefined directions), cultural factors (e.g., language difficulties, illiteracy, or traditional protocol may prevent certain individuals from speaking out), and socioeconomic limitations (for low-income people, the opportunity cost may be too high for them to participate, or they may be intimidated by the "professional" look and norms of certain types of gatherings such as advisory board meetings). Forms of exclusion that are specific to a particular process can be reduced by careful facilitation and openness to unique or nontraditional modes of communication. Dynamic cross-cultural forms of greeting, rhetoric, and narrative may "make possible understanding across structural and cultural differences, and motivate acceptance and action" (Young 2000, p. 57).

Developing the Issues

Distinct possibilities or categories for involvement (Table 3) are related to the kinds of issues that are at stake, which can be thought of as administrative (technical) and normative (allocative). The former involve implementation and monitoring of management activities, whereas the latter generally consider the setting of goals and objectives. Administrative issues typically relate to "routine" decisions that are made by resource technicians and managers; for instance, where to position a culvert for a new logging road or which tree species to use for reforestation projects. Normative issues entail deciding how to fairly allocate resources among competing demands (Knopp and Caldbeck 1990). An example would be whether a relatively large area should be classified for a single use (e.g., sustained-yield timber harvesting or a protected area) or multiple uses (e.g., a combination of timber harvest, recreation, watershed protection, and cattle grazing).

Normative issues tend to attract greater public attention than administrative ones, and therefore it could be argued that these concerns should be discussed

and decided before more technically oriented matters. In reality, however, many public participation activities are limited in scope to the latter, i.e., tinkering at the margins of management issues, while opportunities to contribute to the normative issues remain constrained. For example, the annual allowable cut set by some provinces is not open for discussion in public deliberations. Still, sponsors should consider allowing careful deliberation with substantial public input on some key issues. It is unlikely that the public will maintain interest if there is no hope of influencing a decision or changing a situation. Hence, the final stage of decision making (the outcome), as illustrated in the final column of Table 3, is critical.

Table 3. Framework for public involvement in natural resource management

Type of decision	External	Internal	Outcome
Administrative (technical)	Who organizes the meeting, and who attends?	What are the decision-making rules and who decides?	What is decided? What are the short- and medium-term results?
Normative (allocative)	Who is invited, how are they invited, who attends, and who does not attend?	Who speaks, what is said, what is prioritized, and who decides?	Who benefits and who loses? Who should benefit? What are the long-term results?

Predeliberative Steps

The following steps can be adapted to each deliberative situation. The order may change from one case to another, but the steps will generally be the same.

1. Identify the issues. Before any deliberation can begin, the issues at stake must be at least broadly identified. Tasks related to defining and clarifying issues include the following:
   a. *Issue definition*: The more groundwork that is done on issue definition or building the "terms of reference," the greater the likelihood of garnering extensive support for the process. Issues must be categorized and prioritized well before potential participants are contacted. Are the issues normative or administrative? For example, is the process intended to answer questions like "Should this forested area be harvested? What other alternatives are there?" or "When should this forest be cut? How should we harvest it?" The former will likely attract greater public interest, whereas the latter give responsibility to the sponsors for deciding the big issues. Too much focus on administrative issues, such that the deliberative process deals only with "safe" or technical issues, may reduce the legitimacy of the process in the public's eyes.
   b. *Information needs*. Preliminary information-gathering exercises, strategically targeted at a few representative participants, can be a useful way to "scope out" specific issues. This information can serve as a resource for the deliberative sessions.
2. Identify the participants. The type and number of participants desired will determine what kind of deliberative process is required. This step should generally be completed before a venue is selected. The following questions will require some attention:
   a. *Participants*. Who are the potential participants, or who should they be? Will a targeted, handpicked group or a random sample be used? If a broadly inclusive process is desired, then a random selection method is best, although it may be time-consuming and expensive. Conversely, a targeted group of specialists or representatives of special interests may be more appropriate. In some cases, however, key groups or individuals may refuse to participate for fear of being co-opted or for fear that their views will be relegated to a minority or unimportant status. In such cases, the deliberative process may have to be drastically adapted to meet the needs of particular groups, or an entirely different approach may be required.

b. *Location*. Where are the desired participants located? Are they urban, semi-urban, and/or rural residents? Should they be from all of these jurisdictions? What population boundaries will be used as maximum limits?

c. *Invitations*. What is the best way to contact people? A predeliberative survey can help gather information from a given population and gauge interest. Census data, the Yellow Pages, historical records, minutes from previous meetings, suggestions from key contacts, and other sources of information can also be used to identity and locate target groups. Decisions will be needed on whether and how much to pay participants, whether expenses will be covered, and whether beverages, snacks, and/or meals will be arranged in lieu of payment.

