

Community Mobilization in Support and Opposition of Wind Energy Development: Evidence from Wasco and Sherman Counties, Oregon



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Outline

- Introduction
- Theoretical Foundations
- Research Methods
- Case Summaries
- Analysis
- Discussion
- Conclusions

Introduction

- Renewables sector has the privileged status in the 'energy-environment nexus' (Szarka 2006)
- Governments encourage wind energy development (Ottinger *et al.* 2014)
- Wind energy enjoys broad public support (Bell *et al.* 2005; Bidwell 2013; Ansolabehere and Konisky 2014)
- Local resistance to particular proposals for large-scale wind energy facilities (Bidwell 2016)

Research Question

- Extensive research on the drivers of such a 'gap' in public attitudes (Bell et al. 2005; Batel and Devine-Wright, 2014; Loring 2007; Graham et al. 2009; Wüstenhagen et al. 2007; Kasperson and Ram 2013)
- Little focus on: 1) factors that determine not only community attitudes but also mobilization efforts ; 2) drivers of not only community opposition but also support
- Research Question: why and how community mobilize their efforts to support or oppose wind energy developments

Theoretical Framework I

- Studies on wind energy siting and community acceptance
- Distributive justice: allocation of costs and benefits
- Procedural justice: fairness and transparency of the decision-making, approval policy regimes (Fast and Mabee 2015), public participation (Ottinger et al. 2014, Eltham et al. 2008, Loring 2007)
- Community context: past experience of energy development (Krause et al. 2016), community values and beliefs (Bidwell 2013), place attachment (Devine-Wright 2005)

