

INTEREST GROUPS AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PUBLIC LANDS PROGRAMS: CONFORMITY OR CAPTURE?

CHARLES DAVIS

SANDRA DAVIS

*Department of Political Science
Colorado State University, Ft. Collins*

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article was to examine public lands decision making in Wyoming with a particular emphasis on relationships between the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) administrators and their constituencies. Did this agency exhibit symptoms of "regulatory capture" in view of the Sagebrush Rebellion and the election of a development-oriented president in 1980, or did it, in fact, institutionalize pluralistic access patterns as a result of 1970s environmental legislation? The authors analyzed these questions using data from a survey of federal resource administrators and Wyoming citizens judged to be involved and influential in affecting land use decisions (including representatives from resource user groups, environmental organizations, and advisory boards). They concluded that public lands decisions as perceived by professional administrators and organizational participants tended to represent multiple rather than single interests, thereby rejecting the hypothesis that BLM is dominated by a particular group or industry.

The management of federally owned lands within the United States raises both policy and theoretical questions about the roles played by agency administrators, interest groups, the general public, and elected officials in shaping program decisions. Identifying the relevant "who" has implications for the distribution of resources devoted to resource conservation in relation to resource development activities. The stakes are quite high. Fully one-third of the national forests administered by the U. S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) are roadless and could qualify for wilderness designation,

thus removing a large amount of timber from consumptive use [1]. There are substantial oil and gas reserves on or near federal lands in the Western Overthrust Belt, a geologic fault which is found beneath the Rocky Mountains from Mexico to Canada. Approximately 60 percent of the land overlying these formations is federally owned [2].

Other land uses, including the diversion of water from national forests, livestock grazing, mineral extraction, and recreation, among others, carry significant potential for political conflict between environmentalists, stockmen, timber, mining, and energy firms, recreationists, and, on occasion, local governments. Determining the appropriate locus of decision making is inexorably intertwined with programmatic preferences. Attitudes toward federal/state relations in natural resource issues, for example, are often consistent with individual or organizational positions on the appropriateness of selected land uses [3].

The increasing policy significance of public lands management provides ample justification for the reexamination of administrative theories used to explain actions taken by the BLM or Forest Service. Much of the literature on the behavior of these agencies is drawn from scholarly work on bureaucratic politics, generally, and the capture-conformity debate which focuses on the relationship between regulatory agencies and their clientele. Renewed interest in public lands policy has been sparked, in part, by media attention to a series of actions within the western states popularly referred to as the "Sagebrush Rebellion" and, in academic circles, by the publication of *Public Lands Politics* [4]. Using a combination of aggregate data from the U. S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and survey data obtained from interviews with governmental officials and a variety of groups affected by or interested in public lands programs, the author examined the degree of group influence over agency decisions. He concluded that both agencies were sensitive to a wide array of interests and that the presence of multiple client groups permitted greater decisional latitude to public managers than single-constituency agencies. Neither the BLM nor the Forest Service, in other words, exhibited behavior characteristics of "captured agencies."

While Culhane's work broke new ground (so to speak) in systematically examining group influence in public lands policy-making, it is unclear whether agency actions are a response to the political priorities of the incumbent presidential administration. It should be noted that the data for his study were collected in 1973, an era in which environmental values were clearly ascendant.

Between the early 1970s and the present, decision-making processes within the BLM and the Forest Service have been complicated by a series of policy and political developments. Natural resource legislation, such as the National Forest Management Act of 1976 and the Federal Lands Policy and Management Act of 1976 (which gave BLM formal statutory authority to administer public lands programs) effectively formalized the role of public participation in planning and

rulemaking processes and, in some cases, increased opportunities for the review of administrative recommendations by nongovernmental scientists [5, 6].

These changes, coupled with federal court decisions which extended citizen comment provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to specific public lands issues,¹ served to fan the flames of discontent among western ranchers, resource industries (timber, hard rock minerals, energy, etc.), and key legislators opposed to the growth in land use restrictions [7, 8]. The Sagebrush Rebellion was the political embodiment of these concerns, a movement which emphasized the importance of handling public lands issues at the state rather than the federal level, whenever possible. President Ronald Reagan not only pledged his support for the objectives of this movement in the 1980 election campaign but proceeded to appoint officials with a clear developmental bias to head agencies responsible for the management of public lands programs [9].

The purpose of this article was to examine a number of questions raised by Culhane's study, circa 1985. Particular attention will be devoted to the following concerns. Given a different political and economic climate, is it likely that the pattern of influence over public lands decisions by several groups representing differing values will be maintained? Or can we identify a bias in the direction of program management activities which favor one set of interests more than others? Does agency decision making illustrate a slight policy shift due to differing interpretations of "multiple use" formulae or a more dramatic change akin to the recapturing of an organization by its dominant clientele group(s)? In short, our analysis will indicate the extent to which agency accommodation of multiple interests has been institutionalized by the BLM and the extent to which program management actions are affected by changing presidential administrations and policy priorities.

