

**Sources and Perceptions of Controversy in  
Establishing a Protected Area for Biodiversity  
*A Case Study in the New River Area of Oregon***

by

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*This paper is dedicated to my grandmother, Mary Erickson, whose final stages of life came during the final stages of my project. I love you.*

*Dana Erickson  
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## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS .....</b>	<b>3</b>
OBJECTIVES .....	3
SITE SELECTION .....	3
ETHNOGRAPHIC FRAMEWORK .....	5
THE SURVEY INSTRUMENT .....	5
INTERVIEW PROCESS .....	6
CODING AND ANALYSIS OF RESPONSES.....	7
<b>RESULTS: THE SOURCES OF CONTROVERSY .....</b>	<b>7</b>
COMMUNICATION.....	8
GOVERNMENT .....	11
ENVIRONMENTAL PERCEPTION .....	12
SOCIAL PERCEPTION.....	17
DIFFERENT REALITIES .....	19
INFORMATION .....	22
EXTERNAL INFLUENCES.....	23
OTHER .....	24
<b>DISCUSSION.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>NOTES .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>APPENDIX .....</b>	<b>I</b>
APPENDIX I. MAP SHOWING THE LOCATION OF THE NEW RIVER AREA OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN.....	I
APPENDIX II. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .....	III
APPENDIX III. CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS IN THE NEW RIVER ACQUISITION PROCESS .....	II
APPENDIX IV. PARTICIPANTS .....	III
APPENDIX V. ALL SOURCES OF CONTROVERSY BY RANK AND NUMBER OF CITATIONS.....	V
APPENDIX VI. GRAPHS FOR EACH ISSUE SHOWING RANKING BY THE GROUPS.....	VI

## **LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES**

<b><u>Table</u></b>	<b><u>Page</u></b>
Table 1. Biodiversity of the New River area .....	3
Table 2. Description of Interviewees.....	6
Table 3. The primary differences in the worlds within which agency personnel and landowners operate and feel comfortable in during their daily lives.....	25
Table 4. The sequence of events in the land acquisition process at New River .....	II
Table 5. A ranking of the sources of controversy .....	V

<b><u>Figure</u></b>	<b><u>Page</u></b>
Figure 1. Overall ranking of issues cited as sources of controversy by all individuals. ....	8
Figure 2. Communication as a source of controversy, as cited and ranked by each group.....	VI
Figure 3. Government as a source of controversy, as cited and ranked by each group. ....	VI
Figure 4. Environmental perception as a source of controversy, as cited and ranked by each group.....	VII
Figure 5. Social Perception as a source of controversy, as cited and ranked by each group. ....	VII
Figure 6. Different Realities as a source of controversy, as cited and ranked by each group. ..	VIII
Figure 7. Information as a source of controversy, as cited and ranked by each group. ....	VIII
Figure 8. External Influences as sources of controversy, as cited and ranked by each group.....	IX
Figure 9. Other factors as sources of controversy, as cited and ranked by each group.....	IX

## **Sources and Perceptions of Controversy in the Process of Land Acquisition for Conservation of Biodiversity in the New River area, Oregon**

**ABSTRACT** The process of land acquisition for the conservation of plants or wildlife habitat can raise controversial issues, issues often perceived differently by the individuals and groups involved. After the land acquisition process is completed, there is rarely an opportunity to analyze the differing perceptions of the issues and their relative importance. This question is addressed using case study methodology at the New River Area of Critical Environmental Concern, located on the southern coast of Oregon. Congress allocated 5.2 million dollars from the Land and Water Conservation Fund for the Bureau of Land Management to purchase New River parcels. The ensuing land acquisition process caused controversy among the stakeholders and broke down the fragile trust between the agency and local citizens. The twenty individuals involved in the process (ranchers, agency scientists, managers, planners, and realtors, county commissioners, recreationists, and environmentalists) were identified using key informants and referrals. During semi-structured interviews with each stakeholder, their perceptions of the sources of controversy were identified. Using this primary data, and secondary data from internal files, newspapers and letters, the principal issues and variables in the controversy were analyzed. The findings are significant in their potential to increase the understanding of the controversy surrounding land acquisition for the conservation of biodiversity.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Biodiversity conservation has become an increasingly important principle in ecosystem management (Wilson 1988, Noss and Cooperrider 1994), yet many of the protected areas established years ago are deteriorating (Machlis and Tichnell 1985, as cited by Soule 1991). Frequently, the preserves now serving to protect biodiversity, even as part of their mission, were not originally created for that purpose or were set aside for specific species (Heisel 1998). As biodiversity continues to be lost the need has emerged for additional preserves, and there are calls for the restoration of biodiversity at larger scales, such as landscapes (Ross and Cooperrider 1994).

Conservation at this scale necessitates either a) large landowners interested primarily in protection, b) significant regulation restricting land uses and practices (Weibe et al. 1997), or c) private-public partnerships. One of the myriad ways biodiversity conservation has been achieved is through the federal government's acquisition of lands, and some are asking for the

government to increase its role (Heisel 1998). Yet Sauer (1994) has noted that “carefully setting aside land for the preservation of biodiversity does not eliminate continued impacts from surrounding development on a local scale,” and there are extreme tensions between different groups regarding this method of conservation (Pimm 1998). This suggests a need for the private and public sectors to work together in their management of adjacent public and private lands, a pursuit requiring a cooperative social climate (Newmark 1985). Indeed, if reserves can be established and operated with an acknowledgement of the social realities present in nearby communities, and a commitment to bridging gaps in understanding, it will undoubtedly increase the chances of success in achieving conservation goals over the long term.

Clearly then, the need exists for transdisciplinary research to address sociological aspects of biodiversity (Forester and Machlis 1996, Machlis 1992, and others). Geographers have a logical role to play here, both in research on perceptions of landscape (Mitchell 1993) and on other subjects linking the social and natural sciences (Williams and Patterson 1996, Mabogunje 1984 as cited in Knight 1992, Tuan 1971 and others). Although social variables play a role in the siting, management, and ongoing success of reserves, the process through which they act is not chronicled extensively in literature (Hulse 1997). Those factors are mostly kept as personal memory from the experiences of agency staff, researchers, landowners and conservationists. Yet it is a valuable memory to revisit as it allows the “opportunity to investigate such fundamental issues as the tension between individual freedom and social purposes; the relationship between the expert and the people; the conflict between utilitarian and aesthetic interests; and the advantages and limitations of alternative custodianship strategies for the environment” (Nash 1968 as quoted in Mitchell 1993).

In this study, an effort is made to document that personal experience in the land acquisition process for one conservation area and analyze the relative importance of the issues involved in the controversy that arose. The goal of this paper is to increase the chances of successful long-term conservation by understanding the conflicts potentially surrounding it, with the hope that this understanding will lead to their minimization in future efforts.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS**

### **OBJECTIVES**

1. To identify the sources of controversy in the process of land acquisition for conservation.
2. To determine the relative importance of those variables in generating overall controversy.
3. To determine what could have been done to minimize or avoid those variables.

### **SITE SELECTION**

Oregon had 57 candidate locations. The criteria used in prioritizing the sites were:

1. The protected area was sited primarily for biodiversity conservation.
2. The siting process was relatively complex and controversial.<sup>1</sup>
3. The site represented a relatively large acreage with multiple landowners involved.
4. A majority of people involved in the process were able to be located.
5. The primary acquisition activity was in the last decade but with no current controversy.
6. The majority of lands were acquired by direct purchase (versus land exchange or easement).
7. A public agency was involved as the primary purchaser, and cooperative with information.

### **The Study Area: New River Area of Critical Environmental Concern**

Located on the southern Oregon coast, New River flows parallel to the ocean from Curry County into Coos County (map in Appendix I). Geologically, the river is one of the youngest in North America, running through sandy soils and vegetation kept in the early stages of development by wide fluctuations in water flow and an unstable channel. Periodically, New River breaks through the sand dunes to create new outlets to the sea; its main mouth has been moving rapidly northward since it was first mapped. The surrounding dune ecosystem and ocean-shore interface provides habitat for many plant and wildlife species (Table 1), some of which are threatened or endangered and under federal and state protection: the Western snowy plover, bald eagle, American peregrine falcon, Aleutian Canada goose, chinook salmon, and silvery phacelia.

**Table 1. Biodiversity of the New River area (Source: USDI BLM 1987)**

<b>Category</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>No. Families</b>	<b>No. Species</b>	<b>No. Special Status Species</b>
<i>Plant Communities</i>	22			
<i>Plants</i>		62	124	11
<i>Fungi (mushrooms)</i>		Unknown	39	
<i>Birds</i>		40	198	5
<i>Mammals</i>		20	44	1
<i>Amphibians</i>		6	12	1
<i>Reptiles</i>		8	15	5

New River is a relatively undeveloped area, described as *“having seen the human hand, but not a very strong one”* (Agency Scientist-3). The main access road is a poorly marked 2.5 mile spur off Highway 101. The closest town is seven miles away, a small, tightly-knit community with a population of under 500, and the area is approximately 60 miles away from Coos Bay and North Bend, the population centers of the region. There is little or no industrial activity and only basic services in terms of commercial development. Land uses include ranching (dairy cattle and sheep), cranberry bogs, small woodlots, permanent residences, and recreation homes. The rural setting and relative isolation of the community has resulted in informal trail use across private property which included activities such as: hunting, fishing, horseback riding, birdwatching, hiking and walking. In the last decade, New River has been subject to increasing land speculation and subdivision for additional residential development, an identified threat to biodiversity conservation (Heisel 1998 and others).

#### The Land Acquisition Process

Recognizing the development pressure, and under direction to preserve “unique natural resource values” as well as species that have been granted special status, the BLM designated the public lands along New River (originally 523 acres) as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) in 1983 (the ensuing chronology of events is in Appendix II). A management plan was written and released in 1985 detailing initial goals focused on wetlands and other habitat important to the conservation of threatened and endangered species, as well as the natural values of the area, with recreation as a secondary goal. Two years later, an updated 1987 management plan identified the acquisition of private lands, those currently for sale as well as those not, as a priority management action in order to put together a contiguous land parcel for conservation and ease of management. Because the acquisition goals required significant funding, a detailed Acquisition Activity Plan was created soon after and presented to Congress. This plan included maps showing adjacent private lands targeted for acquisition and tables with landowner names, acreage and estimated value, as well as reasons for acquisition, priority and fiscal year slated for purchase (USDI 1987b).



A nationwide review by environmental organizations and other groups resulted in the New River area being placed as the number one priority for Land and Water Conservation Funds. This resulted in a \$3 million appropriation to the Coos Bay District in 1988 for acquiring New River lands. The primary acquisition activity occurred between 1989 and 1994, an additional \$2.2 million was appropriated, and the majority of funds were used by 1997. Seventeen landowners were contacted for possible acquisition, and eight properties were acquired, five by direct purchase and three by exchange, increasing the ACEC from 523 to 994 acres. The acquisition plan was mostly “successful in the core acquisition area” (Agency Manager-2), yet much of the original land identified as important for an ecologically manageable unit (3675 acres) was not gained, and the relationship with some of the local residents was damaged.<sup>2</sup>

### ETHNOGRAPHIC FRAMEWORK

The ethnographic framework for this case study was developed through frequent visitation by the researcher, in-depth interviews with long term residents of the area, and by background research on the events and their chronology (Vidich and Lyman 1994). Although the researcher was not completely immersed in the world of New River area citizens (i.e. living on site), multiple conversations with community members other than New River informants over a period of six months provided a contextual understanding of the area and its people.

