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Keynote Address—Rethinking Public Participation: The Case of Public Land Management

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1. INTRODUCTION

I would like to build on many of the previous and ongoing conversations by suggesting that it’s time to rethink our concepts and approaches to public participation—particularly those related to natural resources policy—and more specifically federal public land management. The rationale for my proposition is twofold.

First, the conventional approaches to public participation for public land management—as mandated by these various laws—revolve around two basic objectives: to “inform and educate” citizens and to “seek their input and advice.” As I will explain in a bit, even more recent laws, administrative rules, and policies that encourage or mandate some type of collaboration fall under these two basic objectives.

While these objectives, and the methods that support them, are valuable, they compel agencies to serve as a kind of ringmaster in a field of competing interests. Given the design of the decision-making system—where the agency is solely responsible for the weighing and balancing of trade-offs and making decisions—the different “publics” are increasingly unencumbered from any responsibility to help solve problems. In his book A Conspiracy of Optimism, Paul Hirt suggests that this approach to public participation and decision-making empowers this type of behavior by more or less promising that all parties can get what they want, instead of creating the conditions necessary to bring everyone to the table to share the responsibility of solving problems by working together. The process is perhaps best represented in Arenstein’s classic “ladder of citizen participation” as “degrees of tokenism,” with perhaps a shade of “partnership.” The outcomes are well-known to people that live, work, and play on public lands. While agencies do their best to balance competing interests and make decisions on the best available science—the entire process often leaves citizens, advocates, and decision-makers dissatisfied with the outcome. This dissatisfaction in turn leads to a recurrence of disputes, which strains relationships, and increases transaction costs.

The second rationale for my proposition to rethink public participation is that there are an enormous number of innovative approaches to public engagement and shared problem-solving emerging within communities, watersheds, and larger landscapes. Often referred to as the “collaboration movement,” these innovations started to appear in the early 1990s when citizens and stakeholders became frustrated and dissatisfied with the more conventional, government-driven processes to manage public lands. These homegrown, grass-roots processes tend to be citizen-driven and place-based. For the most part, they do not have any official authority and generate legitimacy, credibility, and effectiveness by building broad-based
coalitions or a “constituency for change.” The take-home message is that so-called “coalitions of the unalike” are creating public processes that are inclusive, informed, and foster a sense of shared ownership for the process, decisions, and outcomes. And, they are achieving notable outcomes in terms of economic development, community vitality, and environmental stewardship.

The challenge—or better yet, the opportunity—is to rethink our conventional approaches to public participation by integrating the lessons of these more informal, collaborative processes into the formal decision-making processes.

To examine this proposition, I would like to focus on federal public lands, particularly those in the American West, for three reasons. First, as illustrated by this slide, federal public lands account for 28 percent of all land in the United States and 47 percent of the American West. More than 90 percent of all federal land is found in the eleven westernmost states and Alaska. The U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management administer about 34% of the western landscape, including almost 85 percent of Nevada; more than 50 percent of Idaho, Utah, and Oregon; and more than 40 percent in four other western states. In short, federal public lands are one of the defining features of the American West and significantly influence the region’s economies, communities, and culture.

Second, public lands are a natural laboratory to study public participation and decision-making. As explained by Daniel Kemmis in This Sovereign Land, public lands exemplify democracy in two important ways: by allowing equal access for all Americans and by including all Americans in the decision-making processes that determine how these lands are managed.

The third and final reason to focus on public lands is that the enduring tensions and acute conflicts over public land management seem to revolve around two related sets of questions: First are questions of purpose and policy—for example: What are the objectives, priorities, or uses for which public lands should be managed? How should resources be allocated? Should the federal government retain ownership and management or are there better alternatives? And second are questions of process—for example: Who makes what decisions? And what role do citizens, stakeholders, and experts play in making decisions and implementing outcomes?

These questions overlap each other because those who control the decision-making process determine what constitutes acceptable uses. While I have a particular predisposition as an environmental mediator my sense is that we are not likely to effectively resolve issues of purpose and policy until we create more effective democratic processes to bring people together with the best available information. Thus the need to focus on innovations in public participation and shared governance more broadly, where governance refers to the style or method by which decisions are made and the way in which conflicts among actors are resolved. Governance is about representation, style of interaction, authority, and decision rules. It also refers to processes that support governance: that is, fostering scientific and public learning (one of the key themes of this conference) and building civic and political will.