Following a review of the literature and the presentation of research expectations, we will examine these questions using information obtained from interviews with policy actors judged to be influential in public lands program management decisions. The attitudes of BLM administrators, interest group representatives, advisory board members, and selected individuals toward patterns of influence in three issue areas are analyzed—wilderness designation, the harvesting of timber, and livestock grazing on federal lands. Also discussed

¹ The National Environmental Protection Act of 1969 (NEPA) required that environmental impact statements (EISs) be prepared by federal agencies for major land use decisions affecting the environment. Draft statements of the EISs had to be circulated for public review and comment and administrators were directed to give citizen input careful consideration in all subsequent decisions. The practical effect of this requirement was to provide environmentalists with an early warning system for the identification of issues. Planning and information gathering could then be undertaken for issues of particular concern to citizens and/or organizations. As a consequence of NEPA and subsequent clarifications by the federal courts, public involvement provisions were built into the public lands legislation of the 1970s.

is the degree of change in group influence observed by our respondents between the Carter and Reagan Administrations. The geographical scope of our study is the state of Wyoming—a jurisdiction containing land which is 49 percent federally owned.

BACKGROUND

A conceptual starting point for analyzing relationships between BLM and its clientele is the bureaucratic politics literature. Governmental agencies can be viewed as organizations seeking to survive and prosper within the political arena [10, 11]. The degree of influence exercised by any given agency is associated with a variety of factors; including its sense of organizational esprit, the strength of its political following, the esteem with which its expertise is held by outsiders, and the skill of its leadership [12].

On occasion, efforts to acquire political support for organizational objectives require some modification of agency procedures or activities. Phillip Selznick's classic study of the Tennessee Valley Authority concludes that the appointment of politically prominent farmers to the governing board and the subsequent alteration of its operating goals was the minimum political price needed to gain credibility in the eyes of local constituents. In turn, area agricultural interests were effectively "coopted" into supporting the TVA in later skirmishes involving budgetary and program priorities.

Critics of public lands management within the BLM direct attention to the methods of soliciting group support outlined by Selznick and suggest that this agency has been far too receptive to the demands of user organizations. Recognition of private sector needs by governmental administrators and a willingness to be flexible in rule interpretation and program administration, in their view, becomes more pronounced over time. Accommodation to industry interests is politically useful for agency operatives since the issues initially associated with the creation of regulatory authority have become less salient to the public while support from executives and legislators is increasingly unpredictable. The result, according to Foss [13] and McConnell [14], is the "capture" of natural resource agencies by regulated groups. While lip service is given to the multiple-use land management philosophy long championed by the Forest Service and, more recently, by the BLM, the allocation of resources has favored developmental concerns in relation to conservationist or environmental quality objectives.

The political, institutional, and organizational vehicles for the exercise of influence by user groups included maintaining access to legislators well positioned to affect agency decisions, the delegation of discretionary program management authority to BLM administrators by Congress, and the development of advisory boards to make land use recommendations. Agency resource managers were ostensibly given considerable latitude to use their best professional

judgement in administrative actions but there were few opportunities for advocates of conservationist practices to make their case. Congressional committees charged with the responsibility of overseeing public lands programs administered by the Department of the Interior (including the BLM) were often stacked with legislators closely allied with ranching, timber, and mining interests. According to Calef [15], these congressmen effectively thwarted the implementation of public range restrictions mandated by the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934, a policy designed to slow the productivity loss and erosion associated with overgrazing.

Group pressure to retain unrestricted use of the public lands was equally evident at the local or district level of agency decision making. According to Foss [13], BLM-advisory board relationships were characterized by a *de facto* dominant user philosophy in the pre-1960 era. These boards consisted largely of area ranchers to make recommendations on an array of administrative concerns such as the "carrying capacity"² of the range. Estimates of grazing capacity were often inflated and other policy actors within the Interior Department and the congressional Interior committees were reluctant to back agency actions that would provoke opposition from the stockmen and their political allies. Susceptibility to pressure was exacerbated by the absence of nonrange programs which could be used to attract and nurture alternative constituency groups.

An alternative view of the BLM and its relationship with varying groups is suggested by an examination of shifting policy priorities and management practices over the past quarter century as well as the writings of public lands scholars. We have already alluded to the passage of federal environmental legislation during the 1970s. An important consequence has been the injection of organizational participants with differing values and objectives into a policy system often depicted as autonomous and non-controversial. Moreover, BLM has taken steps to handle the growth and diversity of information requirements. Staffing procedures have been altered to accommodate a more interdisciplinary mix of professionals. Broader perspectives for multiple-use decision making have been added through the employment of anthropologists, sociologists, and planners, thus supplementing the more traditional resource use emphasis characteristic of administrators trained in forestry or range management.

While acknowledging that policy shifts have made it easier for natural resource agencies to develop multiple bases of support, several analysts contend that the BLM has generally taken a more independent path in administering public lands programs than is evident from a survey of the captured agency literature. To some extent, differing interpretations reflect changing circumstances. Most students of public lands administration would agree that the Grazing Service

² Carrying capacity refers to an estimate of the number of livestock that can graze within a given amount of rangeland without causing plant decline or soil erosion. Administrators typically survey an area using animal-unit-months or AUMS (the amount of forage required to maintain a thousand pound cow or sheep for one month) as the units of measurement, thereby providing baseline information for the assessment of grazing fees.

(later to be renamed the BLM) of the 1930s and 1940s did in fact make decisions in accordance with dominant constituency interests [16].