3. Decide on the deliberative process. As already described, mechanisms for public deliberation serve various purposes, and the choice among them must be carefully considered:

a. *Type.* A short town hall meeting may be a good way to encourage widespread participation and allow people to voice dissent or consent, but it may have limited success in fostering constructive debate and shared understanding. Conversely, a focus group might be the way to maximize understanding and encourage high-quality input, but only a few people can participate in such a small setting. One reasonable trade-off is to use a series of deliberative mechanisms that complement each other. Certain groups who feel marginalized, such as First Nations, may require completely different forms of engagement, perhaps involving several band council meetings on their "turf and terms." Also, given that women may be less likely than men to attend public meetings related to natural resources (Force and Williams 1989), certain venues may attract their interest more than others. Furthermore, because the biggest obstacles preventing some women from participating are child care expenses and lack of available time, the provision of child care services could encourage women to attend public meetings.

b. *Number.* The number of deliberative events required should not be underestimated. A typical activity such as a focus group may take several sessions. Advisory committee meetings may need to be held regularly (e.g., monthly or bimonthly) over an extended period.

4. Plan the deliberative event. The "nuts and bolts" of planning are often overlooked or underestimated. Most participants are volunteers, and many have full-time jobs, so convenience must be paramount. The following guidelines should be considered when inviting people and planning the event.

a. *Date and time*. Certain times of the year may be preferable (e.g., holiday periods and extra-busy work periods, such as harvest or seeding time in farm regions, should be avoided if large public representation is desired). The best time of day for maximum participation is generally after 1800, and weeknights are preferable to weekends. For forums that may take an entire day (or more than one full day), one or more Saturdays would perhaps least disrupt work and family commitments.

b. *Place*. Venues have a strong symbolic value and must be chosen carefully. Locations that are considered neutral are always preferable. In practical terms, the locations often have to be arranged weeks or months in advance. Several venues in different towns and cities may have to be used, depending on the scope of the project and the issues at stake. If just one specific region with a relatively homogeneous population (in terms of interests) is used for the deliberative process, there will be less diversity of opinion and shared learning. Instead, venues should be selected to maximize input from outsiders and minority groups. If the sessions will be held in more isolated or rural areas, urbanites should be brought into the process somehow, for example, by videoconferencing or electronic discussions.

c. *Materials and marketing*. It may be necessary to contract with caterers, rent or purchase audiovisual equipment, gather information (e.g., surveys, reports), contact and obtain commitment from experts or other knowledgeable sources, and promote the event.

d. *Facilitator*. The sponsoring agency must be willing to allocate sufficient staff time and resources to the process. If the sponsor wishes to maintain neutrality (and hence, legitimacy), then an independent facilitator with considerable experience should be

hired to lead the sessions and ensure that the process runs smoothly. If an outside facilitator is unavailable, then an in-house facilitator should be trained to conduct the sessions or meetings.

5. Contact the participants. Potential participants should be contacted by the most effective and efficient means possible, but several methods may be needed to reach all targeted groups and individuals. In most cases, cost and time will constrain how much or what can be done. Although mainstream media resources such as major newspapers, television, and radio public service announcements should not be neglected, alternative media resources may attract participants from minority groups. The following techniques may be used:
   a. *Public notice*. Perhaps the cheapest way is to run a series of newspaper and radio ads inviting anyone interested to participate.
   b. *Letter*. If representatives of targeted public and private groups are required, which is the typical scenario, then invitation by personal letter is probably the most appropriate method.
   c. *Alternative media*. Non-mainstream media resources should be considered to attract minority or less visible groups. These could include church bulletins, outreach newsletters, minority newspapers, and flyers to be distributed at child care centres.
   d. *At random*. Random selection is perhaps the best way to ensure representativeness and minimize bias. In this case, some form of random sampling (e.g., random digit dialling) could be used. A polling firm may also assist in generating lists for random selection.
6. Train the participants. Training issues relate to the basic "ground rules" for the event and the personal qualities necessary for effective deliberation. Respect for other opinions, open-mindedness, and a willingness to listen are all important aspects of successful group deliberation. These basic qualities are the responsibility of individual participants, but a facilitator or sponsor may spend some time reinforcing them before deliberations begin. Other types of training may be needed during the process to ensure that mutual understanding can be achieved (e.g., overview of statutory, sociocultural, and environmental ramifications of forest policies).