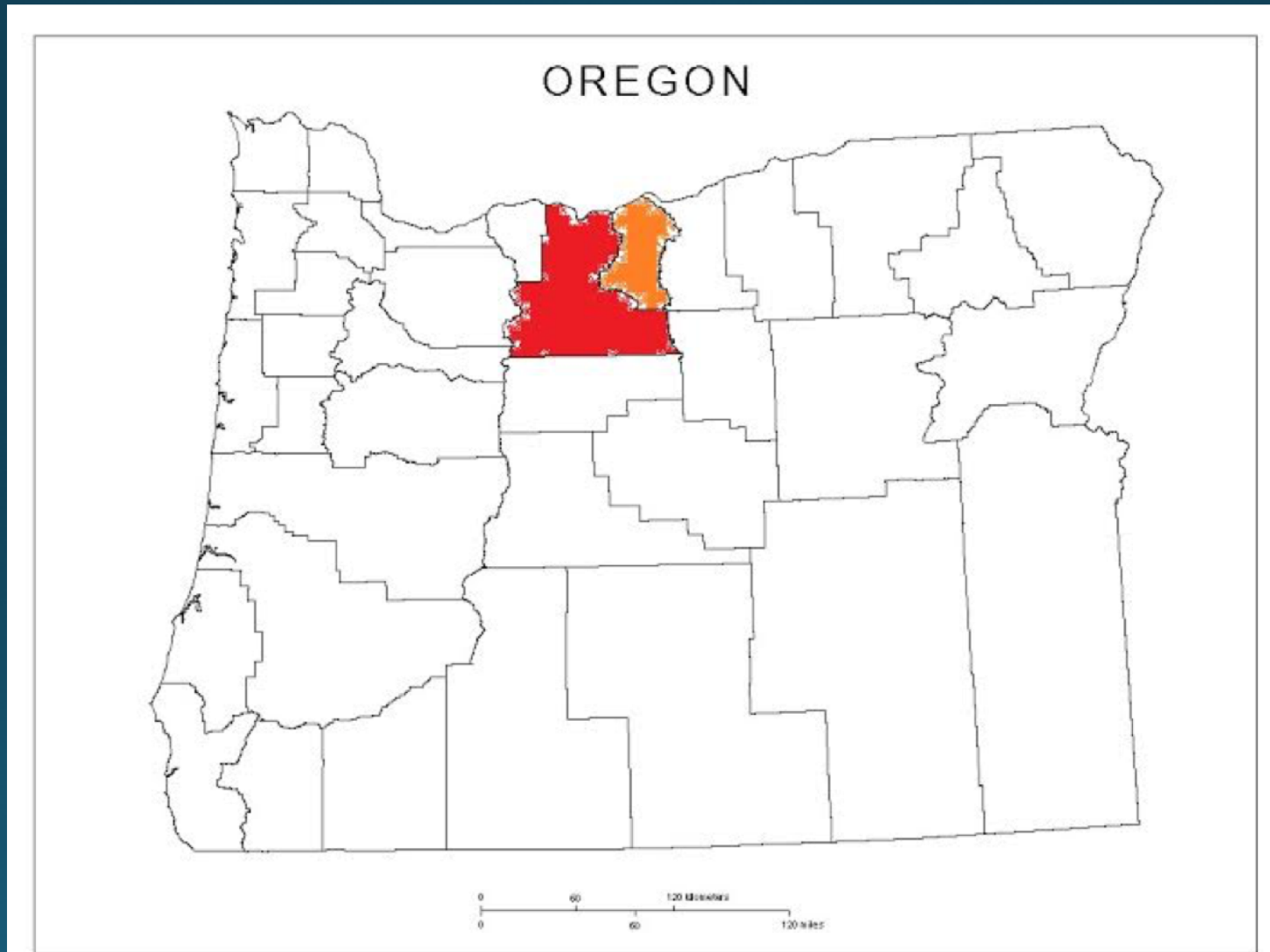
Theoretical Framework II

- Drivers of community mobilization (Boudet 2016)
- Threat: a perceived risk of not mobilizing (Boudet 2016)
- Political opportunity: formal and informal political structure that enhances or prevents actions (McAdam 1996)
- Resources: organizations, funding, information, experience (Carmin 2003)
 - Biophysical and socio-economic factors that influence primary explanatory factors (Freudenburg and Gramling 1993)

Research Methods

- **Research design** (McAdam and Boudet 2012)
- **Coding newspaper articles and letters to the editor** (February 2005 - December 2013)
- **Secondary data review** (census data, regulatory documents, previous studies)
- **Interviews with 13 individuals** (county and state officials, a developer representative, active opponents, active supporters, representatives from environmental and academic organizations , and a reporter who covered the cases)
- **Thematic coding** (primary codes from the literature, secondary codes from the data)