### THE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

The survey instrument (Appendix III) was designed with eighteen questions. The content of questions was generated from readings in literature and a general scoping of the background of the New River process itself.<sup>3</sup> The questionnaire then sought information on some topics predicted to be important in the case: information and communication issues, sense of place considerations, views toward conservation, and the public involvement process. Primarily open-ended questions were utilized to a) allow for depth in the answers and b) to allow the participants’ intentions (rather than the interviewer’s) to be uppermost (Anderson and Jack 1991, Clandinin and Connelly 1994). The questions were reviewed and pre-tested.

## INTERVIEW PROCESS

### Participant Selection

Participants were selected non-randomly (Table 2). Key informants were identified from newspaper articles, internal files, and agency personnel. Referrals were then used until a) the informants identified tended to be on the outskirts of the issue, and b) until the amount of information overlap was much higher than new information gained (Cordray 1997).

**Table 2. Description of the participants**

Group	Code	#Ppl	Descriptions of participants
Agency Scientists	AS	3	2 biologists, 1 archaeologist
Agency Personnel	AP	3	1 planner, 2 realtors
Agency Manager	AM	3	1 area manager, 1 district manager, 1 natural resource manager
Landowners <sup>4</sup>	L	4	4 ranchers (family owned land for: 20, 50, 50, 80, 130 years)
Neighbors & Residents	N	4	1 rancher/med acreage, 1 rancher/large acreage, 2 retired/small acreage
Outside Interests	O	3	1 county commissioner, 1 environmental advocate, 2 2 <sup>nd</sup> home owners

### Interviews

All interviews were conducted in person except two<sup>5</sup>. Although the questions were semi-structured, the order varied as soon as a participant warmed up and started talking freely. Then the interviews proceeded in a guided conversation format. Occasionally the questions were used only as a checklist to make sure the interview had covered each topic, therefore not all the questions were directly asked of every participant as written. The interview length ranged from 45 minutes to two hours, averaging 90 minutes, and the visit often lasted three to four hours. Responses were taped and recorded on interview forms.

### Potential for bias

Steps were taken to address the many potential sources of bias existent in a qualitative study of this nature (Janesick 1994). First, bias in interviewee selection was minimized as all identified informants were contacted. The few that self-selected out of the pool did so due to their limited involvement with the New River acquisition process (vs. the management plan). Second, a single researcher conducted all the interviews and the extreme points of view revealed

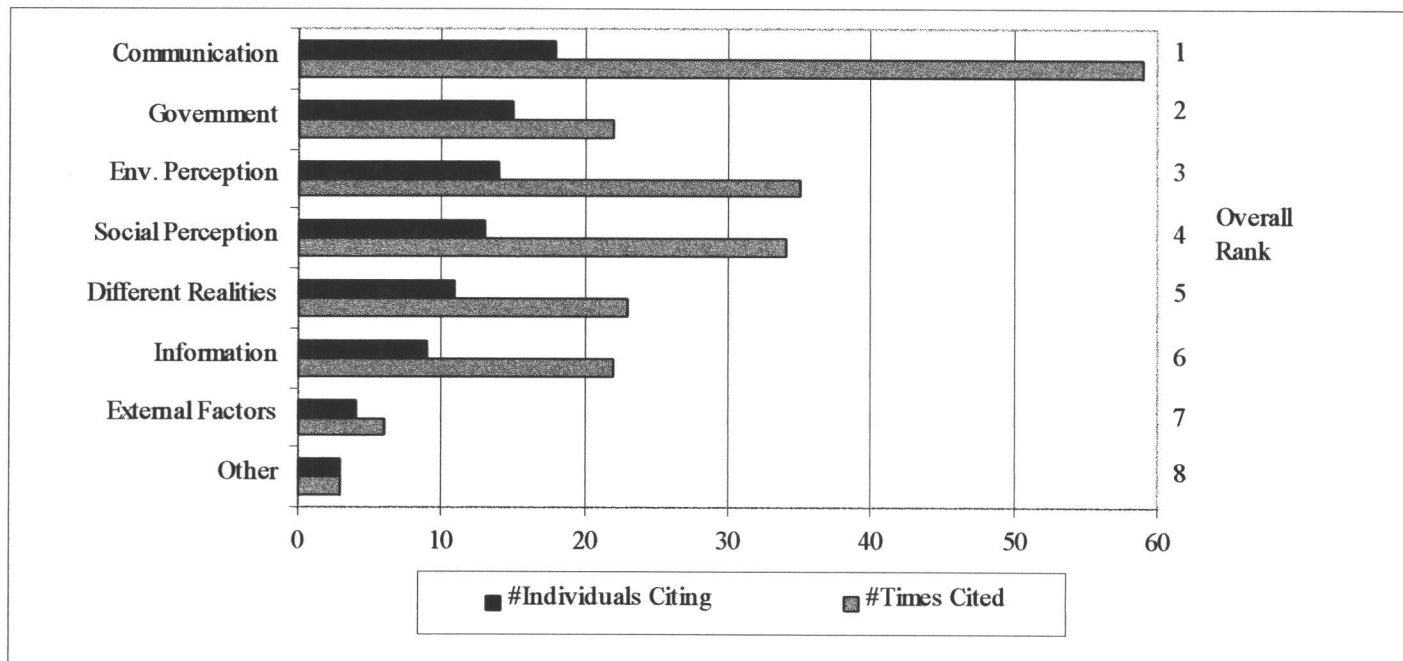
suggest that the participants were comfortable sharing their perspectives. Lastly, steps taken to limit bias during the interviews included: pre-testing the questions, limiting the conversational style to affirmation of responses only when needed to encourage the participant to reveal deeper layers of their perspective, not leading or prompting during open-ended questions, and not paraphrasing or discussing any responses except to clarify for later interpretive purposes.

### **CODING AND ANALYSIS OF RESPONSES**

During the in-depth interviews, participants discussed issues not previously hypothesized. Analysis methods were then utilized which allowed categories, themes and patterns to emerge from the data rather than being imposed prior to data collection (Janesick 1994). From the interview transcripts and notes, key phrases and statements that directly addressed the research questions were identified and coded. Then statements were compared and related to other participants' answers using multiple techniques for qualitative analysis (Lofland and Lofland 1995). Occasionally an informant was contacted for verification.

### **RESULTS: THE SOURCES OF CONTROVERSY**

Many perspectives were voiced in the interviews and garnered from the secondary data analyzed during the course of this research. Despite the diversity in viewpoints, eight issues emerged as sources of controversy: 1) *Communication* problems, 2) *Government* (primarily *distrust of*), 3) disparities in the *Environmental Perception* of each group, 4) the different *Social Perception* of each group, 5) the *Different Realities*, or worldviews, 6) *Information* problems, 7) *External Factors*, and 8) *Other*. The relative importance of each issue was ranked according to a) the number of individuals citing it as a source of controversy and b) the number of times it was mentioned (Figure 1). All eight issues were not cited by every group and the following discussion will focus on each issue in turn, showing which were most important to whom<sup>6</sup>. Each group's ranking on the issues is shown in tabular format (Appendix V) and graphed (Appendix VI).



**Figure 1. Overall ranking of issues cited as sources of controversy by all individuals.**

### COMMUNICATION

Problems with communication were cited as a source of controversy 59 times, by 18 participants, giving this issue an overall ranking of 1. The types of communication problems people felt were present included: how the initial contact was handled, overall communication techniques which led to miscommunication, and communication at public meetings which included a lack of listening by both main groups (landowners and agency personnel).

#### Initial Contact

One of the recurring sentiments was that throughout the acquisition process, the landowners and residents never recovered from the initial shock of the agency's plans and how they found out about them. The first management and acquisition plan for the area was developed internally and went to Congress for Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) appropriation before landowners learned of it. When they heard of the existence of the plan, they requested a copy through their attorney (Landowner-3). Consequently, they felt "*the trust was fractured with that first wave of information*" (Landowner-2). Local residents and neighbors were also frustrated, "*I had to find out about the plan in the newspaper*" (Neighbor-1).

Unfortunately, this was seen as “intentional miscommunication” from an agency the landowners felt was “*not being forthright with their plans. Too much was planned and prepared without talking first; even funds gotten*” (Landowner-3) and that “*initial secrecy was not appreciated*” (Landowner-2).

Soon after the plan’s release, the initial contact in the form of personal communication began. The agency called a local public meeting, where they hoped to straighten out the facts. Yet feelings, fears and attitudes were already running high. The landowners were talking amongst themselves with only the written plan to go on, a plan that backed up their negative ideas about the government. Then, in calling for public comment at the meetings, many felt the agency instead tried to make people fit into the public input plan they had already established (Agency Scientist-2). “*The agency wasn’t sensitive enough in the beginning. We were doing it the old government way*” (Agency Scientist-1). The landowners felt the agency was “*Trying to barnstorm, when instead they should have worked with the ranchers and farmers*” (Landowner-3). A landowner, not as threatened by the others because he was a willing seller, observed that first meeting and summed it up this way, “*They got off on the wrong foot; it went wrong at the initial meeting*” (Landowner-4).

### Communication at Public Meetings<sup>7</sup>

Some people thought the communication should have started earlier, before the acquisition plan itself was completed. Importantly, the effort was not made to take the time to address the issues that had been raised, to quell the fears of the people and to communicate the true intent of the agency. The few public meetings did not seem to be enough, especially after the plan surprised so many people. “*The New River acquisition plan should have been re-written immediately when the ranchers said no. Instead, they kept referring to it [in the public meetings] without correction. Especially with the maps [that showed the landowner’s properties slated for acquisition]!*” (Neighbor-1). The landowners felt this showed a lack of listening, they wanted to see the agency respond to their concerns immediately and take action. “*When mistakes were made, the agency did not apologize, they defended their position instead*” (Landowner-3). The result of this initial contact was public meetings that did not achieve their purpose. “*Meaningful public involvement was absent. We were treated like kids, belittled. They were*

*managing people in an obvious way*” (Neighbor-3). One of the scientists pointed out that they were not trained to handle public meetings, *“It’s hard for us. We’re not public speakers; few agency people are trained in that”* (Agency Scientist-1). Not only was the information not being transmitted, but the lack of trust and real communication meant that the two groups focused more on their own positions. *“Then there’s not enough time or genuine interest in understanding other point of view. They’re too focused on individual agendas”* (Agency Scientist-1).

Although the landowners felt they were “civil but adamant”, others felt that they were more aggressive. One outside observer, a strong supporter of the agency’s mission, felt that they got the job done. *“The agency ran the public meetings well. Other agencies will get wimpy. This agency will do what they say, take their mandate more seriously, and stand up for public rights. They are more aggressive and you can’t push them around”* (Outside-2). *“Reaching our goals was worth it. Sometimes the first change needs to happen, swirl the pot. Managing by consensus would not have worked for our mandate to conserve”* (Agency Scientist-1). Without an apology, and without backing up to rebuild the trust before proceeding, personality conflicts and perceived attitudes started riding herd over any factual information that existed.

### Personality conflicts

One agency representative was disliked in particular. Whether or not that was because he was just the focal point for the landowner’s disagreement with the plan, or the “fall guy” representing all the power of the agency in a unit that landowners could handle (an individual person) is unknown. *“One pushier individual made dealings hard. He had an edge on his words; he flared up, got personal... That’s not right.”* (Neighbor-2). Tempers were quick to flare and both sides apparently had their moments, depending on who’s telling the story. One opinion was that *“The attitude of ranchers was to scream/throw fits and thereby increase the bargaining position. All the hate government, posturing, etc...it’s all bargaining rhetoric”* (Outside-2). Although it should be noted that the same *“landowners who behaved that way had no intention of selling”* (Outside-3, Neighbor-4).