Deliberative Activities

Once the preliminary work has been done (developing and framing issues, generating a list of willing and able participants, and arranging appropriate deliberative venues), it is time to work on the deliberative process itself. Deliberative practices are influenced by internal choices and constraints, or the "rules of the game" to be followed. Depending on the inherent flexibility of a given deliberative mechanism, group members may be invited to establish the terms of reference or the operating ground rules for the group's activity. Establishing ground rules should be done as early in the process as possible, but with flexibility for adaptation. Remember that bringing people together in a deliberative format unlocks hidden potential for innovative brainstorming and debate. As such, what occurs in practice can vary widely from group to group or even from issue to issue. Accepting that techniques will depend on specific circumstances, some basic guidelines for engaging in natural resource planning and management are mentioned below.

1. Plan the deliberative activity. The purpose of each deliberative activity must be reviewed and understood by the participants. For instance, some methods, such as town hall meetings and community dinners, involve "issue finding," whereas others, such as citizen juries and negotiated rule making, involve issue resolution. The latter two methods are generally defined by rigid protocols, so the ability of the group to define its own agenda is constrained, but appropriately so. In addition, clarification of goals and roles will motivate people, help set boundaries, and generally make for a smoother process. Well-prepared meetings should result in a more informed discussion, and hence outcomes that are more reliable.
2. Assess information needs. To encourage discussion that enables sound judgments, extensive, dependable information is needed. Insufficient or untrustworthy information may derail the process or generate questionable results.
   a. *Sources of information*. To help ensure accuracy and completeness, information sources must be as diverse as possible. For example, if the question is whether to harvest or protect an area of unique ecological features, the participants must be given reliable information that weighs pros and cons of the issue. Ideally, several sources should be examined (e.g., environmental publications, forest company

reports, scientific literature, and government documents), and the information distributed should be as current as possible. It may include up-to-date maps and inventories, as well as personal assessments, reports, photographs, videos, surveys, and other sources. Field trips may help the participants to better understand the issues. Bringing in experts or knowledgeable persons from opposing sides could be considered (and must be considered in the case of citizen panels and deliberative polling).

b. *Amount of information*. Determining the appropriate amount of information can be difficult. In some deliberative mechanisms, information is gathered in advance through a meticulous multiparticipant process (deliberative polling); for others, information is gathered throughout the process (advisory committees). With too much information, the process can become bogged down, but with too little information, participants may worry about a lack of transparency. Still, it may be appropriate to err on the side of information excess. Depending on the time available, large amounts of information can usually be condensed to a more manageable size. The participants may also be polled in the early stages of the process to determine what information they require, which can also build transparency and trust. In any case, sponsors must recognize the value-based component of decisions, and accept that mountains of information may not persuade participants to adopt a different set of values.

3. Begin the deliberations. The first deliberative event should open with a clear presentation of the issues to be discussed and/or debated with the following elements stated: goals, objectives, and expected outcomes; specific roles and responsibilities of each participant and the facilitator(s); and the decision-making rules and procedures. Adequate time should be allowed for discussion of the rules and procedures.
4. Facilitate the deliberations. Good facilitation means encouraging reticent voices to speak out, restraining dominant voices from taking over, and moving the debate beyond entrenched positions to avoid a stalemate. There is always the risk of domination by particular individuals or groups. Facilitators should consider some of the "ideal conditions of learning" mentioned by Sinclair and Diduck (2001, p. 115). For example, the best learning processes are free of coercion and open to alternative perspectives, they ensure that participants can reflect critically upon presuppositions, and they offer everyone an equal opportunity to participate. Above all, the sponsors or key decision makers must maintain a regular presence to build trust and maintain continuity (Shindler and Neburka 1997).
5. Encourage shared learning and understanding. Several questions are critical to achieve collective understanding, but it is not only what questions are asked (or not) and by whom, but how they are asked. For instance, is all relevant information available to the group? Do people speak in ways that are understandable? Many discussion techniques can be used to improve communicative understanding. The importance of rhetoric, narrative, and testimonials has been pointed out (see Williams 1998). If participants are to be fully engaged, deliberative meetings should also be structured to allow for maximum group interaction that goes beyond mere information sharing.
6. Nurture relationships and build trust. Building trust is a key component for success. In particular, positions may soften as participants get to know each other and realize that certain personal concerns are commonly held. The most successful groups may consist of those whose members can talk freely, "thus learning the intent behind each other's positions" (Shindler and Neburka 1997, p. 19).
7. Attend to the care and feeding of participants. Attention to detail means a great deal to volunteers. Such details include often-overlooked common courtesies, distributing handouts and meeting notes in advance, defining terms, providing refreshments, and other indications that the sponsors value the group and its work.
8. Provide clear decision-making rules. Although consensus is often the goal of natural resource deliberation, it may be just one of many goals or, conversely, it may not even be necessary. Everything depends upon the process itself, particularly on the expected outcomes. Working toward a common understanding is a worthy goal in itself, and sponsors may use the information gathered during the deliberative event to generate their own action plans. On