On the other hand, it is alleged that the sensitivity of BLM administrators to non-user land management objectives predates the environmental movement. Fairfax contends that BLM had transformed itself into a more professional agency by the early 1960s and was fully capable of managing lands in accordance with multiple-use objectives [17].³ Much of what appeared to be “new” in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) was, in her view, formal congressional ratification of programs and management activities that the Bureau had been following for a decade or more. A temporary grant of management authority to the BLM authorized by the Classification and Multiple Use Act of 1964 was parlayed into an ongoing effort to administer lands under its jurisdiction for a variety of purposes. Allowable uses such as livestock grazing were examined not only in terms of capacity (usually expressed in animal unit months) but in relation to alternative concerns such as wildlife preservation or recreational potential.

The conclusion that BLM has developed sufficient bases of clientele support, technical expertise, and respect from other policy actors to implement land use programs without regard to undue political pressure or interference is echoed by Culhane in his study of public land politics [4]. That groups exercised influence in administrative decision making was not a matter of dispute. The question was whether the existence of such influence was tantamount to capture. According to Culhane, a pair of assumptions guiding the analysis of earlier capture theorists—the homogeneity of interests within an administrator’s district and the political necessity of responding affirmatively to their demands—did not hold up well within the decision-making climate of the 1970s. In his words:

The Service and Bureau are neither uniformly captured nor uncaptured, but variably captured. Local administrators could be termed captured on timber sales policy when the forest products industry was strong, for example, and uncaptured when it was not . . . This kind of group influence is not the same as that which triggered the 1960 capture-conformity debate, however, because the agencies are responding in variable and locally appropriate ways to balanced, heterogeneous constituencies.

In addition, he directed attention to the multiple-use philosophy and public participation requirements as tools that could be used by adept administrators to politically balance the claims of contending interests.

³ Multiple-use, as defined by the Multiple-Use-Sustained Yield Act of 1960, Section 531 (a), refers to “the management of all the various renewable surface resources of the national forests so that they are utilized in the combination that will best meet the needs of the American people; making the most judicious use of the land for some or all of these resources . . . and harmonious and coordinated management of the various resources, each with the other, without impairment of the productivity of the land, with consideration being given to the relative values of the various resources, and not necessarily the combination of uses that will give the greatest dollar return or the greatest unit output.”

RESEARCH EXPECTATIONS

We now turn to the development of research expectations for the analysis of group influence in administrative decisions affecting wilderness designation, timber harvesting, and livestock grazing on public lands. Deciding which school of thought is more applicable to the politics of specific issues is complicated by the differential time frame of published work, policy trends, changing political perspectives on the role of government in managing public lands, and the dearth of empirically-based research. Consequently, the generation of hypotheses is guided not only by issue-specific conclusions called from the literature cited above but our consideration of additional factors, such as the degree of controversy associated with the development or implementation of land use programs and the extent to which program decisions are centralized or decentralized.

The preservation of wilderness areas within federal public lands is perhaps the most controversial of the issues examined in this study. At stake is the relevant share of the undeveloped areas under the jurisdiction of BLM to be set aside for wilderness designation, thereby excluding or severely limiting access to these areas for timber, mining, or ranching interests.⁴ Political opposition has arisen not only from user groups but public sector land managers concerned about a loss of autonomy in the decision making process as well [19].

While wilderness proponents tend to perceive the decision-making process as overly dominated by technical and economic considerations [2], they often underscore the point that a national political constituency has emerged for the preservation of scenic, undeveloped areas. According to Leshy [1], wilderness has become a "motherhood-and-apple-pie" issue capable of shaping the public's attitude toward other, more economically significant, natural resource concerns. Environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club, the Environmental Defense Fund, and the Wilderness Society, among others, have pressured both the Congress and the Executive Branch to act on a number of issues, including the Alaska Lands Act of 1980, the Reagan Administration decision to reconsider allowing mineral exploration by energy firms in wilderness areas, and the expansion of land acreage to be protected in state wilderness bills.⁵ In short, advocates of wilderness preservation can often affect local decisions by attracting media attention and subsequent political support from nationally-based environmental groups and key members of Congress. Accordingly, we expect to find that environmental organizations and the public are perceived to be particularly influential on this issue.

⁴ A useful analysis of energy exploration in wilderness areas is contained in R. McGreggor Cawley, "Wilderness Policy" [18].

⁵ A useful summary of state wilderness bills embraced within the 1984 Act is found in Ross Gorte, "Wilderness in the 98th Congress" [20].

The harvesting of timber on public lands has also become an increasingly controversial issue but lacks the political “sex appeal” of wilderness concerns. The continuing needs for lumber from the national forests is underscored by

1. the rising demand for plywood, boards, paper, and other wood products;
2. the declining productivity of privately owned timberlands; and
3. the sizeable percentage of commercially viable sawtooth reserves (50%) on federally-owned land [2].

Under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), the BLM’s multiple-use mission for the management of timber preserves was formally approved, thus setting the stage for political conflict between lumber products companies and environmental organizations with agency administrators as the referees.

Few land use issues bring into contention the array of management values found in this one. BLM administrators remain strongly committed to the “scientific management” of forests originally contained within the conservationist philosophy espoused by Forest Service Chief Gifford Pinchot in the early 1900s [21]. Among the more current—and controversial—applications of this doctrine is the sustained yield concept.⁶ This is used by agency officials to estimate the allowable timber cut within a given area over a specified period of time. According to Rosenbaum [22], the implementation of sustained yield requires “a non-declining, even-flow policy which limits the lumber harvest in a particular area to a constant, or increasing, rate—but never a declining one.”

