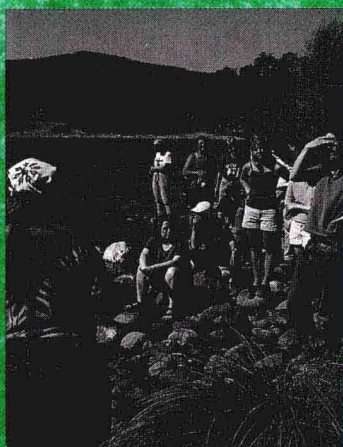# COMMUNITY FORESTRY IN THE UNITED STATES

Learning from the Past, Crafting the Future

Mark Baker

Jonathan Kusel

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Acknowledgments

project. We deeply appreciate the generous contributions all the advisory committee members made to this effort.

We would also like to acknowledge the generous and insightful contributions of those we interviewed for the project and of those who participated in one of the three regional workshops held as part of the research effort. During the intervening 2-year period between the advisory group meetings, we conducted more than 55 interviews with key people within the community forestry movement. These people are listed in the Appendix. They are a diverse group. They include grassroots community forestry practitioners, civil servants, community forestry nonprofit staff members, private sector entrepreneurs, community organizers, woods workers, nontimber forest product gatherers, academics, and national environmental group and wood products industry representatives. In addition to these interviews, we held three regional workshops, one each in the Northeast, the Intermountain West, and the Pacific West. The purpose of each workshop was to bring together a diverse group of community forestry leaders to discuss an array of region-specific community forestry issues. The consistently high level of debate and discussion at these workshops reflects the high level of commitment of these people both to the goals of the community forestry movement and to the hard work and thinking necessary for their realization. The generous contributions to this project of those who participated in the workshops (also listed in the Appendix) were invaluable in revealing the complexities, challenges, and opportunities that the movement faces.

We would also like to thank Forest Community Research staff for the contributions they made to this project. Throughout this project Lorraine Hanson has provided excellent and invariably good-humored support. Joyce Cunningham, Will Kay, and Beth Rose Middleton each contributed to the project. Lee Williams was involved at the early stages of this effort and conducted several of the interviews. The efforts and contributions of all these people are gratefully acknowledged.

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Contents

The Landscape of Community Forestry

A new approach to community development is in the making—
one that asks people about the long-term needs of a place and of
all its residents. We're in the process of building local institutions
that take over the job of looking after public value on a volunteer
basis, and we're learning how to reinvest in areas so that they'll
be more valuable to the next generation than they are to ours. . . .
I think we can now show that stewardship springs from connect-
edness—it gives people back a sense of thinking responsibly on
behalf of the whole community, and it sends a shiver up the
spines of the gatekeepers by reminding them that someone can
take away their keys.

> —*Bob Yaro, former director of the Center for Rural
> Massachusetts (Hiss 1990:207–208)*

Across the United States people have taken up the challenging task of creat-
ing new relations between themselves and the forest ecosystems on which
they depend. Their common goal is to improve the health of the land and
well-being of their communities. Often, their efforts have arisen from des-
perate circumstances: political gridlock and intractable social conflict con-
cerning forest management, local economic crisis resulting from reduced ac-
cess to resources essential to a community's survival, and large-scale
patterns of forest degradation and fragmentation that threaten the integrity of
working forest landscapes. Seeking to reverse historical patterns of resource

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extraction that threaten ecosystems and weaken communities, practitioners and supporters of what has come to be called *community forestry* challenge the dominant paradigm of forest management. They reject continuation of the historical disenfranchisement of communities and workers from forest management. They critique the ways in which the practice of traditional science has not stewarded ecosystems and has privileged some at the expense of others. And they call for a stop to the all-too-pervasive trends of long-term disinvestment in ecosystems and human communities that have undermined the health of both.

To redress these shortcomings, practitioners of community forestry are developing a new approach and new ideas about restructuring relations between people and forests. A key tenet of this approach is the belief that sustaining forest ecosystems demands that forest communities and workers also be sustained. The twin objectives of healthy forests and healthy communities are not distinct; rather, they are two inseparable halves that together constitute a unity. One without the other is inherently unsustainable; only together can each be sustained. Realizing this vision of sustained forests and communities entails a radical reorientation of the ways in which democracy and science are practiced, markets and institutions influence patterns of disinvestment and investment, and resource management agencies mediate relations between government and society. These themes constitute some of the challenges and the promises of community forestry.