the other hand, if process legitimization and conferred authority to develop an action plan are important aspects of the process, then consensus may be a necessity. If consensus is perceived as too difficult, then an alternative is to use a majority vote. This is probably more realistic, although obviously not as desirable as attaining full consensus. Still, whether to engage in a consensual process should be determined as early as possible. Likewise, options are needed for opting out gracefully, so that those in a clear minority can save face or leave on good terms. In a majority-rules situation, it may be rational for the minority with an opposing view to drop out. Agreeing to disagree (and to not engage) on a particular issue is a valid option. Making their exit less contentious may increase the chance that they will participate in discussions on the next issue. Finally, how the information will eventually be used or how decisions will be made are important aspects of any deliberative process. Participants deserve to know this up-front and should be reminded of the decision rules throughout.

Postdeliberative Activities

The completion of any deliberative process in natural resource planning calls for reflection and possible action, especially since any decision taken may affect the participants, the land, and the economy. However, no guarantee exists that the deliberative group will be involved in the outcomes, or that collective decisions will be acted upon. For example, the mandate for decision making may not be in the terms of reference for the group, and even if it were, the sponsor may have specified from the outset that any decisions would be nonbinding. Conversely, research has shown that a deliberative process is more successful when deliberations and outcomes are clearly linked (Shindler and Neburka 1997; McCool and Guthrie 2001; Smith and McDonough 2001).

Apart from the eventual outcomes, however, several practical considerations remain. At a minimum, the participants will want to be informed of the outcomes. Others may want to stay involved well beyond the initial deliberations and decision-making stages. Sponsoring parties will also want to evaluate the success of the deliberative process in terms of several variables, including the degree and type of civic involvement, participant satisfaction, and cost-effectiveness.

Finally, a key question is how to extend the social learning that takes place during each deliberative session to the various constituent groups and the broader public. It is incumbent on all participants, but especially the sponsors, to ensure that news about the results of the deliberative event are spread to nonparticipating citizens. Transparency and shared learning can be achieved through newsletters (sent electronically or by regular mail), meeting minutes (posted in local coffee shops or mailed), and the media (newspaper articles, radio talk shows or interviews, television announcements), to name a few examples.

The recommendations for postdeliberative activities are organized under three interrelated headings: follow-up strategy, evaluation and monitoring, and future deliberation.

1. Follow-up strategy. It is probable that during the deliberative session, a series of commitments were made. These should be prioritized and carried out as soon as possible. Every case will be distinct, but follow-up activities can include any of the following:
   a. *Processing of information*. The deliberative session probably generated a substantial number of remarks and observations. This material may consist of taped or written minutes, flip chart notes, statements from individuals, written evaluation, and/or survey responses. Additional help may be required to organize, analyze, and summarize this data, particularly if it will be used to inform and improve natural resource decisions.
   b. *Feedback and reporting*. Feedback to participants is provided through an overall summary of the process and how the information may be used. A letter from the sponsors may suffice, but a full-length report may be required if the process was long and complicated. Special briefings to government departments and media releases may also represent important outputs. If the deliberative process was deemed innovative and useful, then sharing experiences with others will be beneficial for all parties and others who are intending to engage in deliberative practices.
2. Evaluation and monitoring. If natural resource managers wish to improve practices for future deliberations, knowing what went right is just as important as assessing what went wrong.

Evaluation and monitoring should not be an "add-on" or ad hoc exercise, but should be professionally planned and carried out. At a minimum, an evaluation of the process is essential to improve understanding. If the deliberative process is meant to continue over the long term, then continued monitoring should be incorporated for fine-tuning. Likewise, important results achieved from evaluation activities can be built into forthcoming deliberative practices.