Since the practical effect of this policy is to restrict the cutting of old-growth forests near communities that are economically dependent on timber, opposition to its implementation has mounted from wood-related industries, state and local governments, and elected officials concerned about economic growth. Both the Reagan Administration, and, to a lesser extent, the Carter Administration supported a departure from sustained yield principles to permit a larger timber harvest for the purpose of meeting increased demand [1].

Still another set of arguments is offered by environmentalists who express some disagreement with the current interpretation of sustained yield in land management decisions but are particularly appalled at recommendations made by the current Administration to increase the allowable cut.⁷ More recently, they have sought to forge political coalitions with key personnel within the OMB and a variety of conservative organizations by adding “economic efficiency” concerns to reinforce traditional emphases on aesthetic values, resource

⁶ Sustained yield, as defined by the Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act of 1960, Section 531, refers to “the achievement and maintenance in perpetuity of a high-level annual or regular periodic output for the various renewable resources of the national forests without impairment of the productivity of the land.”

⁷ The allowable cut is the estimated volume of timber that can be harvested on a given Forest Service administrative unit. Board-feet are employed as units of measure and it usually represents the average for a specified period of time, e.g., ten years.

conservation, and the preservation of wildlife habitat [8, 22]. One of the more commonly cited examples of administrative practices that are both inefficient and environmentally unsound is the use of existing timber wealth to cross-subsidize uneconomical forest management activities [24].

To date, allowable timber cut has not received the widespread media attention and public concern commonly associated with wilderness decisions but it has achieved a high degree of administrative centralization. The interest and involvement of high level officials within the Interior Department on this issue coupled with the political potency of growth and employment arguments offered at local administrative hearings leads us to expect our respondents to report greater patterns of influence among resource user groups than environmentalists, recreational organizations, or the public.

Livestock grazing on the public lands represents a longstanding use of federal rangelands, providing forage for about 3 percent of the beef cattle within the United States and 28 percent of the sheep. Usage is clearly more pronounced in the western states, accounting for 17 percent of all livestock forage and providing supplemental beef for other ranching operations [25]. The livestock industry retains considerable economic importance for many small towns and cities in this region, and, for most ranchers, access to the public range is the key to remaining fiscally solvent [2].

Livestock grazing on federal rangelands is regulated by BLM administrators through a system of fees and permits. The current fee structure is set by a Congressionally-determined formula which varies with fluctuations in prices received for sheep and cattle and ranchers' production costs. Issuance of permits is based upon the number of animal unit months (the amount of forage required to maintain a thousand-pound cow for one month) that can be absorbed by a given area of rangeland without undue plant or soil deterioration [26].

We have already alluded to the problems confronting resource administrators in the pre-1960 era. Their ability to make implementable management decisions on range carrying capacity and the issuance of permits was restricted by the political clout of the stockmen (exercised locally through the grazing advisory boards and nationally by western legislators assigned to committees with resource policy responsibilities), limited financial resources, and a narrow constituency base. However, studies by Fairfax [17] and Culhane [4] indicate that decisions affecting rangeland conditions have become far less susceptible to political pressure from stockmen. The chief explanation offered for this changing state of political affairs was the success achieved by BLM in staving off efforts by the grazing boards in the early 1960s to challenge its definition of carrying capacity. Other contributing factors to the development of greater managerial independence included the expansion of programmatic responsibilities and constituency interests (the addition of environmentalists, energy firms, and recreationist groups), and the adoption of technical policy

advances (i.e., rest-rotation⁸) which eased the task of persuading ranchers to maintain or improve existing range conditions.

These changes were not accepted without resistance from the livestock industry. Ranchers led the way in subsequent calls for privatization of the public lands and the reassertion of state rather than federal regulatory authority. However, declining levels of political clout do not imply a lack of say in the decision-making process. Stockmen retain influence over range conservation programs because of their position as chief economic users and the lesser saliency of this issue for the public and other policy actors. This point receives empirical support from Culhane who found that ranchers had a relatively greater impact on grazing decisions than other organizational participants [4].

Since 1981, actions taken by Reagan Administration officials have reaffirmed the important role played by livestock industry operatives and their representatives in administrative decisions. According to Leshy, political commitments to reduce the federal presence on the range and promote grazing have been achieved through administrative directives and regulatory changes [1]. In short, decisions affecting grazing permits and AUM's have received attention from high-level officials without a corresponding expression of interest from the media or Congress. We hypothesize that stockmen and BLM advisory board members with a direct economic stake in range management decisions will be perceived as more influential on this issue than the public or environmentalists.

DATA AND METHODS

The setting for our study is Wyoming, a state which has experienced many of the public lands disputes characteristic of the western region of the United States. There are numerous areas containing both scenic attributes and high resource potential that have spawned conflict between environmentalists concerned about preservation and/or land use restrictions and resource user groups seeking greater access to these lands for exploration or development. The economic and political implications of resource allocation decisions for Wyoming citizens are considerable. Four of the state's leading economic sectors—energy (oil, gas, and coal), tourism/recreation, minerals, and agriculture—are industries that draw heavily on federal lands for their resource base.

We initially sought to identify individuals and organizations in Wyoming that were both involved and influential in public lands politics. Our first step was to request names from five individuals knowledgeable about these issues, including a journalist specializing in state environmental issues, an environmental group leader, one current and one former Forest Service administrator, and a current BLM employee. The subsequent list had 143 individuals—ninety-four

⁸ Rest-rotation is a range management strategy which is designed to maintain or improve soil and vegetation on the public lands. Three or more pastures are alternatively rested or grazed to increase the quality and quantity of range plants.

citizens/organizational participants and twenty-five professional land managers (PLMs). The recommended PLMs work in the BLM state office and the four BLM districts found within Wyoming. A mail questionnaire and follow-up telephone call or visit produced a PLM response rate of 60 percent (15/25).