These communication problems aggravated the potential controversy already existing over the issues themselves and made the landowners feel pushed and disrespected. That they felt this way was obvious, *“Once they got rid of that guy, things could at least hit ground zero and*

*start to go back up [in building a relationship]"* Landowner-1). *"Small actions are the indicator of how much you can trust. A personality conflict (say if someone feels they are not respected) will do more to affect the relationship than all the appropriate words in the plan"* (Agency Scientist-1). Yet that same person saw these people as the saviors of the project that they themselves supported, *"The tough attitude of a few agency folks was the only way the public values and mandate to conserve made it at all"* (Agency Scientist-1,3).

## GOVERNMENT

Issues with the government were cited as a source of controversy 22 times, by 15 participants, giving this issue an overall ranking of 2. This was a relatively straightforward issue; there was an anti-government sentiment among members in the community, and a distrust of the power they felt the agency had. Although the designation of the ACEC wasn't as threatening, the acquisition process was (Outside-2). *"This is subterfuge, a smokescreen for [the agency] to get more land to manage. They won't only buy from willing sellers. If this [acquisition] is to be done with willing sellers only, why appropriate the money, why write the plan until you find out who they are?"* (Landowner-2, 3). The landowners felt they would be powerless if they engaged only passively in a public participation process because *"public involvement can be overpowered, it's not respected. We were suspicious beforehand and we still are now [after the process]"* (Landowner-3). *"The agencies are running themselves, and the public has little involvement in the implementation of things. Their administrative rules are huge, but Congress only passed a two-page law. The layers of bureaucracy are endless."* (Landowner-1).

Additionally, there was general confusion about government, the many levels and responsibilities of agencies, what they can and cannot regulate and enforce, and what their purpose is. *"What is their mission? It's always changing, from timber resource agency to recreation resource agency. [There is a] blending of government agencies involved: BLM, State Parks, USFWS"* (Landowner-2). *"People don't distinguish between different levels and functions so a general anti-government sentiment prevails"* (Agency Manager-1). *"The system within which the agency operates is so complex that, instead of trying to understand it, people are overwhelmed by it and shun the entire thing. Anything associated with the system they don't understand and therefore fear is thus bad"* (Landowner-4).

The distrust and confusion regarding the institution itself seemed to spread to include all employees, representatives, advocates, as well as information, ideas and technical knowledge coming from the agency. *“We constantly must clarify which agency is doing what, what the mandate is, the power, the intent, etc. Otherwise people respond to agency personnel without knowing anything, just what they think they know”* (Agency Manager-1). This issue warranted separate distinction due to the prevailing anti-government attitude that clearly affected relations, however, because it overlaps with other identified sources of controversy, such as perceptions; those insights will be discussed in some of the following sections.

### ENVIRONMENTAL PERCEPTION

A significant theme emerging from the field research showed differences in environmental perception, cited as a source of controversy 35 times by 14 participants, giving this issue an overall ranking of 3. Groups had their own views of the landscape and accompanying senses of place, as well as views of the need for conservation and especially, the methods to achieve conservation. This gave rise to some of the main issues and reasons for the disagreement with the acquisition plan in general. This issue alone represents the most fundamental question: Why is this action, the acquisition process, happening? *“The question of why conserve was not answered, therefore I don’t see the need the agency has for the land”* (Landowner-2).

#### Landscape vision, creation, and a sense of place

There were fundamentally disparate visions of the landscape itself, human’s role in it and peoples’ sense of place. The agency personnel, some neighbors, an outside interest and the media, referred to New River as a unique area, saw the landscape as vulnerable and in need of protection from destructive human agents. *“This is a remnant piece of wild coast, relatively undeveloped”* (Outside-2). *“If you contrast the [New River] ACEC to the surrounding landscape, it’s wild but not pristine. There is a history of human use but it’s all we’ve got. The edge of a continent where the shore and ocean interface”* (Agency Scientist-2).

Contrast this to the landowners’ view of a hardy landscape, ever-changing, in which humans fit right in and manage it to the best of their ability. *“Landowners did not agree with the*



*assessment of a 'dynamic' river, etc."* (Landowner-3). *New River formed easily, quickly. It could disappear as easily. Who knows what nature has in store? Man is part of nature. Why is New River so special?"* (Neighbor-1). Although these comments highlight the difference in views, many of the landowners' comments indicate that they in fact do agree with the vision of New River as "dynamic" and "special" to some extent. Perhaps they felt that agreeing with the agency's view would automatically mean that the agency might feel justified or even supported in pursuing their own way of conserving the area.

After going through a stage of surprise where landowners learned how outsiders perceived "their" area, they then learned that, instead of congratulating and thanking them for having such a beautiful landscape (their enlarged home), the government saw the need to take it out of their hands and protect it. *"We were surprised and caught off-guard at existence of a 'problem,' the need to 'fix' it, and fix it with the method of a 'plan' and formal process. If the agency comes in to "enhance" and "protect," it implies the land needs both; what are landowners doing so wrong?"* (Neighbor-2). *"The agency's wish to buy the land translated to an implication that landowners are failing to treat it right"* (Landowner-2). *"People have ownership of area - they think it evolved through what they did, keeping it in open space and ranching"* (Landowner-1).

The landowners consider themselves responsible for part of the current beauty of the area. *"I'm responsible for the aquatic health of streams. I built 22 ponds in 1987 when there was no water. We want acknowledgement for things like that. How about paying or encouraging us to build or do more?"* (Neighbor-1). The landowner already cooperating with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) in the Stream and Trout Enhancement Program (STEP) agreed. *"I am doing conservation already: a plan with SCS (Soil and Water Conservation Service) long ago, and now cooperating with the STEP program, so I'm doing my part."* (Landowner-2). The landowners see their land to be very healthy, especially in contrast to subdividing it and developing it into housing tracts, something almost everyone in the controversy could agree they didn't favor<sup>8</sup>.

### Need for conservation

A common goal was to save area from subdivision and development; almost everyone agreed on this but then started to differ on what to use the area for. Four out of five of the landowners were “not convinced” of the need to preserve the area and the species, in part because they did not believe the categorizations of New River area as “unique and dynamic”, in part because they did not think recreation fit in with conservation, and in part because they do not believe in conservation being a separate activity from their activities. *“A ‘healthy’ landscape to [the landowners] means a productive one, and production means supporting a way of life”* (Neighbor-1) *“In the New River watershed, we want a good position in agricultural industry, especially cranberries and sheep”* (Landowner-1). *“We don’t disagree with conservation but want it to be ranching”* (Landowner-3).

The world that agency people operate in sees multiple levels of human encroachment, at state, national, and global scales where biodiversity and open space is under constant siege. *“The New River is an incredibly special place. I’ve seen other parts of the West where livestock, urban activity, human use, and recreation runs amok. This place is vulnerable. It needs protection.”* (Agency Scientist-1). This is very different than the landscape reality of the landowners and residents of the relatively isolated south coast of Oregon. Even though the landowners wanted their tradition of land stewardship to continue, they knew that the younger generations were not as interested in the farming and ranching lifestyle because it is hard work offering little security. In the face of that, and the land becoming increasingly valuable for development as well as conservation, they didn’t disagree completely with the government playing a role. *“The agencies will be around and the next generations of landowners may sell out; it’s a matter of time”* (Landowner-2). *“We might just have to wait, their heirs will be college educated and this will make a big difference on their global perspective of conservation”* (Agency Scientist-3).

### Methods of conservation

There is a strong implication that the goal of conservation justifies the agency’s ways of doing it. Even if the need for conservation was agreed upon, and similar goals suggested they could be, landowners questioned the government’s method of protection. First, who would be

the best land stewards? *"The ranchers are doing a better job than the [agency]"* (Landowner-3). *"We don't see the agency out there managing the land and wildlife"* (Landowner-2,3). *"Landowners are managing for their reality, which is today, and [also for] take over from their children"* (Landowner-1). *"I'm not convinced the government needs to own land to conserve"* (Neighbor-4). *"Why does government need to be here - what is their role? Why can't they achieve goals leaving land in private hands?"* (Neighbor-2). There was partial agreement to this on the agency's part, *"Conservation via land acquisition is over-used. We should recognize the stewardship of private landowners and build on that. The mindset of federal employees stops this sometimes"* (Agency Manager-2).

Second, if conservation couldn't include ranching, how could it include recreation? The landowners and neighbors wanted a "family-oriented community, not a tourist or retirement one, the outside interests tended to want it saved from development but open for tourists and recreation. The locals were uncomfortable with the attention that the the agency and media were trying to bring to the area, especially a video aired on PBS. *"If the land goes to public ownership, the visitorship would sky-rocket. Not only does this make me question how good that is for true conservation, but vandalism, trespass, liability, and privacy issues come up. The more people come, the more impact there will be from recreation"* (Landowner-2). This sore point was heightened later, after a road was built that surpassed all stated needs, one that caused an internal argument among agency employees (Agency Scientist-1). *"They were going to leave the area pristine, but they didn't. That road!"* (Neighbor-3). This reflects the mandate of the particular agency to have the area open to the public for recreation. *"Conservation through a different agency, like US Fish and Wildlife, would be better, one that doesn't have to respond to the recreation component and is used to conserving species"* (Agency Scientist-2).

Third, who would be able to conserve for the long term? Both parties believe that they are managing the land for the long-term, but have different approaches. *"Our agencies are managing for multiple possible scenarios over the long-term. We need to conserve the area due to encroaching development, and we need to do it now while land is affordable and the possibility to buy exists at all"* (Agency Manager-2). *"Looking at trends and what pressures will come to bear on New River, it's more susceptible in private hands than in public. Public protection is more stable over the long term than private; public can resist market fluxes, etc."*

*We all trust ourselves and our own group more; what if rancher retires, leaves lands to kids. You never know the resources are safe” (Agency Scientist-1). “The agency should own lands; there are critical resources out there for the public, for the good of the nation. The use of public lands is for people to be around non-synthetic things. City parks don’t cut it - not just fresh air and a tree, we need something wild. We’re not even buying the amounts we should” (Outside-2).*

### Changing Views of Conservation

After the process was over, most people’s views of conservation itself did not change. Some of the agency personnel just thought they should have been more sensitive during the process. *“There’s been no change in our views of conservation. It was a good method, we reached our goals for the core area. We’ll be wiser in terms of process next time” (Agency Manager-1). “It was an excellent goal. We need things that protect the weak from the strong. They should have condemned; the plan was too conservative” (Outside-2).* The landowners said they disagreed with the methods used: not creating partnerships, the government owning the entire process and the interaction methods they used. One landowner was fine with the government owning land, another agreed with goals but said the ways will be different and should be recognized. *“My view of conservation did not change, I support actual on-the-ground conservation, like protecting a snowy-plover nest... and I’d rather have a rancher for a neighbor than the government but the government is okay. It’s their methods I disagree with” (Landowner-2). “This process reinforced a negative view I have of agencies doing conservation, I don’t agree with how they do it...for power or a job. It’s not true conservation” (Neighbor-1). “We were fine with the government owning the land, it was the method that was wrong, the way they handled the situation” (Neighbor-2, 4).*

In light of that, and because it took two years of hard work to restore a fragile trust (but only between a few agency staff and some landowners they needed working relationships with for leases etc), (Landowner-2, Agency Staff-3) it is useful to look at the results from the social perceptions of people, another reason cited for the controversy.

