

Social and Economic Aspects of Planning

Issues and Planning Criteria

Social Variables

PRESENTER: What I have done is just tried to pick out a couple of terms for us to start thinking about, and we will return to them throughout the courses in the subsequent planning steps, but I just want to plant a few seeds and a few ideas here. And so this section is called "Social Concepts." You know, there's a lot of different definition we could use, but the word I like best to associate with the whole social arena of planning and impact assessment is "meaning," and what social scientist do is give meaning to changes. You know, the wildlife person can say "We're going to have this amount of decrease in winter range as a result of this activity," or "This amount of increase, and this is what it's going to do to the elk populations or to the Caribou populations." And then the social scientist takes that information and says, "Well, okay, what does this mean to people and to our institutions and to the quality of our lives and to the well being of our communities?" That's kind of a difficult translating step sometimes.

You know, there's all kinds of other concepts I could define here and you'll find some of them -- I'll hold this up for the camera -- in the appendix D of the land use planning handbook. Has a very nice matrix in it with a number of different social topics that we will encounter when we're developing plans for the BLM.

I work for NOAA, and so when I say "when we're developing plans for the BLM," I'm taking a little liberty there, and I hope that's okay, but let me assure you before I go into these definitions here that it would be kind of natural for you to be saying, "Well, why is

Social and Economic Aspects of Planning

Issues and Planning Criteria

Social Variables

this guy from Hawaii coming and talking to the BLM in Phoenix?" Let me reassure you that I've only been in Hawaii five, six years, so I'm not too spoiled there. And before that I was in Alaska for about the same amount of time, six years. And then the rest -- the whole rest of my career I've been working in Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Utah, Oregon, Washington. So most of my experience is with public land management in the western U.S. But I think one of roles, you may have noticed the teaching, the kind of the content cadre here is to BLM people, one economists and one social scientists, and then one kind of outside type, John Loomis and myself. And so I am going to give you some examples from fishing and some kind of oddball examples, you know, that will not be directly applicable to planning in the BLM, but I have found that sometimes you just get little bits of inspiration or learn something from an example that isn't the same thing you deal with every day. So that's kind of one of my roles, is to interject some of those.

Well, the first term I want to talk about, and Roy's introduction of Pinedale is a great one, is talking about community, and we can talk about community a few different ways. When Roy was talking about community, he was talking about a place where people live and work with each other and play with each other and organize themselves together, and this is a rather formal definition of community here from Wilkinson's "The Community in Rural America" book, but to most of us community is so important because that's where we live our daily lives, and we care about what happens to our communities, and we try to live in communities that -- where our values fit in and where

Social and Economic Aspects of Planning

Issues and Planning Criteria

Social Variables

we can do what we want to do. And economists will sometimes talk about the pocketbook nerve, something that hits you in the wallet is really important. Well, something that hits us in the place we live is really important, too, and that's why you see community emerging as a very important scale of analysis. You know, in that list of scales of analysis we showed earlier, we went down to the individual and the household level and up to the national level, but in between there, this is pretty important, and you don't get at what's going on in communities by analyzing county-level data, do you? You know, you can completely mask differences in impacts to different communities within a given county. And this is not to say, by the way, that communities are homogeneous entities, because as we know, since we all live in one and have lived in others, that they are far from one, you know, solid mass where everybody thinks the same and everybody does the same and everybody has the same attitudes and beliefs and values, and everybody is affected by our actions similarly. That's not the case. But regardless -- and we'll talk about how to deal with that -- but regardless, community is a very important social concept and it's something we can all understand.

There are also other types of communities that aren't based in place, of course. We talk about communities of interest or stakeholder groups or interest groups, and these are also communities, right? Because it's a group of people who are networked in some way and have some shared belief system or shared value system, and those are -- in some case, those are more important than just a bunch of people who happen to be

Social and Economic Aspects of Planning

Issues and Planning Criteria

Social Variables

living together in terms of talking about how what we do affects people's lives.

But you'll see community used both of those ways, and Joan will talk about organizing the entire social impact assessment around communities of interest and just to make that clear. But we also need to keep in mind communities of place.