The ninety-four citizen respondents included members of BLM Grazing Advisory Boards and BLM Multiple Use Advisory Boards, environmentalists, and people representing livestock, timber, and other economic interests. A return rate of 73.4 percent (69/94) was achieved with a two wave mailing of the questionnaire.

Once the surveys had been returned, we attempted to determine why citizen respondents became interested and involved in public lands policymaking. In general, they did so because of

1. a dependence on the use of public land resources for their livelihood;
2. a commitment to environmental values; or
3. a general concern about public land decisions without falling into either of the preceding categories.

Based on the experts' recommendation and job descriptions, the citizens were divided into three groups. The first group, economic resource users or ERUs, is comprised of ranchers, employees and owners of timber, utility and coal mine companies and managers of organizations which represent economic interests. Environmentalists (ENVs) form the second group. The third group, the citizen representatives (CRs), sit on a BLM Grazing Advisory Board (GAB) or a BLM Multiple Use Advisory Board (MUAB) and work as educators, accountants, lawyers, engineers, investment brokers, real estate salesmen, and architects.

The three groups are quite distinct in their background characteristics and participation levels (see Table 1). The environmentalists (ENVs) are far younger than the economic resource users (ERUs) and citizen representatives (CRs). The ENVs are also more educated and likely to have spent half or more of their life living in a state other than Wyoming while the ERUs are more likely to have lived in the "cowboy state" for a long time and least likely to have a professional or graduate degree. The CRs have an educational background more similar to the ERUs but are more apt to resemble the ENVs in their tendency to have immigrated from another state.

In terms of organizational participation, the groups are markedly different. All of the ENVs and 40 percent of the CRs belong to an environmental or outdoor group while only 7 percent of the ERUs do so. Almost 70 percent of the ERUs are members of an organization which promotes economic development such as Wyoming Public Land Council, Wyoming Stockgrowers Association, Wyoming Timber Industry Association, and so on. Few of the ENVs (23%) and none of the CRs belong to such organizations. Finally, the three groups differ in their rates of participation at BLM meetings. The ENVs participate most (46% said they had been to six or more meetings in the last

Table 1. Citizen Background and Participation Characteristics (*N* = 69)

<i>Background</i>	<i>Organizational Affiliation (Percent)</i>		
	<i>ERU^a</i>	<i>ENV^b</i>	<i>CR^c</i>
Age			
28-45	27	85	10
46-60	40	15	60
61+	33	0	30
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>
Education			
High School or Less	36	0	22
Bachelors	49	25	44
Graduate or Professional	15	75	33
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>99</u>
State Lived Half or More in			
Wyoming	80	23	40
Other	20	77	60
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>
Organizations			
Outdoor-Environmental Member	7	100	40
Outdoor-Environmental Nonmember	93	0	60
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>
Economic Resource			
Member	69	23	0
Nonmember	31	77	100
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>
Number of Meetings Attended			
0-2	44	15	33
3-5	33	39	33
6 or more	22	46	33
	<u>99</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>99</u>

^a ERU = Economic Resource User.^b ENV = Environmentalist.^c CR = Citizen Representative.

Table 2. Perceived Influence of Different Groups on Public Land Decisions

<i>Decisions Influenced By</i>	<i>Perceptions of</i>				<i>Eta</i>	<i>Eta Squared</i>	<i>N</i>
	<i>BLM^a</i>	<i>ERU^b</i>	<i>ENV^c</i>	<i>CR^d</i>			
Timber Decisions							
Recreation Groups	-.08 ^e	.24	-.21	-.10	.31	.09	79
Timber Users	.57	.16	1.00	.40	.44	.19*	82
Environmentalists	.21	.67	0	.40	.42	.18*	83
Local Governments	-.07	-.11	-.07	0	.05	.00	82
Grazing Decisions							
Recreation Groups	-.54	.02	-.79	-.20	.43	.18	79
Ranchers	.93	.27	.79	.60	.42	.18*	83
Environmentalists	.43	.47	.07	.10	.26	.07	83
Local Government	-.08	-.30	-.23	-.10	.12	.01	80
Wilderness Decisions							
Recreation Groups	.60	.52	.29	.20	.24	.06	81
Environmentalists	.80	.82	.71	.80	.09	.01	83
Local Government	.27	-.19	.07	-.40	.27	.08	82

* Statistically significant at the .01 level.

^a BLM = Employees of the Bureau of Land Management.

^b ERU = Economic Resource Users such as ranchers or timber company employees.

^c ENV = Environmentalists.

^d CR = Citizen Representatives who sit on BLM advisory boards but are neither environmentalists nor economic resource users.

^e The group's average influence score which ranges from +1 (very influential) to -1 (not very influential).

year) while only 22 percent of the ERUs and 33 percent of the CRs report a similar level of activity.

FINDINGS

Group Influence Within Issue Areas

We asked the respondents to rate the influence of recreation groups, users, environmentalists, and local governments on the differing types of public land decisions. Groups serving in the +.3 to +1.0 range are judged to be very influential while scores closer to zero (-.29 to +.29) indicate that the group is somewhat influential. A lack of influence is suggested by the larger negative scores (-.3 to -1.0).