## SOCIAL PERCEPTION

Differences in social perceptions were cited as a source of controversy 34 times, by 13 participants, giving this issue an overall ranking of 4. The key points for this issue were 1) that each group's perception of themselves was different than what other groups thought, and 2) there was a lack of understanding between the groups that showed in behaviors perceived to be a lack of trust and respect.

### Perception of self and others

*"People had their own vision of themselves (ranchers are rugged individualists, beleaguered agency employees, scientists just trying to get objective information across) that others did not buy into"* (Agency Scientist-3). These opposing perceptions set up an "us versus them" relationship in which people quickly aligned themselves. Then people wouldn't depart from their group even to support what they individually believed in (Pinto 1997). *"Citizens in area will align themselves with people they know, especially if there is any adversarial situation set up, us v. them. People would have a hard time supporting the government over their neighbor"* (Neighbor-2). A scientist who was not on the hot-seat at one meeting, like the managers were, observed *"The agency representatives thought they knew landowners wouldn't support [the Plan] so everyone was skeptical and untrustworthy at the beginning. Both groups adversarial toward each other from the get-go"* (Agency Scientist-1).

The agency also didn't realize how the work they were doing was being perceived by the local citizens. *"When the ACEC was designated, slides [the agency showed] included farmer's ditching and draining. They contrasted that with New River, Muddy Lake and the "great" fish and wildlife. That was done 30 years ago! Articles about what landowners are doing wrong will not be listened too – it goes against the sense of pride they have. The landowners self-perception is one of hard-working, noble people, individualists with a good relationship to the land. We do not see ourselves as villains"* (Landowner-3). The way that information was presented made the ranchers uncomfortable thinking they did something wrong. They were not used to having things pointed out like that from someone who had no relationship with them and it was insulting.

*"There was a lack of acknowledgment for private landowners' stewardship"* (Landowner-2).

When those slideshows were immediately followed with acquisition plans (such as in the report

to Congress in 1987), the landowners felt violated by the agency *“talking about their land before talking with them”* (Landowner-2). Most felt sure it would lead to condemnation.

### Power relationships and a lack of understanding

A lack of trust, respect and understanding between both groups underpinned some behavior and perceptions<sup>9</sup>. *“There was a lack of trust leading to over-reacting to issues. The ranchers were over-reacting, hysterical. Just say no when [the agency] asks to buy your land”* (Outside-2). Yet the landowners did say no and felt overwhelmed by the power they saw the agency had. *“We said no at the public meetings. Straight out. But the money was already appropriated. They kept coming back again and again; it was like a slap in the face. We said no once, leave it at that. Why the lack of respect in not listening to no the first time? We were totally overwhelmed; we had no power to direct our own destiny”* (Landowner-2). *“We felt like the Indians must have”* (Landowner-3).

The government does have more power, capital, and is charged with the public mission. The landowner does not. *“The agency is carrying out a mandate from voters, from Congress. The local people don’t like it but they’ll have to agree, or they can be included in the process without having to agree. But the agency will fight back if attacked. It will clarify its position with memos. The ranchers just don’t like anybody telling them what to do. But how are they oppressed? What can’t they do?”* (Outside-2). Due to this unequal power relationship, *“People were [easily] intimidated, and scared the government would take without due process”* (Landowner-4). *“The ranchers felt threatened when meeting behind closed doors with BLM, felt their leases are threatened. We knew people would be made into willing sellers even if they weren’t”* (Landowner-1).

Although the agency employees were careful not to speak about this particular subject as freely, they also felt disrespected and were at a loss of how to communicate with the residents. *“The lack of respect for the agency by landowners translated to illegal fencing, carrying guns and shooting at people, chasing people off their land, putting fences with barbed wire across the river”* (Outside-2, Wood 1993).

Overall, the lack of a good relationship between the agency and the landowners meant things weren’t discussed. People talked within their own groups, instead of between groups.

Both “sides” reinforced their own views and raised the barriers to interaction with one another. Clearly, it would have been beneficial to address stereotypes by bringing peoples' fears out in the open. This kind of relationship building would mostly be initiated by those in public service, and a certain personality is needed to achieve this in a genuine fashion. There is a realization of the need, but the expertise is scarce. *“The agency has to more open and up-front with what they’re doing. There’s a school of people out there preying on ignorance and paranoia with scare tactics, treating people like weak-minded pawns in extreme issue fights”* (Outside-2). *“We should try to trust each other, share worlds, respect one another, maybe there is a role government can play”* (Neighbor-2).

## DIFFERENT REALITIES

There were fundamentally disparate realities (i.e. the worlds people operate in on a daily basis) between the groups. These were cited as a source of controversy 23 times, by 11 participants, giving this issue an overall ranking of 5. Differences emerged in peoples’ familiarity and association to the area, their ability to act and consequences of their actions, their information system and organizational structure, and their interaction styles.

### Organizational Structure and Effects

Landowners found the organizational structure of the agency to be alienating. Individual landowners deal with family and friends, their neighbors, and people that are for the most part “locals.” Agencies have multiple levels of staff of different job descriptions. *“The agency is big - ranchers don’t even know who to deal with. Big in terms of number of people, big money, congressional connections, and everyone acting like they have a mandate from ‘the people’”* (Landowner-3). The employees that could make up for that by “putting a face on government” are challenged by the fact that this is a job within a career for them, not a long-term relationship with the citizens like a neighbor might have.

An agency’s hierarchical assignment of power makes for a complex assignment of decision-making power and responsibility. *“The person talking to you [from the agency] isn’t the one who can make decisions. Have the head person make the deals and discuss them”*

(Landowner-4). Agency employees have to answer to others whereas landowners are often running an entire operation, answer only to themselves, and can act quickly but take all responsibility. *“They are not held personally accountable whereas landowners are held directly accountable”* (Landowner-3). Further, the agency must document their entire decision-making process due to working with numerous people on one project, and the need to explain decisions and actions to higher levels of authority and to the public. *“The government [decisions and] promises mean nothing unless they’re on paper”* (Agency Scientist-3). This frustrates landowners, and is especially uncomfortable when the fear of a local controversial decision is being considered. *“The [agency] system is too slow for decisions, with too much paperwork”* (Landowner-4).

The fundamental reality for an agency employee is that they are working within a career. *“The agency employee is just working a job; they want promotion from doing a good job, and if that’s to get the land, there you have it”* (Neighbor-1). *“Agency people are doing a job, first”* (Outside-1). People feel that this is in sharp contrast to the landowners’ management of the landscape which is a lifestyle for them, every day, every week, all throughout the year. Their entire livelihood and is based on their decisions on the land. *“The difference I see is ‘this is home’ versus ‘this is a job.’ The first is more emotional, a sense of place, sense of history, a sense of knowing, versus the outsider”* (Neighbor-2). *“A landowner is a longtime resident doing the same thing [on the ground] for years”* (Landowner-1). *“The landowner has a vested interest in the land; they are producing from it. Don’t tell us what we can and cannot do. We have completely opposite values”* (Neighbor-1).

The landowners are frustrated *“with the turnover in, for example, the head of the New River area. It’s a waste of taxpayer money. Why don’t people stay in one place? Agency employees constantly switch jobs, their locations, the projects they’re working on, and the power.”* (Landowner-3) *“Because of [this] turnover, no relationships established or they are short-lived and citizens get tired of establishing new relationship with every person doing their ‘job’ as if it’s an objective pursuit”* (Neighbor-2). The agency people agree that it is difficult to interface the agency bureaucracy with the landowners’ private way of life: *“The turnover in our agency leads to different personalities taking on the same job, say at New River. Some work better than others but turnover does create a lack of accountability and continuity”* (Agency



Scientist-3)<sup>10</sup>. *“New River people at the agency move on. Then you’re back to nobody, government without a face. Who do you shake hands with?”* (Neighbor-2).

### Styles of Interaction and Operation

The interaction style, such as “shaking hands, proved vital. The landowners have a personal style where trust, manners and friendliness go a long way. As one of the key informants said, *“[The ranchers] will ‘suss you up in two minutes flat, and we’ll see if you get your interviews.’”* In this we see that the landowners, acting as private citizens only, even while they manage their land, *“put people first. They won’t interact with non-trusted people unless they absolutely have to”* (Neighbor-3). By contrast, the agency personnel are mired in paperwork and bureaucracy because they are public employees. *“They are trained to gather info, write a plan, see dream come to fruition, focus on ideal world... why not just ask for it?”* (Landowner-1). In addition to this plea for straightforwardness, another community member laments that the government people working on the New River project became detached from the local people. *“The agency trusts a piece of paper, ‘the Plan,’ and writes reports. They ‘plan’, ‘review,’ ‘study’, ‘judge,’ and then make decisions. What about trusting the person, the handshake, [and] building the relationships?”* (Neighbor-2). *“We have little personal contact, and work with many people, so paper-pushing becomes very important; but that alienates people”* (Agency Scientist-3).

The information that the groups rely on within their system of knowing is quite different. The agencies rely on science and the formal planning process, and have higher-level decision makers following what “the public” mandates. Their reliance on paperwork is necessitated by the system they work in. For example, the formal Plan that undermined the controversy *“Had to be made in a relatively detailed way to get any attention in Washington. We were told to draw a line on the map around the area we needed for management of the ecological system. From there, we created a ‘wish list’ for acquisition. It wasn’t concrete”* (Agency Scientist-2,3). This is an entirely different system from the one the landowners were using to decide what information to trust and what actions to take. *“Ranchers will operate by common sense and traditions (which can get in the way). Change makes sense sometimes. We’re different [in the way we operate], not good or bad, versus the agency”* (Neighbor-1). Some feel that the “system

*the agency operates in assumes landowner wrongdoing, and 'agency knows best,' which is alienating. There will always be [some] abusers. Be respectful of landowners; approach them differently. Tradition is stronger than paperwork. People will find a way around whatever rule is made unless it makes sense and the people understand why"* (Neighbor-2).

## INFORMATION

Problems with information were cited as a source of controversy 22 times, by 9 participants, giving this issue an overall ranking of 6. Although information in itself was a component of the controversy, most of the information problems were with how it was communicated and this was discussed earlier. Additionally there were perceptions of information inconsistencies and the gap between scientific and local knowledge now well-documented in literature (e.g. Weeks 1995, Cantrill 1996, Williams and Patterson 1996).

The bulk of the information was contained in the management and acquisition plan, which were not made available until they were complete, consistent with how a public agency usually operated. Due to this, the situation began to unravel even before the meetings were called to clear up the misconceptions, because *"Citizens misinformed each other by exaggerating in the coffee shop casual talk. They start bringing outside issues and fears into it"* (Agency Scientist-3). *Scientific information from the government is not trusted* (Agency Scientists-1,2,3). One neighbor noted that, in trying to get a handle on the issue themselves, *"the people got information from their own groups, such as through trade magazines, etc. This included reports about government takeovers, etc."* (Neighbor-4). These sources were trusted peers, friends and neighbors, and therefore acceptable sources of information for the local people. Especially in contrast to what they felt the agency had done, built up the plan behind their backs, controlling the release of the information with a lack of forthrightness and importantly, not allowing time for understanding. The agency personnel were frustrated at this and had assumed the landowners understood the situation. *"After the conservation groups put New River on top for federal funding, we knew it would be possible. We then explained the situation to landowners and thought they understood"* (Agency Manager-2). Very few people let information completely speak for itself, and break community ties to understand it. It is essential to become part of the community to share information, especially about a complex or potentially controversial subject.