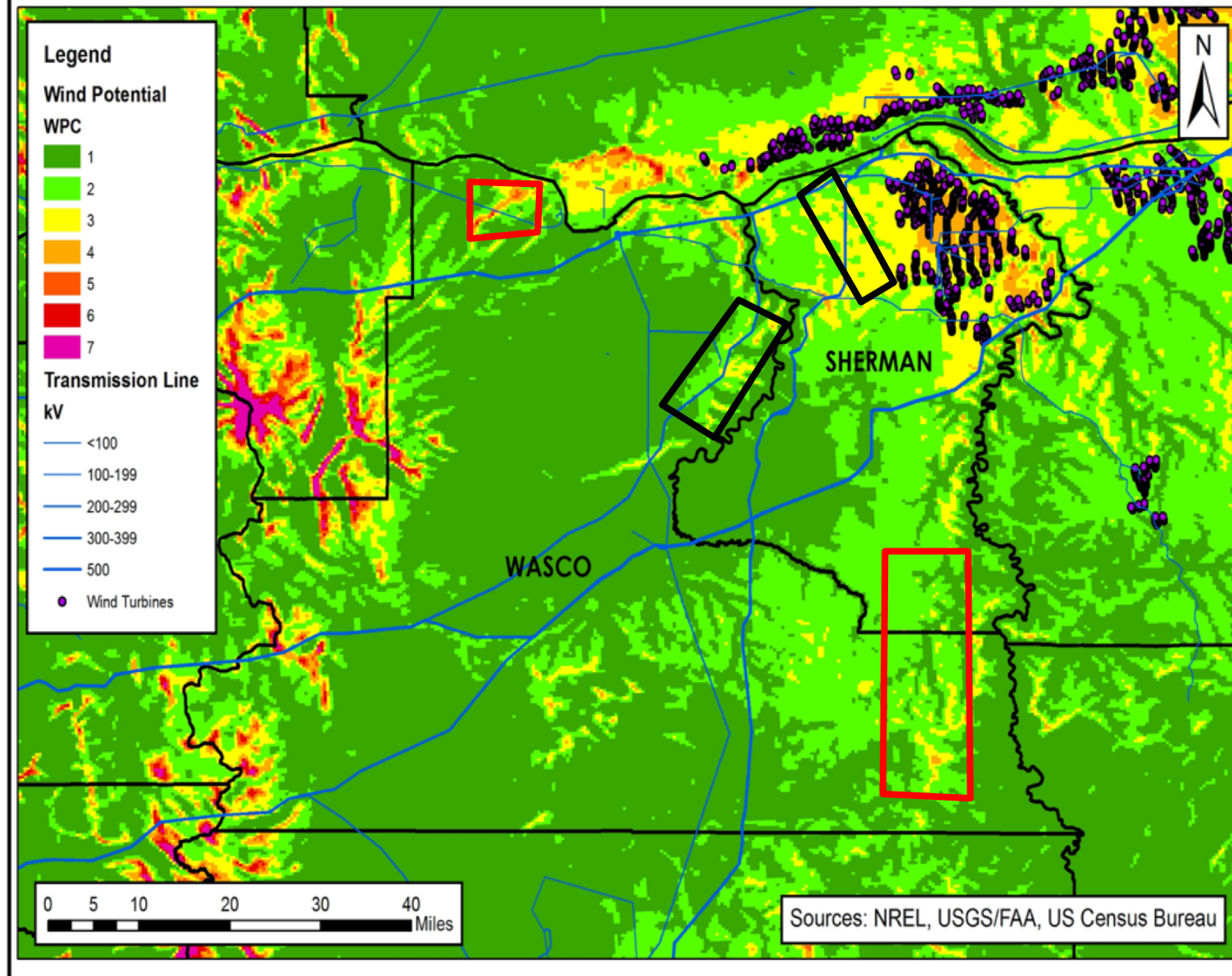
Wasco and Sherman Counties



Background

	Wasco	Sherman	Oregon
Population (total)	23,791	1,934	3,421,399
Population Density (people/sq. mi)	10	2.3	35.6
Median Household Income	\$35,959	\$35,142	\$40,916
Population over 60 years old	21.3	23.3	16.6
Unemployment Rate	7.8%	8.5%	5.0%
Population in Poverty	12.94%	14.57%	11.61%
Median Home Value	\$105,500	\$77,400	\$152,100
Sources: US Census 2000, BLS Local Area Unemployment Statistics Map			

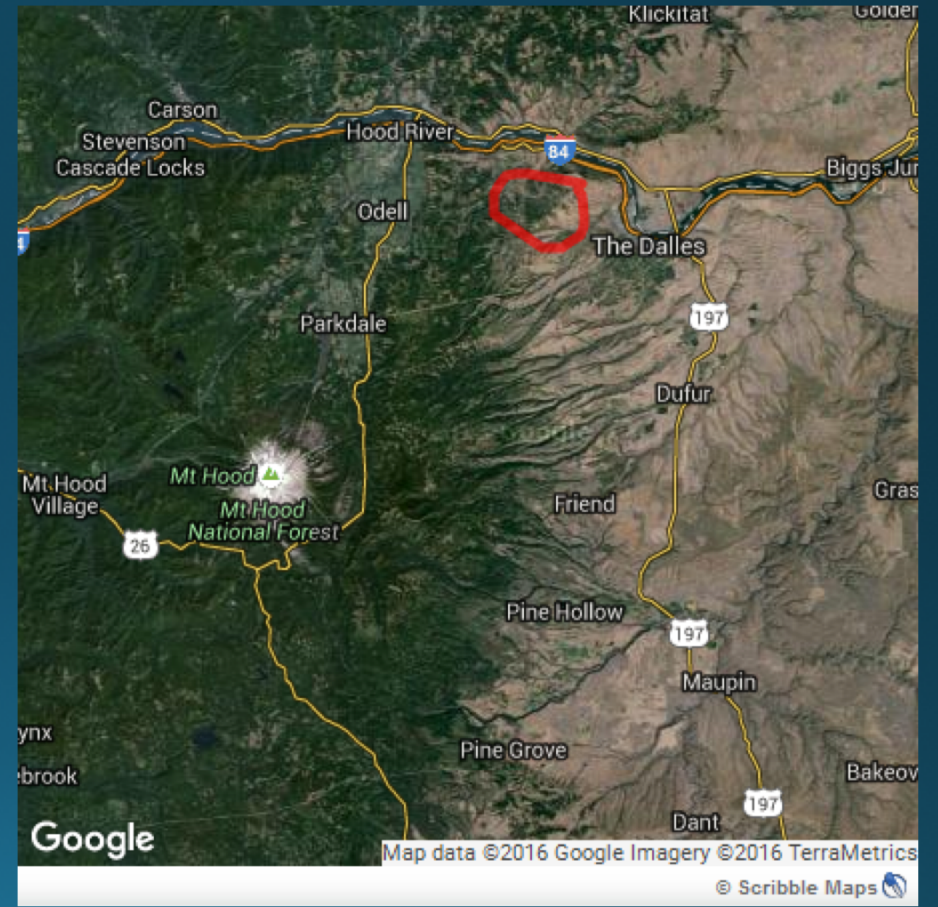
Wind Potential and Turbines in Wasco and Sherman Counties