The perceived influence of differing groups on decisions affecting the harvesting of timber on public lands is summarized in Table 2. Recreationists are

reported to be somewhat influential by ERUs but their role in the decision-making process is not very large according to other organizational representatives. Both users (timber interests) and environmentalists are perceived to have greater clout although it is unclear which group has the upper hand. Virtually all respondents indicate that users are very or somewhat influential; however, the ERUs tend to deemphasize their ability to affect timber decisions while the ENVs are most likely to attribute influence to user groups on this issue.

A similar pattern of perceived influence exists for environmentalists. ERUs tended to identify ecological organizations as especially influential while ENVs are least likely to hold such views. BLM administrators indicate that user groups have somewhat greater clout on these issues than environmentalists. The two groups are judged to be equally important by CRs. In short, the ERUs and ENVs tend to minimize their own influence and to exaggerate the degree of clout wielded by the other in shaping resource management decisions.

The pattern of group influence on livestock grazing decisions is consistent with the preceding discussion (see Table 2). Both ranchers and environmentalists are seen as powerful. In the area of grazing policy, users (i.e., ranchers) are thought by BLMs and CRs to exert even more influence than users do in timber decisions. Most of the respondents describe the environmentalists as being very or somewhat influential. Again, the ENVs believe the ranchers have considerable clout while the ERUs are more modest in the amount of influence they assign to ranchers; conversely, ENVs were less likely than ERUs to report that environmentalists held much influence.

Recreation groups are perceived to be somewhat or not very influential, possibly because they have limited interest in using rangelands for recreational activities. Finally, local governments have some influence. To summarize, the users appear to predominate a bit more in decisions affecting livestock grazing than any group dominates timber decisions. Even so, the environmentalists are thought to exercise substantial influence.

Group influence on wilderness decisions differs from the other policy areas in three respects (see Table 2). First, recreational and environmental groups are perceived to be most important. Second, there is likely to be less conflict between environmentalists and recreation users than there is between environmentalists and either timber interests or grazers. Third, virtually all respondents agree (including the ENVs) that environmentalists are very influential.

On the other hand, group influence in this policy area is similar to other policy areas. Here, as elsewhere, the greatest influence is exercised by respondents with the most direct interest; i.e., ENVs have a major stake in this issue and act accordingly. Second, local governments are again perceived to have some influence. Our results thus point to a pattern of selective influence exercised by several groups in differing issue areas rather than a position of dominance assumed by one of the organizational participants.

Table 3. Perceptions of the Changing Influence of Users, Environmentalists, and Presidential Administrations on Public Land Decisions

<i>Influence in 1985 Compared to 1980</i>	<i>Changes Perceived By</i>				<i>Eta</i>		<i>N</i>
	<i>BLM^a</i>	<i>ERU^b</i>	<i>ENV^c</i>	<i>CR^d</i>	<i>Squared</i>		
Influence of Local Users	.27 ^e	.10	0	.10	.1	.01	79
Influence of Environmentalists	-.27	.36	.15	.60	.35	.12	80*
Influence of Reagan Administration	.80	.45	.67	.60	.22	.05	77

* Significant at the .05 level.

^a BLM = Bureau of Land Management Employees.

^b ERU = Economic Resource Users such as ranchers or timber company employees.

^c ENV = Environmentalists.

^d CR = Citizen Representatives who sit on BLM advisory committees but are not economic resource users or environmentalists.

^e The groups average influence score which ranged from more influence in 1985 than 1980 (+1) to less influence in 1985 than 1980 (-1).

Recent Changes in Patterns of Group Influence

Finally, we examine the impact that changing presidential policy priorities have had on groups' perceived ability to shape public land decisions. The local users are exercising about the same influence (see Table 3). The BLM employees were more likely to suggest that local users' influence had grown somewhat between 1980 and 1985. Contrary to other results in this article, the ERUs were slightly more likely than ENVs to report an increase in the power of local users. This incongruity may occur as ERUs evaluate users' influence in two different contexts. When ERUs compare their impact on decisions with that of environmentalists, they react by understating their own abilities to effectuate change. However, an assessment of group efforts between the Carter and Reagan Administrations results in a less modest appraisal. ERUs report a slight increase in their ability to influence decisions.

There was unanimous agreement that the Reagan Administration exerts more control over public lands policymaking than previous administrations. Not surprisingly, BLM employees who were in contact with the administration, were most likely to express this view. Finally, evaluations of environmentalists' influence are more disparate. The BLM employees were the only group to indicate that environmentalists now exercise less power, a position which is consistent with journalistic accounts of a declining commitment to environmental objectives in favor of resource development and deregulation.

The other respondents felt that environmentalists were holding their own (ENVs) or had increased their influence (ERSs and, especially, CRs). This suggests that the environmentalists' active role in policy process has become institutionalized.

The diversity of BLM opinions can be at least partially attributed to the length of time employees have worked for the agency. Overall, BLM employees indicate that professional values are of equal or slightly lesser importance in the decision-making process. However, employees with longer tenure as resource administrators are more likely than newer employees to hold this view (see Table 4).

There is a distinct difference in opinions about the influence of the Reagan Administration on policy. Most BLM employees describe the current Administration as having a greater impact on program management decisions than the Carter Administration, a belief which is especially pronounced among respondents with fifteen or more years of service (see Table 4). Senior administrators are also more likely to report that environmentalists have become somewhat less influential and to suggest that users have retained their same level of influence.