There were perceived inconsistencies in what the agency said, and what they intended to do (or were already doing). And there was a difference in information received by landowners, Congress people, and distributed inside agency (Landowner-3, BLM memos). The specific case most disturbing to landowners was the agency's profession to buy from "willing sellers only" and to be "good neighbors." The landowners could not reconcile these statements with the \$3 million they knew had been appropriated for land acquisition and the accompanying priority list for acquisition that held the private landowners' names, their ranch names, location of properties, acreages, and land value as well as the year they were supposed to be purchased. *"Couple that with "science" showing what ranchers doing to land is wrong, next step is condemnation. But ditches done by ranchers a long time ago"*(Landowner-3). *"Yes, in fine print there were big hammers"* (Neighbor-1).

### EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

External influences were cited as a source of controversy 4 times, by 6 participants, giving this issue an overall ranking of 7. These external issues were in part the unfortunately simultaneous timing of events "close to home" for New River residents, and in part related to the constantly changing and threatening polarization of natural resource issues in general. Specific events included: the beach line controversy between the shoreline residents and the State of Oregon, the Wild and Scenic River designation and other environmental issues that had polarized people in the immediate area or the nation.

The concurrent issue concerning the placement of the line for the state's public beach easement involved the three landowners most upset by what they saw as possible federal acquisition of their property. Additionally, the public agencies managing land in the area were attempting to cooperate on ORV control on the same stretches of beach, another action generating public comment from the same people and outsiders commenting on the land acquisition process. *"There was too much going on and it got overwhelming, blended together in people's minds"* (Outside-3).

The external factors led to perception issues that affected all the groups. People wanted to preserve a way of life overall, regardless of specific land ownership and use, and felt that it was being threatened. *"People are already grappling with how land is changing in the way it's*

*valued. It used to be for what [commodities] it could produce, now it's for what recreation [opportunities] it can produce, for what views it has"* (Landowner-3). They also questioned the role of government in a scenario where they felt attacked. *"We've heard of other areas...where people lose jobs"* (Neighbor-1). The backdrop for this acquisition process was a sea of natural resource issues including what felt like "villainization" of ranchers and farmers by environmentalists and the general public. What resulted was *"political resource management instead of natural resource management. This frustrated everyone because we're forced to do things that aren't good for anything except the current political situation"* (Agency Scientist-2). Viewing natural resources management actions as driven by political expediency versus rational decision-making was also found in the fishing industry (Weeks 1995).

### OTHER

Other types of problems comprised the balance of the reasons cited as sources of controversy (mentioned 3 times by 3 people), giving this issue an overall ranking of 8. One issue concerned sentiments against taking the land off of tax rolls although agency staffers pointed out that the federal government did pay a kind of property tax into county coffers and that this land was zoned exclusive farm use which has one of the lowest property taxes (BLM letter to county commissioners, 19). The other issue was not adding more government land in the west, *"The government has no business owning land; seventy-five percent government ownership in these counties is too much already"* (Outside-1).

## DISCUSSION

### Different systems of operation

When taken as a whole, each person's story fits together such that their perspective of the New River land acquisition process is clear, understandable and logical. Yet since the landowners' perspective of the world and their place in it contrasts strongly with that of the agency employees, the question becomes, Which is the 'right' perspective? A hearty debate exists on the subject of whether there is an actual reality or whether it is all a construct of world

view and ways of knowing (Milton 1997). Table 3 shows the two different “systems of operation” which emerged from the data.

**Table 3. The primary differences in the systems within which agency personnel and landowners operate and feel comfortable in during their daily lives.**

Criteria	Private Landowners	Agency Personnel
<b>Familiarity to area/community</b>	Longtime resident	Employee turnover
<b>Association to area/community</b>	Personal attachment	Project focus
<b>Consequences of Actions</b>	Personal responsibility	Hierarchical, complex assignment of responsibility
<b>Reality</b>	It's a lifestyle	It's a job
<b>Information System</b>	Common sense, tradition	Science and formal planning
<b>Ability to act</b>	Act quickly	Act slowly
<b>Organizational Structure</b>	Individual, family and friends, neighbors, all local	Multiple levels of staff, hierarchical levels of power and decision-making; local, regional, national
<b>Interaction style</b>	Personal interaction	Paperwork, bureaucracy

Both groups acknowledged the different systems they operate within. A part of this collision of worlds shows in the project focus of the agency people which is in direct contrast to the long-term, personal attachment the landowners have to their everyday activities. Their entire association to the community is because they live there, whereas, in the New River case, the agency's employees were in the district office over one hour away and could not achieve that same familiarity. This absence of daily personal interaction leads to a difficulty in building trust and a knowing of each other.

### Environmental perception

“Natural resources are in fact cultural appraisals” (Sauer 1925) and the environment may be perceived and used by people in different ways (Milton 1997, Brookfield 1969). This was evident in the environmental perception of the participants in the New River study. Their differing viewpoints were significant because a) they underpinned the most basic questions regarding the agency's actions at New River: “Why conserve” and “Why conserve using this method?”, and b) they represent a fertile area about which to build understanding and common ground in future relationships, one that could lead to an adoption of each other's beliefs enough to positively affect conservation (Schroeder 1996).

The participants' sense of place regarding the New River landscape can be analyzed relative to how long they had lived in the area and whether they built that sense of their environment by way of "natural" or "social" features in their daily lives (after Cantrill 1998). The landowners that had been in the area the longest had a stronger sense of place (i.e. they mentioned it more often), and although it was based on natural features to a large extent, the social significance of place was high as well. By contrast, the outside interests, the landowner that had lived there the shortest amount of time and was primarily interested in real-estate dealings with the agency, and all the agency personnel, focused their senses of place on natural values almost exclusively.<sup>11</sup>

One of the basic components of environmental perception is the place of the human in the natural world (Tuan 1971). In the case of New River, the landowners see humans as a part of the environment, with a positive role in shaping it, and a responsibility for daily stewardship for conservation such that the productive capacity of the land is maintained. In contrast, most of the agency personnel, and the outside observers with environmental interests, see humans as separate from nature, interacting with a place like New River as visitors, managers, and protectors. This differentiation is consistent with the Dwyer's (1996) evaluation that those who interact more extensively with the environment are a part of it whereas those with more intensive interactions, such as in urban areas where human use is concentrated and distinguished from nature, see a disconnect between humans and the environment.

### Public participation process

As natural resource management focuses toward incorporating whole ecosystems, landscape perception and individuals' senses of place becomes integral to dialogue and the decision-making process (Williams and Patterson 1996, Duane 1997). This "perceptual interface between people and habitat is generally considered a pivotal factor in designing communication programs to promote the conservation of biodiversity" (Cantrill 1998). In an ideal sense, "public involvement offers opportunities for sharing and receiving information, and for broadening the support of agency activities through increased awareness and appreciation," yet when a controversy is involved, it can be a delicate process (Nelson and Kalmar 1995). The way most public participation processes work, each group gives input to the agency who holds the plan and

has the power to make the decision. This forces the agency to sort through everyone's comments and "mediate" between different perspectives because those groups are never engaged with each other in dialogue. Leichty (1997) identifies this as a situation where collaboration is almost impossible because an agency's particular rhetorical strategy may repair one organization-public relationship but cause alienation in another. Contrast this with calling the people "to the table" and putting the planning process in their hands from the outset (Duane 1997). The agency could then clearly state a) why they are starting the process, b) the background leading up to it, c) the pertinent framework of laws, mandates, and the spirit behind them d) the expertise available, including philosophical considerations, and e) where the public fits in the process and at what power level. It is immediately apparent that a rich dialogue would then begin.

This is much different than what occurred in the New River process, where the citizens felt their own goals were overlooked and they had no ownership in the process, a component vital to acceptance of the final outcome (Nelson and Kalmar 1995). This direct relationship from the beginning groundwork to the end result can be explained by the concept of "social capital". In this case the social capital built up in a negative direction, in which mistrust and defection generate further mistrust and defection (Duane 1997). Much of this was based on the initial contact with the acquisition plan and the communication about it.

The most crucial lesson to learn, it seems, is to realize what order the sources of controversy need to be handled in. Too often, an "information problem" takes center stage or people decide "we're just different" and throw up their hands. While each may in part be true, there is also a need to "back up" and address the fact that people operate in different worlds, with individual perspectives on the environment and themselves, and that things can be reasonably explained by those worlds. This suggests the need for taking time for open and genuine communication built upon an ever-increasing understanding of each other's perceptions. Therein, "trust is generated and malfeasance discouraged [because] agreements are *embedded* within a larger structure of personal relations and social networks" (Duane 1997, emphasis in original). Yet in a world where natural resources dialogue is characterized more often by extreme voices, does getting what we want fundamentally depend on not communicating in a genuine fashion? Positioning behavior can be likened to a conservation war where all the

“soldiers” have to hate each other to get the job done. If this situation is set up, there is no room for understanding.

Almost ten years have passed since most of the controversy occurred, and the public participation processes of the government have changed to some extent. *“Now we’d do it differently, more low-key, and build a relationship with landowners”* (Agency Scientist-1). *“We could have sat down with ranchers in collective mode, and gone over the whole plan with them to see if any land might be available in any way at any time. This would have avoided rumors and exaggerated coffee-shop talk cause they would have all been there”* (Agency Manager-2). It would have also contributed to better potential for partnership in conservation.

### **CONCLUSION**

The New River Case Study was an excellent vehicle for identifying the sources of controversy associated with the establishment of a protected area for biodiversity conservation. By the end of the main project period in 1997, the BLM had been successful in acquiring critical lands in the core area. Unfortunately, the process caused local controversy around issues of: communication, a distrust of the government, differences in environmental perception, differences in social perception, different realities of the groups involved, information problems, external factors, and other influences. This paper served to document the perceptions of the different New River participants in rich detail, and to explain the controversy by providing a brief analysis based on the participants’ differing perceptions of the environment, different systems of operation, and the public participation process. Although some of the identified points of conflict are not likely to be easily resolved, there are areas where improvement could be achieved by creating opportunities for focused and meaningful dialogue. Conversations such as these would occur within an expanded public participation process focused on the long-term relationship of the agency with its neighbors versus a project-by-project solicitation for public input. This kind of relationship building would undoubtedly serve to create private-public partnerships more effective for biodiversity conservation in the future.



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Not all sitings are controversial. Often when they are, it is over a few typical reasons, concern that land is being taken off the tax rolls, and disagreements over the price. The New River case provided a decidedly richer study, complete with multiple actors, years in the process, and BLM employees later dedicated to smoothing over relations and regaining trust of the locals.

One USFWS manager was clearly upset that I was looking for controversy. This individual wanted me to focus on a process that had been “happier”.

<sup>2</sup>It should be recognized that, even if there had been no controversy, the amount of land owned publicly in the end may not have been different.

<sup>3</sup>Background demographic information was also collected, some directly (occupation, number of years living in area), and some indirectly that came up in casual conversation (approximate age, education, family, approximate income).

<sup>4</sup>There were landowners with small acreages who sold to the agency in smooth transactions. Almost all of them did not have a history in the area and either moved out directly after the sale, were absentee landowners, or had no views of the controversy in the southern end.

<sup>5</sup>The interview results from the two phone interviews paled in comparison to the depth achieved in the face-to-face interviews.