Mobilization against Cascade Wind

Threat

- Adverse impacts on a large number of adjacent residents
- Negative impacts on local habitat
- Disturbance of National Scenic Area: “Yes, we do need green energy; and there are many good choices for windmill placement which are not in the middle of a scenic area. Tourists are not coming here to see windmills; they come for the beauty of the gorge.... We need to be stewards of this beauty” (Widge Johnson, The Dalles Chronicle June 19 2007).



Political opportunity

- Openness of the institutional decision making
 - The Oregon Energy Facility Siting Council process offers venues for public participation: public hearings and comments, contested cases
- Elite allies among officials and opponents:
 - Holding additional meetings
 - Clarifications how to structure comments in an effective way

“It’s not that we encourage them to oppose but it's our responsibility to ensure that they understand how to testify in a way that they continue to participate in a process” (Decision maker, interview)

Resources

- The first public meeting - a networking opportunity for opponents: "Let's not get all upset, we can fight this" (Opponent, interview)
- A nonprofit organization Families for Seven Mile Hill for efforts coordination (extensive research on issues, effective comments)
- Newcomers - highly educated, affluent professionals
- Large number of affected residents

High level of mobilization in opposition

High level of
threat
motivated to
mobilize

Available
resources

Use
advantage
of political
opportunity

Mobilization in support in Sherman County

Threat

- High level of perceived threat for not mobilizing in support of wind energy development as a solution to revive wheat farming:
 - By early 2000s, wheat prices at low records and a drought
 - Decreasing population, two school districts to combine
 - A lot of interest from landowners: "Geez, let's get it to work out here" (Landowner, Interview)

Political opportunity: elite allies presence

State officials:

- Enthusiastically supported development of the first wind energy project in 2000 through Community Solutions Team

County officials:

- Mike McArthur, Sherman County Judge from 1992 through 2004, “Wind power helps to diversify the economy. It’s another crop we can harvest, [and] it helps in the county budget” (Ouderkirk and Pedden 2004, p. 5)

Majority of county residents

“I think if someone wanted to object in Sherman County, they would have been heard. I am not saying people wouldn't give them hell for objecting” (Supporter, interview)

Resources

- Competition of two groups of landowners searching for developers
- Organized efforts through Praise the Wind, Inc. launched by local residents
 - Developing templates of legal documents
 - Making Sherman County attractive for landowners by having secured land for wind projects
 - Defending rights of landowners (e.g., fencing)