2. CROWN OF THE CONTINENT

To make this argument a bit more concrete, let me tell you the story of the Crown of the Continent, the 18-million acre ecosystem including parts of Montana, Alberta, and British
Columbia. The COTC is an ideal laboratory to examine the evolution of several innovative approaches to public participation and shared governance.

The transboundary COTC is a special place. In addition to being my backyard, it’s an ecological crossroads where plant and animal communities from the Pacific Northwest, eastern prairies, southern Rockies, and boreal forests mingle. This spine of mountains is also the headwaters for North America, where pristine rivers originate and flow to the Pacific Ocean, Gulf of Mexico, and Arctic Ocean. Nowhere else on the continent retains its full complement of native habitat and native predators—wolves, grizzly and black bears, cougar, coyote, fox, wolverine, bobcat, and lynx—as well as large populations of moose, elk, bighorn sheep, pronghorn, and deer.

The Crown is—and has been—home to a number of indigenous people. Ancestors of the Blackfeet, Kainaiwa, Ktunaxa, Salish, and Kootenai peoples were among the first to hunt, fish, and gather plants for food and fiber here. By the early 1800s, when the first white explorers and trappers arrived, much of the region was already settled, with tribal territories, hunting grounds, and travel routes well established.

As the population grew, some people saw development as a threat to the region’s natural abundance and beauty. In the late 1890s, several people, including the editor of Forest and Stream magazine—George Bird Grinnell—lobbied Congress to establish a national park south of the Canadian border. In a series of articles, Grinnell referred to the region as the “Crown of the Continent.” A forest preserve was set aside in 1897, but the area remained open to mining and logging. Grinnell and other conservationists continued promoting the area’s unique features, and finally, in 1910, President Taft signed a bill creating Glacier National Park. The Canadians were slightly ahead of the USA, creating Waterton Lakes National Park—which borders Glacier Park—in 1895.

Local Rotary clubs in Alberta and Montana rallied around the idea of this shared landscape, and in 1932 the governments of both Canada and the United States voted to designate the parks as Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park—the world’s first such designation. UNESCO named Glacier National Park as a Biosphere Reserve in 1976, and recognized Waterton Lakes with the same designation in 1979. Comprising about 1.3 million acres, the two parks were named a World Heritage Site in 1995, acknowledging the area’s rich ecological and cultural values.

Stateside, about 1.6 million acres of federally protected wilderness extend around Glacier National Park. Several areas throughout the transboundary ecosystem benefit from additional special conservation designations, including wild and scenic rivers, provincial parks, wildlife management areas, and recreation areas. Many additional acres of private working landscapes are protected under conservation easements.

Thanks to this remarkable history of stewardship, the COTC endures today as a natural oasis in an increasingly developed world. Like many large landscapes in the American West, however, the COTC is currently faced with a number of issues related to climate change, water resources, wildlife corridors and habitat conservation, evolving economic opportunities, and patterns of growth and development.

In response to this mix of complicated issues, individuals and organizations throughout the Crown are rising to the occasion and creating new forms of public engagement and shared problem-solving—what we might refer to collectively as an “ecology of governance.” In a formal sense, the COTC includes two nations, two provinces, one state, and seven tribes and First Nations, with more than 20 government agencies exercising some type of authority and
management on the landscape. Although the landscape is jurisdictionally fragmented, each of these institutions plays an important role in managing natural resources. Unfortunately, the most compelling issues facing the Crown—from invasive species to weeds to wildlife corridors, wildfire, water, and so on—present themselves at a spatial scale that crosses jurisdictional and cultural boundaries.

While legal and institutional boundaries delineate ownership and management authority, they also create barriers among neighbors and can reinforce disparate cultures, attitudes, goals, and values. In spite of these challenges, people who care about the Crown and its future are creating new opportunities for public engagement and shared problem-solving. What is occurring, in fact, is a nested system of collaborative arrangements that are similar, at least in part, to Elinor Ostrom’s “polycentric systems of governance.” Today, more than a hundred agencies and community-based partnerships are working to promote and support livable communities, vibrant economies, and healthy landscapes.