<sup>6</sup>None of the issues can be fully separated from the others and they are distinguished here for two reasons: 1) ease of analysis and making recommendations, and 2) because when people relate why things happened, they point to separate issues.

<sup>7</sup>So much time has passed since the public meetings were held in this area that the memories of them are often distilled down to a few key points. There was not an opportunity to study the meetings in person, and no written transcripts were made. Therefore, the comments about them are illustrated here to show the basic sentiments regarding information and communication between the parties.

<sup>8</sup>The landowner with the least history in the area, out of those interviewed, viewed the land as a *“nice park, with no connection really...I look at it as real estate. Development would be fine”* (Landowner-4). In an interesting contrast, this same landowner, who was a willing seller to the agency, thought it was *“a nice unique area, and fine to conserve”* (Landowner-4).

<sup>9</sup>The fear and distrust was so strong the issue rode over one long term resident’s relationship with area landowners because he went away to school, became a scientist, and came back to work for the government on the New River plan.

<sup>10</sup>For example, the agency person who had been working with the landowners the longest (six years) to rebuild the trust post-acquisition, had gained a rapport with the landowners that both reported being happy with. Yet the time was coming for him to move on to another state and a new position in his career. In training his replacement, he had been introducing him to the landowners for two years and people still weren’t ready for the change.

<sup>11</sup>When analyzing sense of place, it is awkward to compare the sentiments of people that live in a place with those that do not. For example, if some agency personnel, and recreationists have an “environmental” sense of place toward New River, compared with the landowner’s “way of life” sense of place, the former could change significantly if someone who only visited the area moved there and tried to make a living.

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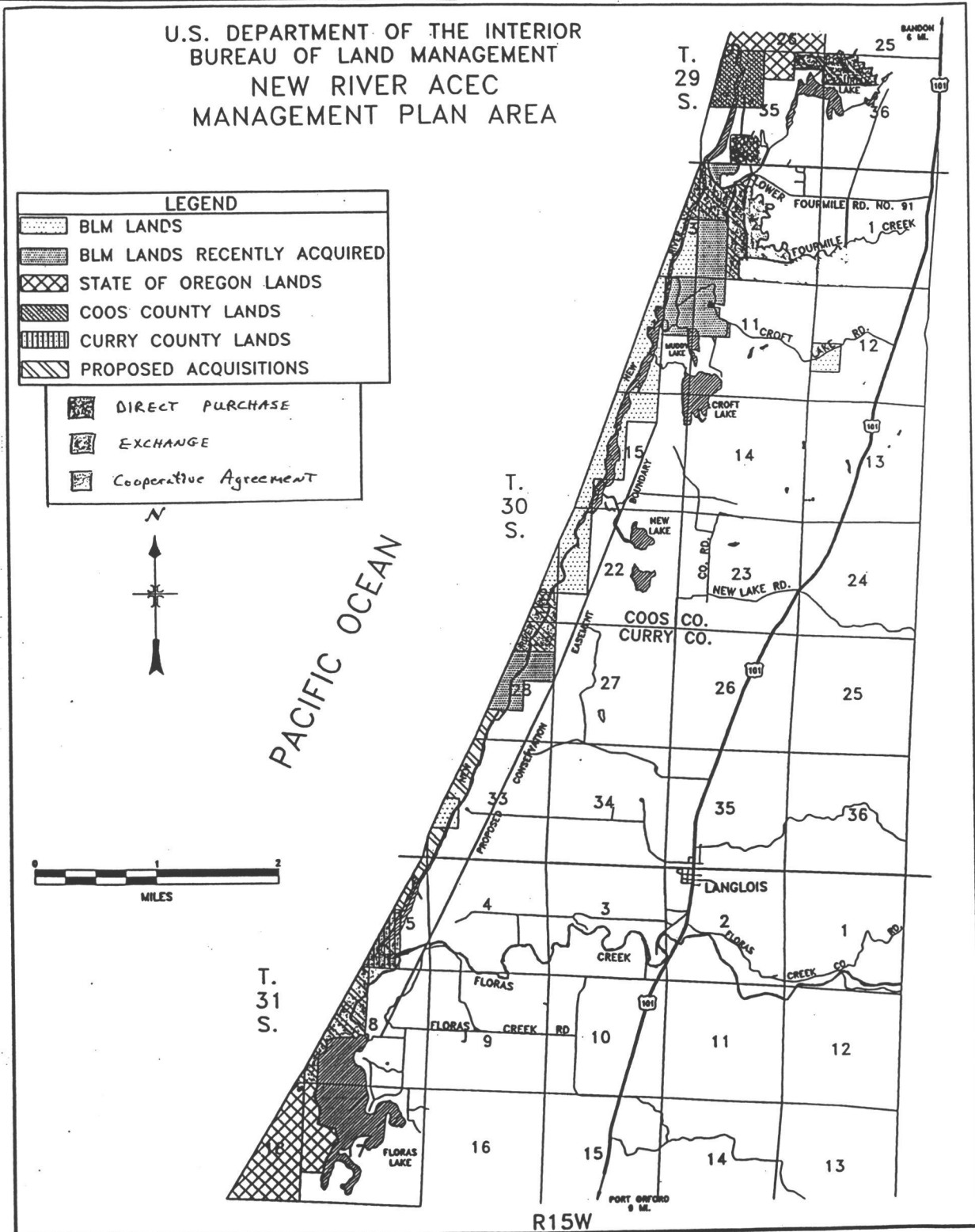
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## APPENDIX

### APPENDIX I. MAP SHOWING THE LOCATION OF THE NEW RIVER AREA OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN.



## APPENDIX II. CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS IN THE NEW RIVER ACQUISITION PROCESS

Table 4. The sequence of events in the land acquisition process at New River

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event in Acquisition Process</i>
1980	BLM adopts New River management plan; calls for ACEC designation
1983, June	New River Area designated ACEC, management plan writing begins
1984, Sept	Meeting with BLM and 2 landowners to discuss ACEC designation, fencing, foredune breaching, ORV use
1985	BLM claims they involved adjacent landowner in planning process beginning on this date.
1985, Apr	Meeting with landowner concerning ACEC, no acquisition discussion
1986	14.2 acres acquired by exchange
1987, Jan	Oregon and national conservation groups make New River acquisition a priority; ask for Land and Water conservation funds from Congress
1987, Sept	First management plan complete (includes prioritized acquisition plan)
1988, Dec	Preliminary acquisition priorities drafted. No record of their being shared.
1989, Jan	Preliminary acquisition priorities drafted. No record of their being shared.
1989, Apr	Roundtable Earth Day discussion in Bandon
1989, June	Acquisition activity plan completed
1989, July	Public meeting-- notice of acquisition plan to landowners
1989, Sept	\$500K appropriated from LWCF by Congress for BLM to acquire lands
1989, Dec	BLM and TNC sign MOU to buy and transfer lands
1990, Feb	BLM meets with landowners to confirm that they will respect unwillingness to sell.
1990, Feb	Landowners say they first learned of acquisition plan on this date
1990, May	Public meeting held
1991	\$3 million appropriated from LWCF by Congress for BLM to acquire lands
1991, June	BLM acquires 345.6 acres by purchase
1991, July	Officials tour land to discuss beach line placement (external issue)
1991, Sept	Public meeting held. Propose revised acquisition plan removing ranchers' names
1991, Sept	Memo from Congressman DeFazio's office asking BLM for specific resolution of landowner concerns from meeting
1991, Dec	Affected landowners dropped from Federal Register list of prioritized lands.
1994, June	Updated Management Plan draft complete
1994, Aug	BLM acquires 111 acres by purchase
1994, Dec	BLM acquires additional acreage at Lost Lake (in New River area)
1995, May	Voters in Coos County pass non-binding initiative (no more lands to feds)
1996	BLM given \$1.5 million from LWCF by Congress to acquire more lands

Abbreviations: LWCF – Land and Water Conservation Fund; TNC – The Nature Conservancy; MOU –Memorandum of Understanding; ORV – Off-Road Vehicle.

## APPENDIX III. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### Instructions to Participants

The process of land acquisition for conservation of plants or wildlife habitat can raise issues often perceived differently by each individual involved. After the land acquisition process is completed, there is rarely an opportunity to analyze the differing perceptions of the issues and their relative importance. We want to record these different perspectives and contribute to an increased understanding of the process.

As a person involved in the establishment of the New River area, your help is important in identifying issues and describing your perception of them. Results of this study will help anyone reading them to understand what issues arise during attempts to establish conservation areas and contribute ideas to improving future community involvement.

The in-person interview will take about an hour. You do not have to answer any questions which you do not feel comfortable with and you may terminate the interview at any point or turn off the tape recorder. Do you have any questions before we begin?

### Interview Questions (*potential responses are indicated in italics*).

1. To start with your background, how long have you lived in this area? *number, open-ended*
2. What is your occupation and how long have you supported yourself that way? *statement, open-ended*
3. What is the history of your association with the New River area? *open-ended*
4. At what point did you become aware of the attempts to acquire the site for conservation? *date, time in process, and how; open-ended.*
5. At that initial point, what was your view of the purpose(s) of setting aside this land for conservation? *favorable, non-favorable, neutral; open-ended.*
6. Please tell me about your involvement in the establishment of the New River area. *open-ended*
7. In your opinion, what were the key factors in the success and failure of the establishment of the area and how important were they relative to each other? *list and nominal ranking, open-ended*
8. What did you see as the sources of controversy in the process? *list; open-ended.*
9. Did you attend any public meetings on the issue? *yes, no*
  - 9a. If yes, What issues were raised at the meeting? *list*
  - 9b. Who raised those issues? *list*
  - 9c. How did you think people responded to the issues raised? *open-ended*
  - 9d. What other issues were raised at the meeting? *list*
  - 9e. How did you think those issues were addressed and handled? *open-ended*
10. How did people, including yourself, communicate with each other during this process (by what methods and how well do you think each method worked)? *open-ended*
  - 10a. Were there any working groups formed, informal or formal? *yes, no*
11. What was your goal for this site (what land-use)? *open-ended*
12. How much of that goal was achieved in the final outcome? *percentage, then open-ended*
13. How much do you think other people's goals were included in the final outcome? *percent, then open-ended*
14. Were you satisfied with the outcome? *yes, no, partially; open-ended*
15. What do you think could have been better? *open-ended*
16. What do you see as some of the possible futures of this site? *list*
17. Now that the controversial process is over, how do you feel about the purpose of setting aside this site for conservation? *open-ended*
18. So your view of conservation has (not) changed from this experience? *open-ended*

## APPENDIX IV. PARTICIPANTS

### Federal Agency Managers

**Agency Manager-1.** Individual is a natural resources and recreation manager for a federal land management agency in the area.

**Agency Manager-2.** Individual was a District Manager for a federal land management agency in the area.

**Agency Manager-3.** Individual is an Area Manager for a federal land management agency in the area.

### Federal Agency Personnel

**Agency Staff-1.** Individual is a recreation and natural resources planner for a federal land management agency in the area. Was a realtor in previous position.

**Agency Staff-2.** Individual is a natural resources planner for a federal land management agency in the area.

**Agency Staff-3.** Individual is a realtor for a federal land management agency in the area.

### Federal Agency Scientists

**Agency Scientist-1.** Individual is a biologist for a federal land management agency in the area.

**Agency Scientist-2.** Individual is a biologist for a federal land management agency in the area.

**Agency Scientist-3.** Individual was an archaeologist for a federal land management agency in the area.

### Private Landowners

**Landowner-1.** Individual is a landowner and rancher with a 50 year history in the New River area, with approximately 800 acres targeted for purchase by the agency.