3. Future deliberation. Most deliberative projects have a fixed end point, but there are many examples of long-term activities, such as public advisory groups, which meet regularly over months or years. Periodic deliberations may be tied to dates in a planning sequence, such as participatory input on 5-year operating plans or 20-year strategic plans. The need for additional deliberative sessions may be suggested during the initial process or the evaluation stage. Whichever the case, the following steps can be taken for future deliberative sessions:
   a. *Rotation*. Conduct the deliberative sessions on a periodic "rotating participant" basis. Fresh perspectives that breathe new life into a stalled process can more than compensate any loss in continuity from a changeover in participants. It may be appropriate to identify more potential participants than can be accommodated by the available space and budget. Each participant can be asked how much time he or she can realistically commit. In this way, a secondary list (or even several lists) can be generated to allow the original participants to be replaced after a certain period.
   b. *Adaptations*. Any lessons learned from the first sessions can help the sponsors and participants make changes to ensure a more streamlined, or perhaps more representative, process the next time. There is always room for improvement in any deliberative process, and the information gathered from the feedback, reporting, and evaluation stages will be extremely useful in preparing and implementing future sessions.

SUMMARY

This document provides a guide for best practices in public participation. At a minimum, this guide may serve to alleviate some of the concerns and challenges associated with public engagement by highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of specific approaches and by focusing on key steps in the process. It also demonstrates that there is no single or "right" way to conduct a deliberative activity in natural resource planning and management. Many paths can be taken to achieve meaningful public involvement. Even if the steps outlined here are strictly followed, the results for a particular process may not be optimal. Some citizens who could or should participate will be left out, even after extensive planning and implementation, and even those who are involved may find that their wishes have not been satisfactorily addressed.

Each of the three case examples discussed earlier in this report — Special Places 2000, the AFCS, and public advisory committees — illustrates some of the potentials and pitfalls of deliberative practices in natural resource planning and management.

Special Places 2000 achieved some of its goals in setting aside more protected areas in the province of Alberta, but attempts to develop an inclusive process were largely unsuccessful. Constructive public participation was constrained by a hierarchical structure, political priorities, and minimal group diversity, among other limitations. Genuine attempts to achieve collective understanding through a more inclusive deliberative structure and tying these deliberations to the decision-making process more explicitly might have allowed for greater success in this initiative.

The AFCS was an inclusive process with a high degree of constructive dialogue, shared learning, informative debate, and consensual decision making by a diverse group of participants. However, a lack of commitment to implementation caused considerable frustration and burnout among participants. The AFCS could have benefited enormously from well-defined postdeliberative activities to follow up on the many commitments made, which would also have led to more satisfactory outcomes for those involved.

The public advisory committees have most certainly provided opportunities for a few citizens to influence how the private sector manages natural resources on public lands. Still, these groups are often characterized by a local and fairly static membership that is not representative of the larger public. Moreover, discussion and debate are often constrained by the narrow mandate and jurisdiction of forest company operations. The public advisory group process could be improved by periodically rotating the participants from a more diverse pool, with special efforts to incorporate more minority voices in the committee makeup, as well as efforts to incorporate a wider range of information to inform the discussion and debate.

In short, these examples of participatory natural resource decision making offer important lessons for sponsors wishing to design and implement deliberative mechanisms. Predeliberative and postdeliberative steps could certainly have been strengthened in all cases, along with more careful execution of the deliberative process itself. Nevertheless, in the spirit of adaptive management, where shared learning is ingrained into flexible systems, initiatives such as Special Places 2000 and the AFCS can only be considered failures if they do not meet their stated objectives and the organizers fail to learn from the experience.

One area with high potential for incorporating participatory mechanisms is forest certification. Governments and companies are now required to somehow engage the public in forest management planning. As forest certification initiatives become more widespread and are combined with continued government decentralization, the private sector will likely be looking for advice and support from society at large. Future certification requirements will most likely necessitate rigorous forms of public deliberation and some well-developed procedures for monitoring and evaluation. The deliberative mechanisms outlined here may provide a foundation for understanding the range of potential tools available for public participation and some of the criteria for evaluation that can be incorporated into various certification initiatives.

Finally, given the position of sponsoring agencies as stewards of the resource, the onus for true commitment to deliberative practices in natural resource planning and management must rest with these agencies. An informed dialogue with a broad range of participants can help to improve existing planning and management techniques only when such activities are undertaken with sincerity and adequate attention to detail. Toward this end, this guide to best practices provides some specific advice for natural resource managers on how to incorporate more (or improved) deliberative activities into their decision-making processes.

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