Starting at the smallest geographic scale, there are at least 20 community-based partnerships in the COTC, most of them initiated and convened by citizens. These community-based partnerships create the basic building blocks—and a regional neighborhood—within the nested system of governance. Consider, for example, the Blackfoot Challenge. This landowner-based group coordinates management of the Blackfoot River, its tributaries, and adjacent public and private lands—approximately 2,400 square miles. It is organized locally and known nationally as a model for preserving the rural character, ecological health, and natural beauty of a watershed.

The mission of the Blackfoot Challenge is to coordinate efforts that enhance, conserve and protect the natural resources and rural lifestyles of the Blackfoot River Valley for present and future generations. It supports environmental stewardship through cooperation of private and public interests. Private landowners, federal and state land managers, local government officials, and corporate landowners compose the membership of the Board. All share a common vision of how the Challenge operates in the Blackfoot watershed and all believe that success is most likely to result from building trust and sharing responsibility.

The Blackfoot Challenge has produced an impressive list of accomplishments over 20 years. It is a good example of how community-based partnerships often “nest” alongside each other, and within a larger spatial context—in this case, the ecosystem referred to as the Crown of the Continent.

As illustrated by this slide, at least nine independent and complimentary initiatives have emerged since 1994 to promote and support shared problem-solving at the scale of the Crown. While none of these initiatives has any formal authority to make and implement decisions, they each play a critical role in the ecology of governance—exchanging information, building relationships, and creating opportunities to work together. Along with the community-based partnerships, they help build the civic and political will to address complex natural resource and related issues that cannot be effectively addressed by any single community, stakeholder group, or government agency.

Let me highlight a couple of these Crown-wide initiatives. The Crown Managers Partnership emerged in 2001 as an inter-agency forum for about 20 land management agencies in Montana, British Columbia, and Alberta. This voluntary partnership provides a forum for management agencies to identify common needs and interests, develop joint initiatives, and leverage resources as appropriate. It convenes an annual public forum to examine both ongoing and emerging issues, and to inform decision-makers at all levels on priority issues and actions.
It is important to emphasize that the work of this partnership is non-binding; it depends on the participating agencies going back to their particular jurisdictions and implementing projects consistent with agreed-upon objectives and strategies.

The other Crown-wide initiative I want to mention is the Roundtable on the COTC. Realizing that the future of the Crown is being shaped by over 100 government agencies, NGOs, and community-based partnerships, our Center—in partnership with a handful of other organizations—helped launch the Roundtable in 2007 to provide an ongoing forum to bring together all of the individuals and organizations who care about this special place. Our thesis—which turned out to be true—was that people were connected to the landscape, but were not connected to each other. In other words, various initiatives operated somewhat independent of each other. Through workshops, forums, policy dialogues, conferences, and online newsletters, the Roundtable has provided an independent, nonpartisan forum to exchange ideas, build relationships, and explore opportunities to work together. It is governed by a leadership team that includes representation from community-based partnerships, NGOs, communities, tribes and First Nations, agencies, and other people that care about the Crown. Last month, the Roundtable won an award from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for our adaptive management work over the past five years.

Moving on and scaling up even further from the level of the Crown is the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, an effort to protect wildlife habitat and corridors across a 500,000 square mile landscape -- nearly three times the size of California. Y2Y began as a network of biologists and conservationists concerned about wildlife and their habitat. Today, the organization focuses on protecting key connectivity areas for wildlife that are threatened by habitat loss, invasive species, and increasingly climate change. Y2Y also works closely with private landowners, community leaders, and others to address a range of issues related to land use, community and economic prosperity, and wildlife management.

One of the most recent additions to the ecology of governance in the COTC is the Great Northern Landscape Conservation Cooperative. This initiative, led by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and other federal agencies, is developing scientific capacity to address climate change and other stressors to wildlife species and habitats within the Northern Rockies and the Columbia River Basin. The Cooperative provides scientific and technical support to government agencies, including tribes and First Nations, in part to support adaptive management and large landscape conservation.

Several other home-grown initiatives further illustrate the variety of innovative approaches to public participation and shared problem-solving emerging in the COTC. In response to a growing national debate over the use of mountain bikes in wilderness area, Montana High Divide Trails formed in 2007 to find common ground and present a united front to agency decision-makers. The groups includes representatives from MWA, a local land trust, several mountain biking clubs, a backcountry horseman’s association, and others. This “coalition of the unalike” has found that the US Forest Service is likely to listen to them when they offer consensus recommendations on travel plans and the like.