**Landowner-2.** Individual is a landowner and rancher with a 130 year family history in the New River area, with approximately 400 acres targeted for purchase by the agency.

**Landowner-3.** Individual is a landowner and rancher with a 50 year history in the New River area, with approximately 1500 acres targeted for purchase by the agency.

**Landowner-4.** Individual is a landowner and rancher with a 80 year history in the New River area, with approximately 250 acres targeted for purchase by the agency.

### Area Citizens and Neighbors

**Neighbor-1.** Individual is a large acreage landowner, rancher and realtor in the New River area; holds office in a ranching proponents group.

**Neighbor-2.** Individual is a medium acreage landowner and rancher in the New River area and recreates in ACEC.

**Neighbor-3.** Individual is a medium acreage landowner in the New River area and recreates in ACEC.

**Neighbor-4.** Individual is a small acreage landowner in the New River area, retired manager of a mill.

### Outside Interests

**Outside-1.** Individual is a second-home owner in the New River area, for recreation use; lives about one hour inland.

**Outside-2.** Individual is an environmental activist in the region with specific knowledge of New River area.

**Outside-3.** Individual was a County Commissioner in the area during the period of controversy.



# APPENDIX V. ALL SOURCES OF CONTROVERSY BY RANK AND NUMBER OF CITATIONS

Source of Controversy	Rank	No. ppl citing	No. times cited	Ranking of sources of controversy by group (#ppl, #times)					
				Land-owners	Neighbors	Outside Obsrvrs	Agency Staff	Agency Scntsts	Agency Mngrs
<b>Communication</b> – techniques, attitude, overall miscommunication, at public meeting, initial contact, lack of listening	1	18	59	1 (4, 13)	1 (3, 14)	2 (3, 6)	1 (2, 6)	1 (3, 13)	1 (3, 7)
<b>Government</b> – distrust of, confusion regarding	2	15	22	3/4 (3, 5)	4/5 (3, 7)	3 (3, 4)	2 (2, 2)	5/6 (2, 2)	5 (2, 2)
<b>Environmental Perception</b> – landscape (vision, sense of place, creation and causes), conservation (definition, methods, needs)	3	14	35	3/4 (3, 5)	2 (3, 11)	1 (3, 10)	6/7/8 (0, 0)	2 (3, 6)	4 (2, 3)
<b>Perception</b> – relations between groups, perception of the other, power imbalance, perception of self, of what others think	4	13	34	2 (4, 11)	4/5 (3, 7)	3 (2, 7)	4/5 (1, 1)	4 (2, 7)	6/7/8 (1, 1)
<b>Different Systems of Operation</b> (worldviews) – association (project/job v. personal/lifestyle), interaction method (personal v. paperwork), consequences of action, belief system (tradition/common sense v. science/planning), familiarity/history	5	11	23	5 (3, 3)	3 (3, 10)	6/7/8 (0, 0)	4/5 (1, 1)	3 (2, 5)	2/3 (2, 4)
<b>Information</b> – timing, misinformation, control, inconsistency	6	9	22	6 (2, 10)	6 (2, 6)	5 (2, 3)	6/7/8 (0, 0)	5/6 (2, 2)	6/7/8 (1, 1)
<b>External influences</b> – beach line controversy, Wild and Scenic designation, other environ. Issues	7	4	6	7 (2, 2)	7/8 (0, 0)	6/7/8 (0, 0)	6/7/8 (0, 0)	8 (0, 0)	2/3 (2, 4)
<b>Other</b> – taxes, amount of government ownership	8	3	3	8 (0, 0)	7/8 (0, 0)	6/7/8 (0, 0)	3 (1, 2)	7 (1, 1)	6/7/8 (1, 1)

Table 5. A ranking of the sources of controversy.

Overall ranking of the relative contribution of each issue to the controversy was determined by the number of different people citing the issue as a source of controversy. This is a measure of the pervasiveness of the perception that a particular issue was a problem. The relative complexity of the issue is shown in the number of times it was mentioned overall. For group ranking, the number of people citing the issue was the primary factor and the number of times the issue was mentioned was the secondary factor.

## APPENDIX VI. GRAPHS FOR EACH ISSUE SHOWING RANKING BY THE GROUPS.

The following figures show how many individuals in each group cited the issue as a source of controversy, as well as the number of times the issue came up for that group overall. The right axis shows each groups' ranking for this issue, relative to other issues they discussed.

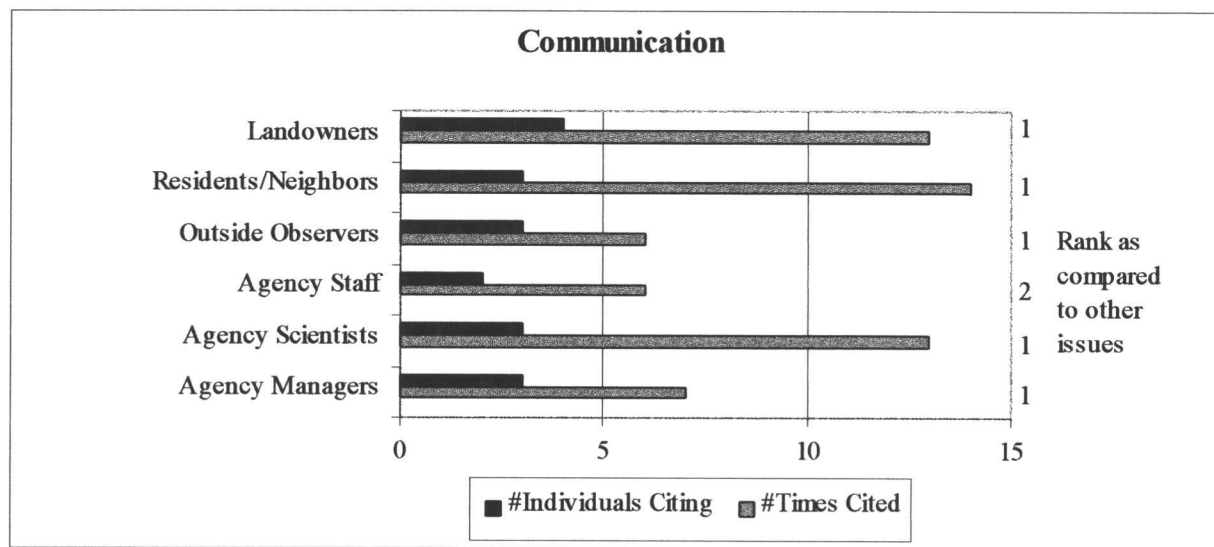


Figure 2. Communication as a source of controversy, as cited and ranked by each group.

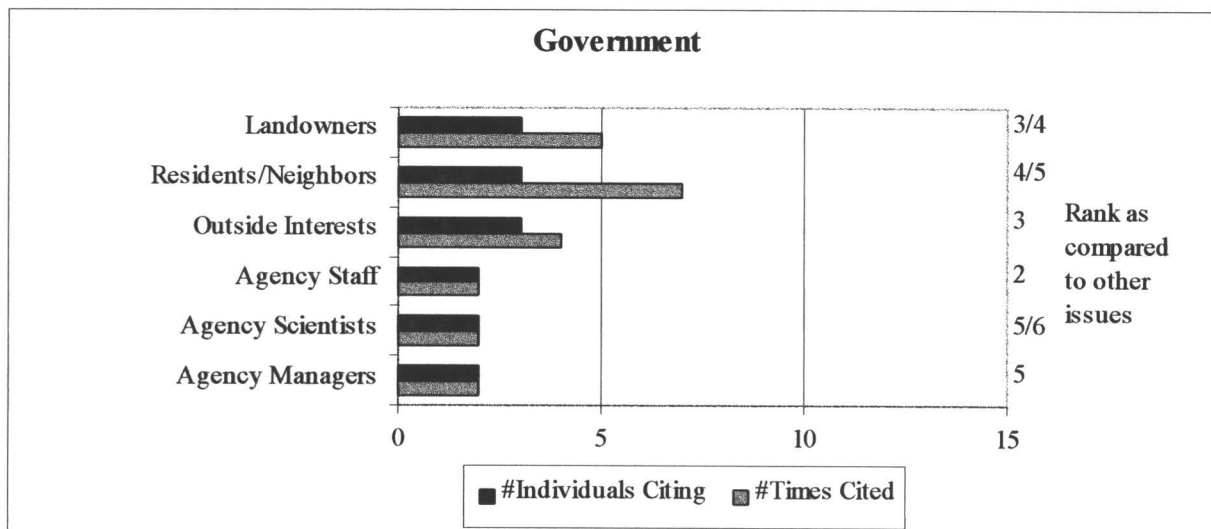


Figure 3. Government as a source of controversy, as cited and ranked by each group.

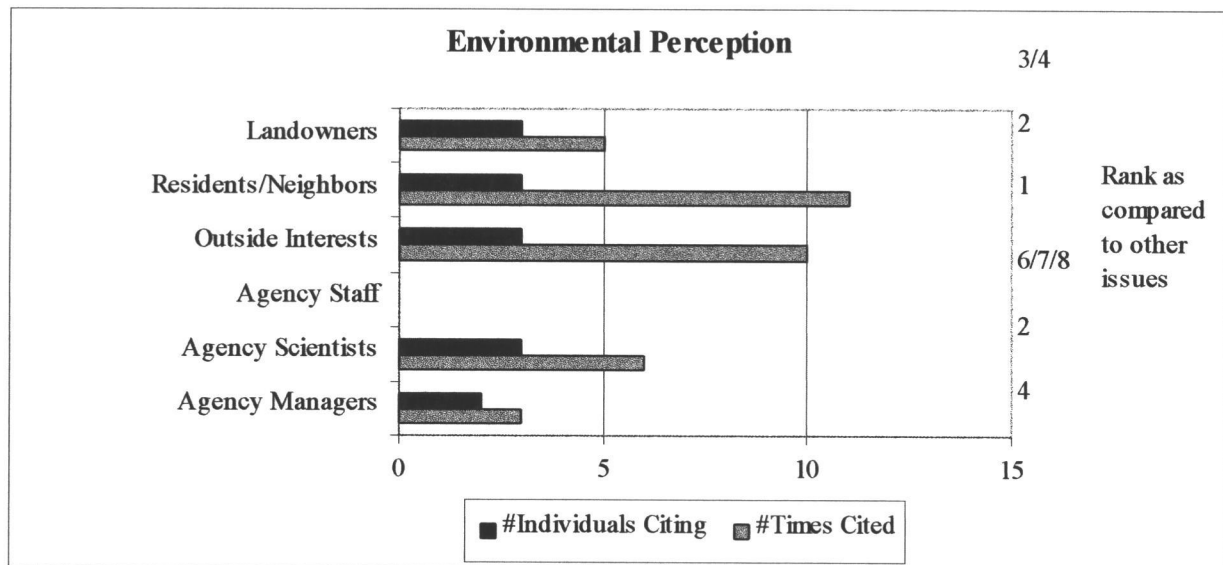


Figure 4. Environmental perception as a source of controversy, as cited and ranked by each group.