Conclusions based on a small group of respondents must be drawn with care. However, it is instructive to note that those most likely to minimize the

Table 4. BLM^a Employee Perceptions of the Changing Influence on Public Land Decisions

<i>Influence in 1985 Compared to 1980</i>	<i>Changes in Influence Perceived By</i>		
	<i>All BLM</i>	<i>BLM Employed 6-16 Years</i>	<i>BLM Employed 19-30 Years</i>
Influence of Local Users			
More	29 ^b (4) ^c	43 (3)	17 (1)
Same	64 (9)	57 (4)	67 (4)
Less	7 (1)	0 (0)	17 (1)
Total	100 (14)	100 (7)	101 (6)

^a BLM = Bureau of Land Management

^b Percentage of respondents.

^c Number of respondents.

Table 4. (Cont'd.)

<i>Influence in 1985 Compared to 1980</i>	<i>Changes in Influence Perceived By</i>		
	<i>All BLM</i>	<i>BLM^a Employed 6-16 Years</i>	<i>BLM Employed 19-30 Years</i>
Influence of Environmentalists			
More	14 ^b (2) ^c	14 (1)	17 (1)
Same	50 (7)	57 (4)	33 (2)
Less	36 (5)	29 (2)	50 (3)
Total	100 (14)	100 (7)	100 (6)
Influence of Professional Values			
More	14 (2)	29 (2)	0 (0)
Same	43 (6)	57 (4)	33 (2)
Less	43 (6)	14 (1)	67 (4)
Total	100 (14)	100 (7)	100 (6)
Influence of Reagan Administration			
More	86 (12)	71 (5)	100 (6)
Same	14 (2)	29 (2)	0 (0)
Less	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Total	100 (14)	100 (7)	100 (6)

^a BLM = Bureau of Land Management.

^b Percentage of respondents.

^c Number of respondents.

importance of professional values and environmentalists while acknowledging the substantial role played by the Reagan Administration are the more senior administrators who can personally compare how public land decisions were made before and after the emergence of the environmental movement and the election of Ronald Reagan. These individuals have had ample opportunity to see public land decisions become contested by a larger number of interests, each of which is intent upon shaping decisions to suit group objectives.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

We were motivated to undertake this research by three concerns. First, we sought to examine the relative influence of Wyoming constituencies on BLM decisions in three areas of public land policy—timber, grazing, and wilderness issues. Second, although early theorists suggested capture occurs if the administrators' constituency is so homogeneous that the agency must accede to the constituents' demands, this is, as Culhane notes, too simplistic a definition [4]. We wanted to describe the pressures which are brought to bear on public land administrators and to thereby discuss the latitude of the administrator to make what he deems to be an appropriate decision. Third, we wanted to examine the effect of heightened presidential administration interest in (and possibly control over) BLM decisions.

We began with a set of research expectations in each policy area and much (but not all) of the data lend support to these hypotheses. In timber and grazing decisions we expected and found that users were very influential. In both issue areas the ERUs and ENVs "accuse" each other of exercising the greater power and more modestly assess their own influence. The PLMs and CRs come closer to ratifying the ENVs' view that users exercise far greater power in grazing decisions, suggesting that while there is conflict and competition in both areas, conflict is less and the corresponding user control is greater in grazing than timber decisions. The data suggest that neither environmentalists nor grazers or timbering interests are able to dictate decisions. In either issue area, administrators ought to have the latitude they need to make decisions.

We also hypothesized that environmentalists and the public would be particularly important in shaping wilderness decisions. There is partial confirmation for this expectation. Environmentalists are perceived to be more powerful in this issue area than any other user is thought to be in any of the public land issues. In wilderness issues the data also suggest that the public exercises more clout than they manage in timber or grazing decisions. This finding, however, should be tempered by the realization that public influence is appreciably less than recreation group influence and substantially less than environmental power. Moreover, agency decision-making procedures explicitly identify public comments as one of three criteria to be used in issuing wilderness recommendations. This emphasis is less clear cut in timber or range management decisions.

What are the implications of these findings for the capture-conformity debate? To conclude that the BLM has been captured requires empirical verification that decision making is dominated by a particular interest or set of interests, that administrators have little leeway to exercise discretionary authority in accordance with professional values (or to reconcile such values with political considerations), and that higher echelon officials are either uninvolved in administrative matters or routinely approve actions taken by these agencies. None of these conditions was found here. Our conclusions on perceived patterns of influence in varying issue areas are similar to those reported by Culhane in his analysis of public lands decision-making, circa 1973. In like fashion, the data suggest that BLM administrators are not uniformly captured or uncaptured but are responsive to heterogeneous constituencies.

Administrators are also well positioned to balance the interests of contending groups and thereby retain their managerial autonomy because of their adherence to a multiple-use management philosophy and the inclusion of statutorily-mandated provisions for public participation in administrative decisions or recommendations. Open meetings or hearings provide not only an opportunity for citizens and newer organizational participants to express program preferences in the best traditions of local representative democracy but a strategic tool which can be used to counter specific claims or demands found to be inconsistent with land management objectives.