One final example of the emerging ecology of governance in the COTC. In September 2014, members of the Blackfeet Nation, Blood Tribe, Siksika Nation, Piikani Nation, Fort Belknap Reservation, Fort Peck Reservation, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Reservation, and the Tsuu T’ina Nation signed the “Northern Tribes Buffalo Treaty.” The intent of this transboundary treaty—the first such treaty among these disparate tribes in over 150 years—is to bring wild buffalo back to tribal lands to perform once again that species’ cultural, spiritual,
nutritional and ecological role. I am happy to report that in April this year, nearly 100 bison were re-introduced to the Blackfeet Indian Reservation in northern Montana from Elk Island National Park in Alberta.

3. RETHINKING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The emerging ecology of governance in the COTC illustrates a growing trend in public participation and shared problem-solving—a trend where citizens, NGOs, and other associations are taking the initiative to catalyze, convene, and coordinate public forums to exchange information, solve problems, and implement solutions. In most cases, these home-grown forums are designed to supplement, not replace formal decision-making systems. In some cases, they allow the formal decision-making processes to work better—such as when the groups involved in Montana High Divide Trails find common ground and offer consensus recommendations to the US Forest Service. This type of supplemental civic engagement does not replace the public participation required by the Forest Service prior to making decisions and taking actions, but it often informs that decision process, reduces the amount and intensity of conflict, and helps generate durable solutions that can be implemented on-the-ground.

This trend not only suggests a shift from an expert-driven model of decision-making to more democratic approaches, but also raises some important questions about "governance" and the role of citizens, professionals, and communities in decision-making. From a political perspective, this trend in public participation creates a healthy tension between bottom-up and top-down approaches to governance. In their book Planning with Complexity, Judith Innes and David Booher suggest that this tension can be explained—at least in part—by the difference between “instrumental rationality” and “collaborative rationality.”

Instrumental rationalists tend to approach natural resource issues as largely technical problems that can be effectively resolved by the best available science and the separation of politics from decision-making. Many of you will recognize this as the model that emerged during the progressive era around the 1900s and continues to serve as the foundation for public land management agencies.

By contrast, collaborative rationality sees the world as inherently uncertain and assumes that all decisions are necessarily contingent. From this perspective, planning and policy are not about finding the best solution (indeed, there is not likely to be one best solution), but rather discovering better ways of proceeding than the status quo. Public processes characterized by collaborative rationality engage diverse members of a community—including citizens, stakeholders with diverse needs and interests, as well as experts and agencies. They work together, side-by-side, to jointly learn and generate solutions in the face of conflict, changing conditions, and conflicting sources of information. Such processes—as illustrated by the ecology of governance in the COTC—not only generate new ways to move forward, but also help communities adapt and be resilient in the face of new challenges.

Given these trends in public participation and shared governance, let me return to the core proposition, challenge, or opportunity as I see it— that is, how to rethink our conventional approaches to public participation by integrating the lessons of the more informal, collaborative processes into formal decision-making processes.

There seem to be two general responses to this question— first, to foster innovations within the existing legal and institutional system; and second, to begin experimenting with
some alternatives to the established decision-making system. Let me start with this latter option.

Beginning in the mid-to-late 1990s, several people started calling for a series of pilot projects or experiments in governance as a way to foster more innovative (and effective) approaches to public participation, decision-making, and stewardship on public lands. Taken as a whole, the idea is to foster a diverse portfolio of experiments on public land governance—similar, in part, to the idea of a diversified portfolio in the investment world.

In 1999, a broad-based group of participants came together to test the hypothesis that collaborative processes could and should be more effectively integrated into the NEPA decision-making process. Among other things, they called for pilot projects to test the possibilities and limits of collaboration, including the degree to which decision-making authority might be vested in collaborative groups.

A different group meeting in the late 1990s, referred to as the Forest Options Group, suggested—among other things—a collaborative governance option where the forest plan would be written and the forest supervisor hired by a local board of directors. The participants would be required to follow all environmental laws but would be allowed to depart from internal agency procedures.

