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Review: Large-Scale Ecosystem Restoration: Five Case Studies from the United States

Mary Doyle and Cynthia A. Drew (Eds.)

Reviewed by Elery Hamilton-Smith
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Doyle, Mary and Drew, Cynthia A. (Eds.). *Large-Scale Ecosystem Restoration: Five Case Studies from the United States*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press. 325pp. ISBN 1-59726-026-6. US \$35.00, recycled, acid-free paper.

The basic practical organizational problems which arise in almost any co-operative initiative within a Federal government are notorious. Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) carried out a valuable critical review and case study under the title (!) *Implementation: How great expectations in Washington are dashed in Oakland; or, why it's amazing that Federal Programs work at all, this being a saga of the Economic Development Administration as told by two sympathetic observers who seek to build morals on a foundation of ruined hopes*. (University of California Press, Berkeley).

Since that time governmental administrators have learned a great deal about adaptive management, but new issues in governance arise, and introduce new problems in co-operative initiative. The current emphasis upon risk management is one of these, and although it was probably seen as not relevant to co-operative action, it inevitably adds to the difficulties.

Similarly, the arena within which action is planned and acted upon will also grow to be more complex. The current example which is central to this book is the recognition that to focus any restoration program upon a single element of the environment is not likely to be effective. Rather we now accept the centrality of ecological thinking with its basis in complexity and inter-connectedness. So, we have moved towards tackling all aspects of the restoration program at one time and in a balanced way. In turn this leads us to continuing research and the struggle to integrate new knowledge into our practical strategies or in other words to adopt an adaptive management approach. Inevitably this leads to contest and the need to resolve differences. But restoration at this level demands immense resources and co-operation across all levels of social organisation. So the restoration arena is also a contested one with differences and immense problems in attaining resolution and continuing commitment.

This book is organised around five major regional programs, each defined by the boundaries of a major watershed – Everglades, Platte River, California-Bay Delta, Chesapeake Bay and the Upper Mississippi. The watershed boundary itself represents a significant change in thinking as it defines a common basis for conceptualizing what is to be done. It avoids the almost universal fragmentation of natural environment by cadastral and political boundaries. Yet at the same time, it introduces a new contest over access to and management of resources.

Each program is examined from three viewpoints: the origin and evolution of the program, the scientific understanding of the region, and the political economy of the project and its impacts. The authors have achieved a great deal in their clarity of analysis. They provide an excellent model for case studies of this kind through identification of the key dimensions which must be assessed and the key inter-related elements which shape the success or failure of any project:

- Timing and levels of funding
- Setting and meeting interim and final goals
- Nature and status of the federal-state partnership
- Quality of the science and its integration in decision making
- Conflict management and resolution
- Building and maintaining public awareness and support

Although federal and state governments are the major partners in these projects, a very similar model might well be used in planning, managing and assessing any other complex inter-organisational

programs. Perhaps one of the important lessons from this series of studies is the fallibility of common assumptions and stereotypes about both the natural and cultural environments.

This is indeed a valuable book for anyone who wants to be a stakeholder, actor, analyst or perceptive observer in any major complex action program.

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