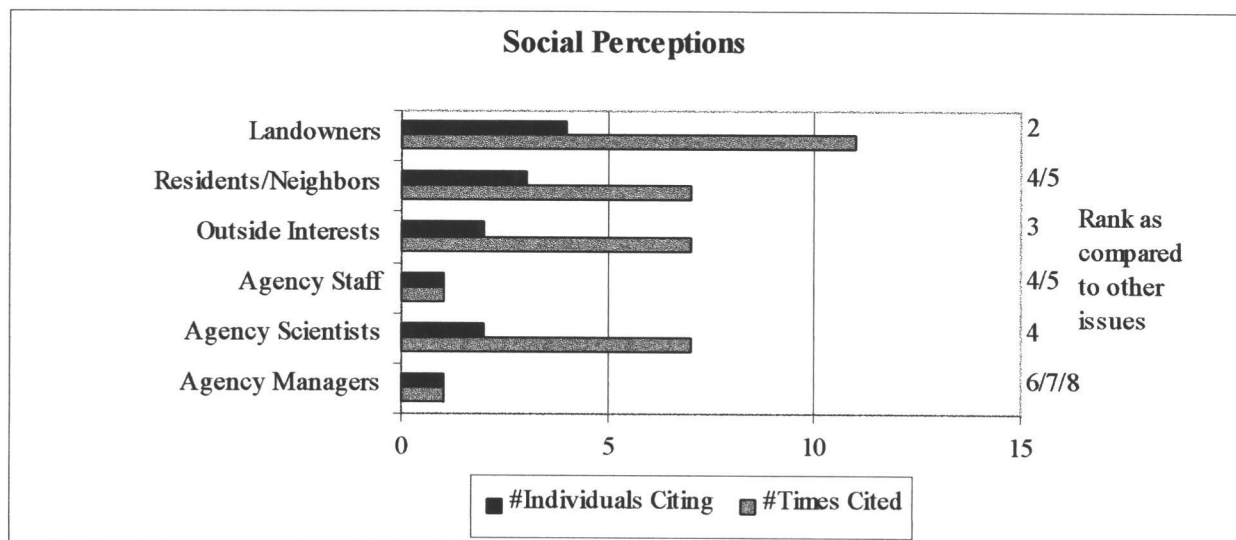


Figure 5. Social Perception as a source of controversy, as cited and ranked by each group.

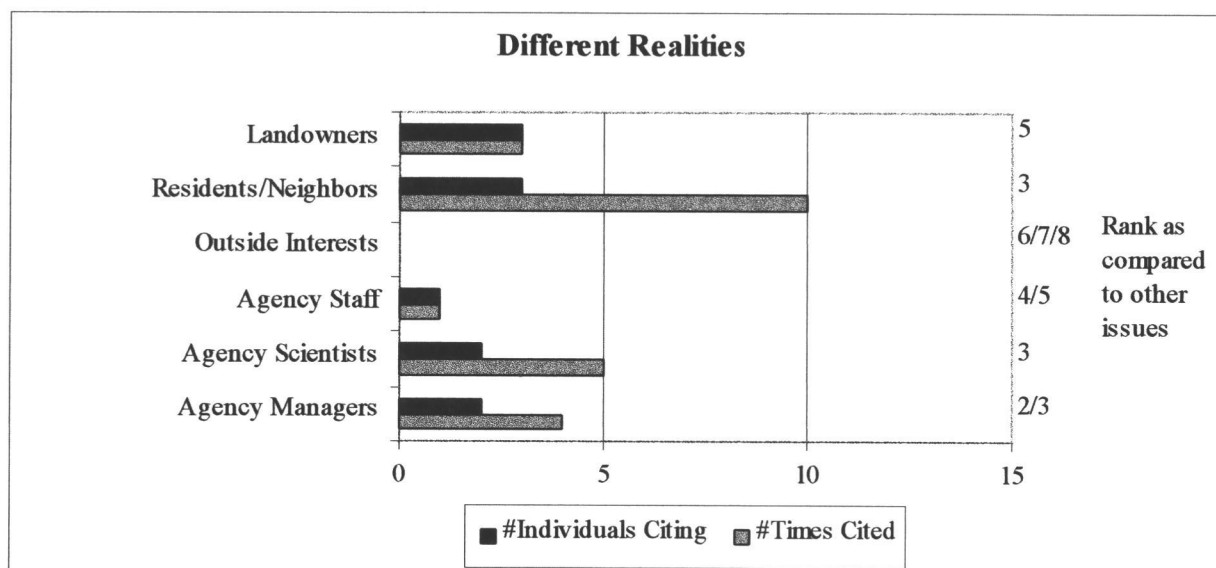


Figure 6. Different Realities as a source of controversy, as cited and ranked by each group.

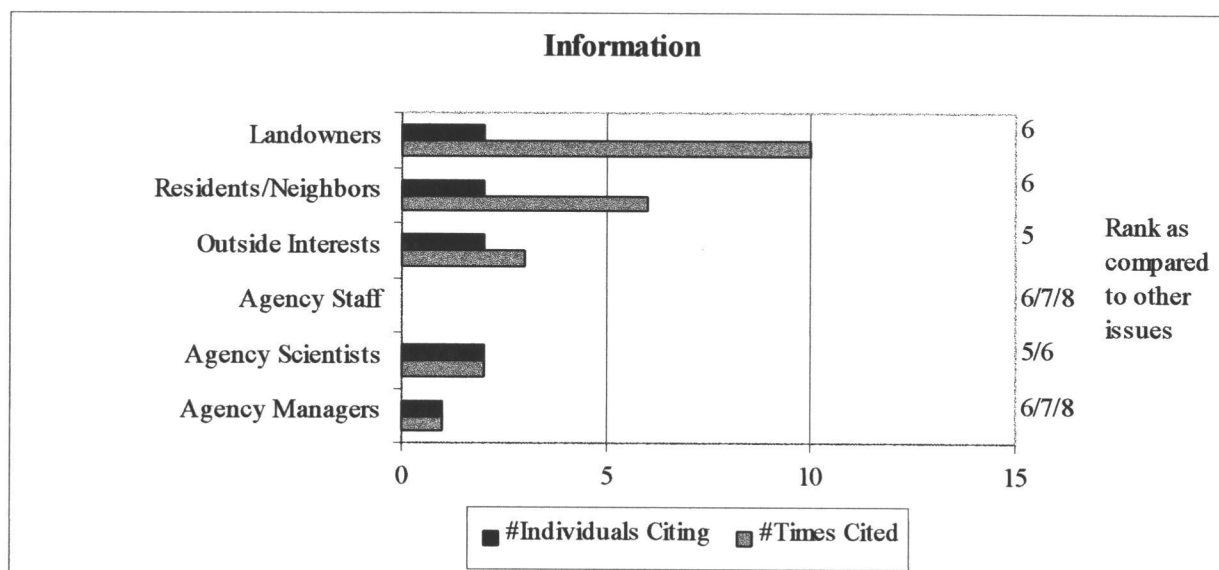


Figure 7. Information as a source of controversy, as cited and ranked by each group.

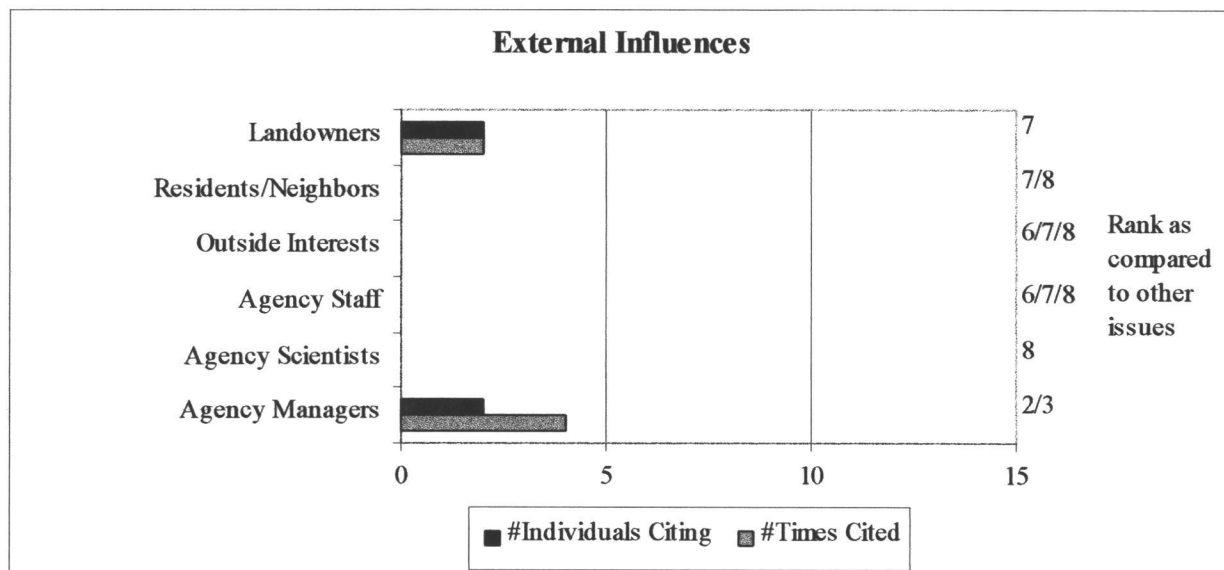


Figure 8. External Influences as sources of controversy, as cited and ranked by each group.

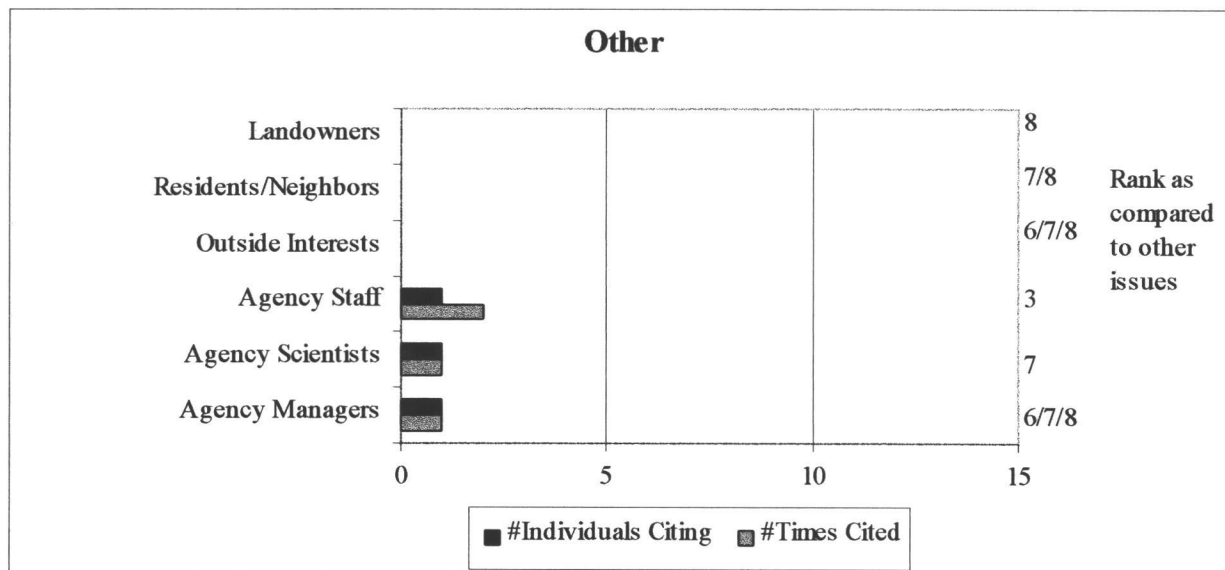


Figure 9. Other factors as sources of controversy, as cited and ranked by each group.