Still another broad-based group, meeting at Lubrecht Forest outside Missoula, Montana in 1998, recommended the creation of a new Region 7 of the US Forest Service (the original Region 7 was absorbed into two other regions in 1966 and the regions were never renumbered, so there has not been a Region 7 for decades). The new Region 7 would be a “virtual region” consisting of a diverse portfolio of pilot or experimental forests. Like the other proposals, it would include an opportunity for management plans to be written and implemented by a local collaborative group.

More recently, Professor Robert Nelson has called for a series of Charter Forests. Much like charter schools, the key principle of charter forests is freedom with accountability. Charter forests would be freed from the centralized administration of the Forest Service, and management would devolve to autonomous forests capable of more creative and locally responsive management.

The common theme in all four of these proposals is that they would turn planning and management over to local collaborative groups—something like the Blackfoot Challenge. Just as “inside the box” innovations (which we will address in a moment) allow the agencies to demonstrate their capacity to incorporate collaborative methods within the established procedures, these local control experiments would give diverse groups of stakeholders a chance to prove they are capable of ecologically sustainable stewardship of their own landscapes, including public lands.

Within the past two years, there have been additional calls for similar experiments in co-management or what Kirk Emerson, the founding director of the US Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution, refers to as “collaborative federalism.” Native Americans, conservationists, and other stakeholders in the proposed Bears Ears National Monument in southern Utah and the Badger-Two Medicine sacred area in the COTC are calling for opportunities to jointly manage these landscapes.

The limitation of all these suggestions is that they require either the President or Congress—or both—to create the legal and institutional space to experiment with different models of governance. While many people support this strategy, it’s hard to imagine Congress passing the required legislation any time in the near future.
Therefore, while we wait for the opportunity to advance a diverse portfolio of experiments, the second general response is to foster innovation within the existing legal and institutional framework. Let me offer two examples from the US Forest Service on how this is being accomplished.

The first example is the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, which is a type of pilot project as just described. In 2009, Congress authorized a limited number of projects to accelerate restoration on high-priority landscapes, support economic stability in rural communities, and reduce the risk and associated costs of catastrophic wildfire. An advisory committee overseeing implementation of this program selected projects on the basis of these goals and criteria. Importantly, particularly for our conversation, projects were selected on the strength of their collaborative capacity—demonstrated first and foremost by the mix of individuals and organizations that prepared the proposals.

In other words, the CFLRP created the right set of incentives for people with diverse needs and interests to come together and forge a common vision and strategy. According the program’s five-year report, the 10 pilot projects have generated an impressive list of accomplishments as seen in this slide. CFLR projects have also attracted new partners and built community relationships, leveraging more than $76 million in matching funds. All-in-all, a pretty impressive resume of accomplishments in five years—and a good example of how to integrate the “secret sauce” of collaboration into the existing decision-making system.

The second example is the new planning rule adopted by the US Forest Service. In 2012, after working through a multi-party collaborative process, the agency adopted new administrative rules to guide the process of revising and updating land management plans. Among other things, the 2012 planning rule directs the USFS to “engage the public…early and throughout the planning process…using collaborative processes where feasible and appropriate…[as well as] the full spectrum of tools for public engagement.”

In the fall of 2014, our Center was asked to document and evaluate lessons learned with respect to public participation and collaboration in the 12 “early adopters”—the first national forests to revise and update their land management plans under the 2012 planning rule. We have continued to monitor who is doing what, in part because we are facilitating the public process for one of the national forests in Montana.

Several national forests are employing what might be considered “best practices” in collaborative planning, including but not limited to:

- Using professional facilitators to help design and guide the public process;
- Completing stakeholder assessments up-front to clarify the needs and interests of individuals, groups, and communities, and to explore how they want to be involved in the process;
- Jointly preparing public participation plans based on the stakeholder assessments;
- Engaging the public prior to initiating NEPA, as illustrated by this image; and
- Using participatory mapping tools, as reflected in this picture of people working together to identify areas suitable for wilderness designation, timber harvesting, and other resource uses in the Helena and Lewis & Clark National Forests in Montana. In addition to providing spatially relevant information, this exercise allowed individuals with diverse interests to exchange ideas with each other and Forest Service officials, to consider potential conflicts and trade-offs, and to otherwise build and enhance relationships.
A limited number of national forests have gone even further. In the Nantahala & Pisgah National Forests in North Carolina, three different stakeholder groups attempted to create a multi-party collaborative process to run alongside, feed, and otherwise supplement the planning process. Each of these processes apparently failed to generate sufficient momentum in large part because they limited who could participate. As a result, the National Forest Foundation was asked to step-in and help create a single, more inclusive collaborative process to provide input and advice to the Forest Service as the planning process unfolds. My understanding is that this single collaborative group is up and running, and time will tell how effective it is as an innovative form of public participation and collaborative engagement.