High level of mobilization in support

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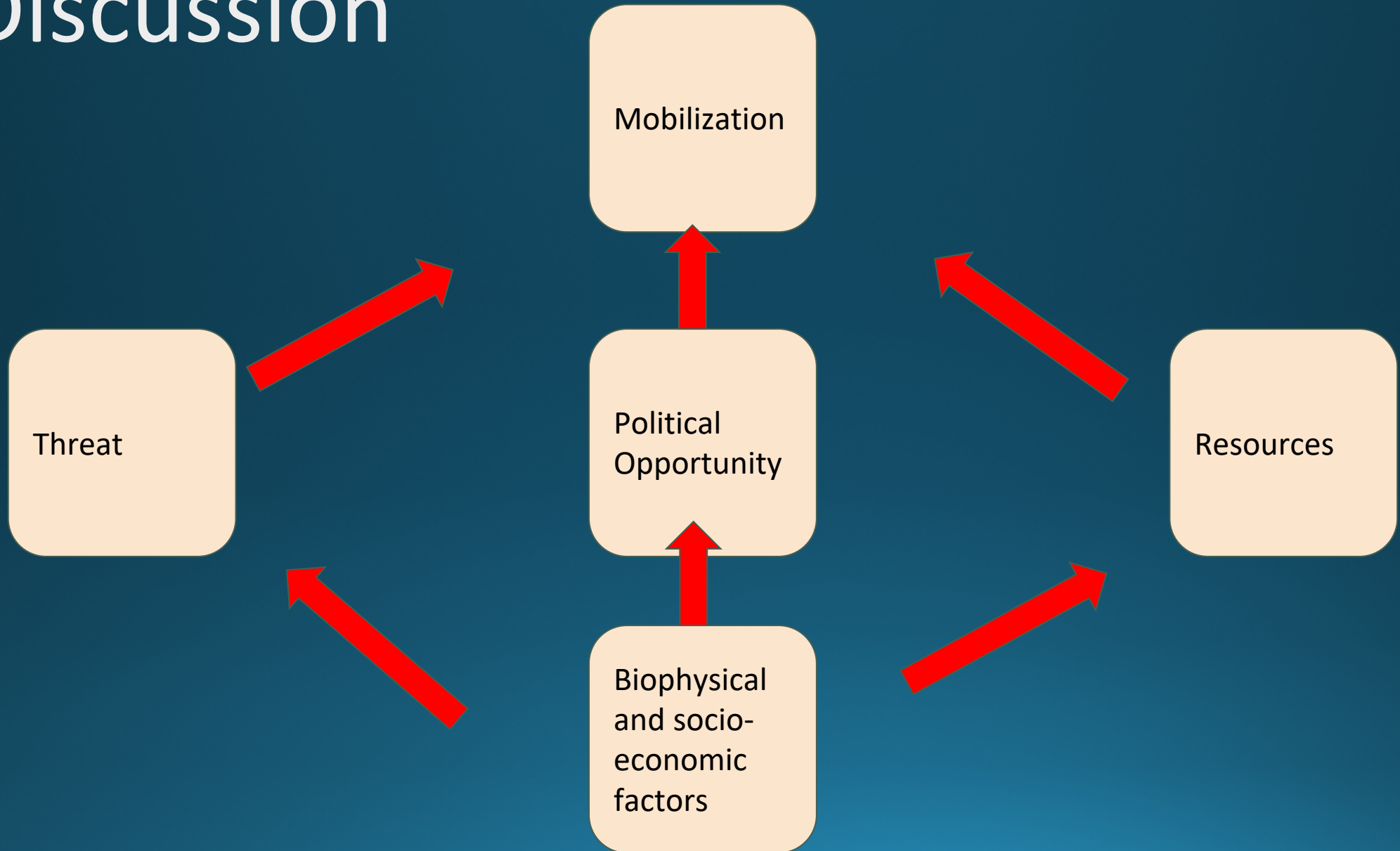
Coordination
of efforts

Support of
officials and
county
majority

Discussion

“It's all about location”: “Mr. Hildebrand, I didn't think you were "screwed up living in the wind patch of Sherman County." Being out in the middle of a wheat field is entirely different than being in the middle of the Scenic Gorge. You seem to be happy having them on your property so I say great, have them out there in Sherman County but not on our hill [Seven Mile Hill] (Kelley Gorton, The Dalles Chronicle July 15 2007).

Discussion



Conclusions

Factors drawn from the studies of social movements (threat, political opportunity, and resources) were able to provide a conceptual framework to understand why and how communities mobilized their efforts.

Limitations:

internal validity,
external validity

Conclusions

Policy implications:

Mobilization efforts: obtain allies and resources

Developers: from the beginning closely work with local community to avoid contentious cases

Planners and policy makers: adjust siting regulatory framework to make sure that legal standards address people's concerns

Q&A