Finally, we sought to determine whether changing presidential administrations adversely affected the degree of decisional latitude possessed by BLM officials in their evaluation of prospective land use options. Most respondents agreed that the current Administration wields greater influence than the preceding one and that the principle effect of these changes is a greater emphasis on resource development rather than conservation or environmental protection. However, the link between presidential influence and perceptions of managerial autonomy is less obvious. BLMs are evenly divided in assessing the relative influence of professional values on the decision-making process in 1985 versus 1980 but these differences are at least partially attributable to the length of one's tenure as a resource administrator. Senior BLM officials are less likely than more junior administrators to agree that professional values retain the same effect on agency decisions.

We conclude that public lands decision making as perceived by professional administrators and organizational participants tends to reflect a pattern of multiple rather than single interests. Federal statutes providing opportunities for citizen and group comments on administrative concerns, the institutionalization of environmental organizations as legitimate policy actors, the growing professionalism and occupational diversity of natural resource administrators, increased programmatic responsibilities, and the development of several constituencies have reduced the probability of agency domination by a particular interest group. While presidential administrations will certainly vary

in terms of policy direction and administrative style, it is likely that groups with a strong interest or stake in a given program management issue will receive due consideration in the decision-making process.

REFERENCES

1. J. Leshy, National Resource Policy, in *Natural Resources and the Environment*, P. Portney (ed.), Urban Institute Press, Washington, DC, 1984.
2. T. Arrandale, *The Battle for Natural Resources*, CQ Press, Washington, DC, 1983.
3. J. Francis and R. Ganzel, *Western Public Lands*, Rowman and Allanheld, Totowa, NJ, 1984.
4. P. Culhane, *Public Lands Politics*, Resources for the Future, Baltimore, MD, 1981.
5. H. Cortner and D. Schweitzer, Institutional Limits to National Public Planning for Forest Resources, *Natural Resources Journal*, 21, pp. 203-222, 1981.
6. T. R. Fortenbery and H. R. Harris, Public Participation, The Forest Service, and NFMA: Hold the Line, *Public Land Law Review*, 4, pp. 51-87, 1983.
7. J. G. Francis, Environmental Values, Intergovernmental Politics, and the Sagebrush Rebellion, in *Western Public Lands*, J. G. Francis and R. Ganzel (eds.), Rowman and Allanheld, Totowa, NJ, 1984.
8. R. H. Nelson, Why the Sagebrush Revolt Burned Out, *Regulation*, 8, pp. 27-35, 1984.
9. P. Culhane, Sagebrush Rebels in Office: Jim Watt's Land and Water Politics, in *Environmental Policy in the 1980's: Reagan's New Agenda*, N. J. Vig and M. E. Kraft (eds.), CQ Press, Washington, DC, 1984.
10. N. Long, *The Polity*, Rand-McNally, Chicago, IL, 1962.
11. J. D. Thompson, *Organizations in Action*, McGraw-Hill, New York, NY, 1984.
12. F. Rourke, *Bureaucracy, Politics and Public Policy*, Little, Brown, Boston, MA, 1976.
13. P. Foss, *Politics and Grass*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, WA, 1960.
14. G. McConnell, *Private Power and American Democracy*, Knopf, New York, NY, 1966.
15. W. Calef, *Private Grazing and Public Lands*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, 1960.
16. P. Gates, *History of Public Land Law Development*, Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1968.
17. S. K. Fairfax, Beyond the Sagebrush Rebellion: The BLM as Neighbor and Manager in the Western States, in *Western Public Lands*, J. G. Francis and R. Ganzel (eds.), Rowman and Allanheld, Totowa, NJ, 1984.
18. R. M. Cawley, Wilderness Policy: When Compromise is Not a Compromise, paper delivered at the Western Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Las Vegas, NV, 1985.

19. C. Allin, *The Politics of Wilderness Preservation*, Greenwood Press, Westport, CT, 1982.
20. R. Gorte, Wilderness in the 98th Congress, *Congressional Research Service Review*, 6, pp. 16-18, 1985.
21. S. P. Hays, *Conservation and The Gospel of Efficiency*, Atheneum, New York, NY, 1975.
22. W. A. Rosenbaum, *Environmental Politics and Policy*, CQ Press, Washington, DC, 1985.
23. W. F. Hyde, Compounding Clear-Cuts: The Social Failures of Public Timber Management in the Rockies, in *Bureaucracy vs. Environment*, J. Baden and R. L. Stroup (eds.), The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, MI, 1981.
24. B. Dowdle, An Institutional Dinosaur with an Ace: Or, How to Piddle Away Public Timber Wealth and Foul the Environment in the Process, in *Bureaucracy vs. Environment*, J. Baden and R. L. Stroup (eds.), The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, MI, 1981.
25. A. Backiel, Rangeland Management Issues in the 99th Congress, *Congressional Research Service Review*, 6, pp. 18-21, 1985.
26. S. Dana and S. Fairfax, *Public Lands Politics*, Resources for the Future, Baltimore, MD, 1981.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Kaufman, H., *The Forest Ranger*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD, 1960.
- Mercure, D. V., Jr. and W. M. Ross, The Wilderness Act: A Product of Congressional Compromise, in *Congress and the Environment*, R. A. Cooley and G. Wandesforde-Smith (eds.), University of Washington Press, Seattle, WA, 1970.
- Reich, C., *Bureaucracy and the Forests*, Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, Santa Barbara, CA, 1962.
- Selznick, P., *TVA and the Grass Roots*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 1949.

Direct reprint requests to:

Charles Davis
 Department of Political Science
 Colorado State University
 Fort Collins, CO 80523