In the Flathead National Forest in Montana, a diverse collection of individuals and groups created the Whitefish Range Partnership to seek agreement on recommendations for this particular area. Representatives of wilderness, timber, motorized and non-motorized recreation, and the local communities worked alongside Forest Service officials and arrived at a set of consensus recommendations on land use and management for the Whitefish Range. These recommendations were rolled into the proposed action to initiate the NEPA process. This innovative approach to public participation and shared problem-solving did not violate the Federal Advisory Committee Act because the Forest Service did not convene the partnership, and other people had a similar opportunity to provide input and advice prior to the start of the NEPA process.

In our work with different national forests, we have suggested a similar innovative approach. Rather than creating new collaborative partnerships for national forest planning, we suggest that national forests should build on existing community-based partnerships. In the case of the Helena and Lewis & Clark National Forest, there are about ten different multi-party collaborative partnerships, all high-functioning with a track-record of success. Given that these partnerships have done the heavy lifting of bringing diverse interests and viewpoints to the table, building trust, and achieving results on-the-ground, they could provide a solid foundation for public participation during the planning process. While they would not be a substitute for other opportunities for public participation, such well-established partnerships could help convene and facilitate public forums on issues related to the emerging plan. In many cases, these types of community-based partnerships are already working with the Forest Service to collaboratively implement projects, so in part this is an opportunity to move from collaborative implementation to collaborative decision-making.

This incomplete, but representative, list of innovations represents a significant step forward in the way at least one public land management agency—the USFS—engages citizens, stakeholders, and other governments. There is a significant difference, however, between the type of home-grown collaboration that has emerged organically in the COTC and government-sponsored collaboration as practiced by the USFS and other agencies. Citizen-initiated collaboration represents a fundamentally different type of decision-making relative to the conventional model of expert decision-making.

Citizen-initiated collaboration is an inherently decentralized, democratic form of governing. By contrast, government-sponsored collaboration is embedded within the expert model of decision-making, a system and a culture that is inherently centralized and hierarchical. Citizen-initiated collaboration facilitates a shared ownership of the process, decisions, and outcomes. By contrast, government-sponsored collaboration is at best advisory, and thus resembles conventional approaches to public participation that “seek input and advice” but do not (and cannot) share decision-making.
Nevertheless, these innovations and experiments in public engagement represent a promising trend in public land management and public participation more generally.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we should welcome any and all innovations and experiments to improve the process of public participation and shared problem-solving in public land management. A diversity of approaches should foster a healthy, high-functioning “ecology of governance.” That said, we also need to acknowledge and respond to the legitimate issues and concerns that many people have raised since the emergence of the so-called collaboration movement. We should emphasize that collaboration is not a panacea, that it does not replace existing environmental laws, and that agencies cannot abdicate their decision-making authority. We also need to develop an agreed-upon set of metrics to measure the outcomes of collaboration relative to administrative decision-making and litigation.

Finally, in addition to building the collaborative capacity of agencies, we need to inspire and equip future leaders. I have the pleasure of working with graduate students in 10-15 different disciplines through our Natural Resources Conflict Resolution Program at the University of Montana. Our primary goal is to prepare a generation of collaborative leaders—that is, individuals, regardless of whether they go to work for agencies, NGOs, businesses, or communities—that have the willingness and ability to bring together diverse groups of people, to encourage them to take ownership of a shared vision, to bridge differences and nourish relationships, and to create legitimacy, credibility, and capacity by broadening participation, not hoarding power. As part of their curriculum, our students are engaged in hands-on projects all over the world, helping diverse groups of people come together, share information, and jointly solve problems. It is truly inspiring to see the interest, enthusiasm, and commitment of the next generation of leaders. I think we are in very good hands.