And, of course, another great social concept that I think we can all relate to and we can all understand personally, although we might not know how to study systematically, is quality of life. This is also called social well being. Has some other terms that are commonly attached to it. But what we mean is the experience that we have, the various factors that exert some sort of influence on us and what kind of their net effect is. And the interesting thing for BLM planning here, of course, is that there's this whole population of things that add to or detract from our quality of life, right? And the BLM, or the National Marine Fishery Service or the Forest Service or the Park Service, you know, may be responsible for just a little chunk of that, right? Or in some cases, it might be a big chunk, you know. And one of the things we want to do is figure out what this arena of factors that contribute to the quality of life of a given person or a given community, quality of life in a given community is, and how we're going to affect that, because when we get to impact assessment, you know, it's important to talk about what effects BLM actions have, but we need to put that in the greater context. Are we talking about, you know, one percent of the variance in the quality of people's lives that we

Social and Economic Aspects of Planning

Issues and Planning Criteria

Social Variables

might be affecting? Or 50 percent? And does that differ across groups or across communities?

Later on we're going -- I put how do you define it, what portion of it relates to public land management. We're going to have a little brainstorming exercise in another step or two where we kind of explore that in a little more detail.

Another one, which I'm sure is not unfamiliar to everyone in this room, is sense of place. This has been written about a lot. It's played a role in some fairly major decisions over the years, which Joan will talk about. But I just want to plant the seed here that this is another example of a great social term, because it's all about meaning. You know, we can look at a map of a place and define its various topography, characteristics, other biophysical characteristics. We can talk about it in a lot of ways, but what social scientists and what social aspects of plans need to capture in the relationship people have to that place, the meaning that is attached to that place for different types of uses and different types of users and different types of peoples, and the importance of that in quality of life in a lot of cases because, you know, a lot of people live where they live because they have an attachment to the land in some way, and a lot of times we're managing that land, and so we can -- we can say, oh, we're going to change this factor, this will go up, this will go down, what's really important is, well, what does that mean to people, and how will it affect them? And are we changing something that's in an

Social and Economic Aspects of Planning

Issues and Planning Criteria

Social Variables

irreversible and irretrievable way through our actions? Are we going to destroy the meaning and the attachment of this place forever by our actions? Or how are we going to change that relationship?

With the Pinedale example, you know, that's -- it's not just a change of -- a fundamental change on the landscape. It's not just an attachment to a place where you always went camping. It's an attachment to your community, too. You can have an attachment to a community and to a quality of life and to a lifestyle, and, you know, I think the Pinedale example made that abundantly clear. We change a community by the actions.

And, you know, it's a political decision ultimately whether that change is worth it and how the winners are going to compensate the losers, but it's our job as planning and environmental coordinators and as people working on RMP's and as NEPA analysts to document those changes.

And sense of place is certainly -- certainly has a role and there's great examples of sense of place analyses that you guys have probably seen some of, too, and I can give you some if you haven't.

Equity. This a great one. John ruined my intro line here by talking about winners and losers and winners compensating losers because I can't talk about economists anymore

Social and Economic Aspects of Planning

Issues and Planning Criteria

Social Variables

as heartless, soulless people who are only concerned about the net benefit to society as a whole and not how those benefits are distributed. So there's certainly an economic side to this, too, but there's a social side, and, you know, people within communities, different communities, different interest groups, are all going to be affected differently by the decision we make and, frankly, too, by the way we choose to plan. So it's the act of planning that is perceived as an equity issue, too, not just the outputs or the outcomes of the plan.

You know, so, there are going to be -- there are going to be winners and losers, and what society decided to about that is something else, but we need to not just be concerned about the net effects or effects at the county level. You need to kind of dig down and see who is going to be differentially affected by this? Who are the winners? Who are the losers? How -- and how does this change things? What is the meaning of those changes? And an important aspect of this, which was mentioned, and which Joan is going to talk about in a little more detail later, so, again, we're just kind of planting the seed, is environmental justice.

You know, Ben brought up the issue of health being a major consideration for Alaska residents in a lot of decisions, and it's an important issue elsewhere, too, and environmental justice started out as kind of a health issue, didn't it, by siting power plants in poorer neighborhoods where people were ill equipped to organize themselves

Social and Economic Aspects of Planning

Issues and Planning Criteria

Social Variables

as a community and mount some kind of effective protest against the siting of that plant in their area, you know, they were going to suffer the health effects of pollution, you know, if that plant was emitting materials that were health hazards. The risk for them was going to be higher because they could not organize.

And so when society collectively realized that this was happening, one of the outcomes was Clinton's Executive Order which we referred to earlier.

So this is -- you know, we're not polluting the air necessarily directly with what we do or despoiling water, but it's not just a health issue. It's an equity issue. And so the question we need to ask ourselves, and we'll tell you how to go about asking it and answering it is: Are there minorities? Are there low income people? Are there tribal groups that are going to be differentially affected? Are they going to take the hit for society in any kind of decision that we make? Are they going to be -- even -- we're never going to try to single them out, right, and say we're going to stick it to you because you can't defend yourselves, but if that is, nonetheless, going to be the outcome, well the decision makers need to know about it, and society needs to know about that, partly so they can address it. You know --

As the Pinedale example points out, and I'm glad Stacy mentioned resiliency, which is a concept we'll come to later and define and talk about how to measure, you know, by providing this type of information to county governments and city governments and state

Social and Economic Aspects of Planning

Issues and Planning Criteria

Social Variables

governments and by revealing the full range of impacts and any differential impacts that we find, you know, we are going to be helping to mitigate those just by putting the information out, by letting planning processes begin that can maybe start to address those issues, and by alerting society that this is going to happen, and it's not our responsibility to make it all right, but at least by fully revealing the effects, you know, we can help to mitigate them a little bit by maybe getting the planning process going and making you aware that these -- of these changes and their meanings and so we can start to address those collectively as a society.

I have a report here -- it's about a year ago. "EPA inspector criticizes agency on fairness of reviews. The EPA is not conducting required reviews to ensure low-income and minority neighborhoods get the same environmental protection as other communities. The agency said it agreed with the report's recommendation that called for clearer guidelines and plans for conducting formal environmental justice reviews to ensure policies are achieving their intent."

So there's kind of a recognition, I think, universally that although we've all bought into the concept, we haven't really implemented it very well, and if you look at environmental justice sections of our EIS's, they're usually pretty lame, I think would be the way to characterize those. I'm not just talking about BLM's. I'm talking about everyone's. It is the norm for these to be done fairly poorly and for the outcome to be "all of the citizens in the area are going to be affected equally by our decisions." So we're really good at

Social and Economic Aspects of Planning

Issues and Planning Criteria

Social Variables

using census data to identify low-income or minority population but we're much worse at saying, "Okay, well, let's delve into this a little more and see if those people are going to be differentially affected." So it's not just a BLM issue.

Last slide for this mini section on social concepts is some key points, and we have trained Elvin well over the years and he even mentioned the socioeconomics. So we put this with a circle in it. And it's not really -- you won't suffer during performance appraisals if you use the term socioeconomics. So it's really not that bad. But I did want to share with you that in some agencies, in my agency, there is kind of a riff between sociologists and anthropologists and economists, because there's more economists, and they have all the money, and they have all the power, and we're kind of bastard stepchildren of the agency, and I'm kind of added as an afterthought although at least there's a few of thrust. But the term socioeconomic, what does it usually mean? It usually means economics, right? And so when you see a section on socioeconomics in an EIS, it's probably going to deal with demographics and economics, and that's probably about it.

And this was the sign at last year's training for this course, okay? This was the sign posted outside the door. It was just the hotel that did it. It wasn't Elvin and it wasn't John. You know, they weren't trying to subvert it or anything, but it's just -- to me, it was kind of an indication that socioeconomics means economics, and that's the only reason

Social and Economic Aspects of Planning

Issues and Planning Criteria

Social Variables

we emphasize the difference, you know. And I think Roy's Pinedale example made it clear that there are economic impacts, some of which can be mitigated, and the social impacts, though, you can't get at by just mitigating -- you can't make them go away just by mitigating the economic impacts. That social conflict is going to be there. The differences in lifestyles is going to be there. And you -- you know, we need to point those out, even if they're very difficult to mitigate, although there are some things that can be done. So that's why we're encouraging you to think of these as separate but related topics.