This book is a historically grounded analysis of the community forestry movement in the United States. It examines the current state of the field to assess where community forestry is now and where it might go in the future. This purpose is important for the same reason that community forestry is important: There is a broad consensus that the dominant paradigm of forest management bequeathed by the Progressive Era, with its associated bureaucratic and technocratic structures, has, for the most part, failed to steward forest ecosystems and maintain vital communities. Community forestry has emerged as an alternative or complementary model of forest management and therefore offers the promise of forest management regimes that may succeed where the progressive model has not.

Identifying the current state of community forestry and its potential future is also important because community forestry in the United States has reached a critical stage. No longer a series of spontaneous ignitions across the country, it has gained the coherence and profile of a national movement. In short, community forestry has become a force to be reckoned with. As one longtime supporter of community forestry recently remarked, "Community forestry is ready for take off." However, there remains considerable debate about the most desirable course for the movement to follow and even about which people and groups should be included, for not all those whose liveli-

hoods depend on the forest ecosystem are part of the community forestry movement. Thus community forestry has reached a critical crossroads. This book is timely because part of its purpose is not only to reveal and clarify the nature of the crossroads but also to suggest and legitimate a trajectory, a method, and a process that in the long run are most likely to promote ecological stewardship and build healthy communities.

The National Backdrop of Community Forestry

Reinvigorating democratic institutions and fostering civic engagement are widely recognized as the biggest challenges of democracy in the United States today. This challenge has arisen as a result of the failure of the liberal democratic state to provide people with meaningful opportunities to participate in collective decision making regarding the economic, social, and environmental conditions that affect them. The prevailing structure of interest group–driven politics (known also as interest group pluralism) has produced a plethora of highly capitalized, centralized, and specialized political lobbying organizations that effectively advance their respective agendas at state and national levels. Through financial contributions individuals support the groups that promise to forward their interests. Battle lines harden as interest groups compete for funds and support. Government policy and actions result from the tense interplay of interest group politics and influence peddling on one hand and the ostensibly neutral scientist–expert advancing the interests of the public good on the other. Welfare programs based on trickle-down and income poverty alleviation are assumed to be adequate safety nets for those unable to prosper; other critically needed investments in community capacity building, their relationships with income poverty and environmental deterioration, and the concomitant variety of potential policy and investment responses are ignored.

Democratic participation and civic engagement are not the only casualties of the dominant American political economy. Impoverishment of communities and lingering or increasing environmental degradation symbolize the disruptive workings of capitalism and the limits of both trickle-down and centralized command-and-control environmental management and regulation. These trends stand in stark contrast with the strong economic growth of recent years, low unemployment rates, and spectacular wealth increases among some segments of society. They are also cause for concern given the general trends within state and federal government to privatize services and incorporate market-based models of government service delivery.

The overlapping spatial patterns of community decline and environmental degradation suggest that their causes, and therefore the possibility of their amelioration, may be linked. Furthermore, the historically weak political

representation and civic engagement of such communities suggests that strengthened participatory planning processes and a more vibrant civic culture may be important components of a solution.

To many, these observations may sound trite. However, they are useful to note and reflect on because they have given birth to a family of community-based social movements, of which community forestry is one. These community-based social movements share much in common because the conditions they address arise from the same set of dominant political, economic, and social institutions, processes, and relationships. Given the common ground from which these movements have emerged, it comes as no surprise that they share many important attributes in terms of both the frameworks used to analyze constraints and opportunities and the strategies proposed and implemented to advance their causes. A brief review of some of the key features of two of these social movements establishes parallels with community forestry and points to the common warp and weft they share.

Civic Environmentalism, Sustainable Communities, and Community Forestry: Three Sister Movements

Two community-based movements, civic environmentalism and the sustainable communities movement, are closely related to community forestry.[1] A review of some of the key objectives and core concepts of these movements highlights the similar conditions from which community-based social movements emerge, their common challenges, and their shared approaches and principles.

Civic Environmentalism

Narrowly conceived, civic environmentalism concerns the potential for communities to partner with government in environmental protection and stewardship, particularly with regard to moving beyond traditional command-and-control environmental regulation and diversifying the array of policy instruments that are used to maintain or enhance environmental quality (John 1994). A broader, more encompassing interpretation of civic environmentalism focuses attention on the importance of "the civic capacity of communities to engage in effective environmental problem solving, and the relationship between the civic life of communities and environmental conditions" (Shutkin 2000:15). This interpretation informs the civic environmental movement and the wide variety of civic environmental projects, primarily located in urban areas, around the country.

The focus on the linkages between community building and environmental problem solving is a central tenet of this movement. When these two

goals are considered in tandem, as integrated processes, they focus attention on democratic renewal and environmental protection or enhancement. Community building depends on strengthening civic democracy, founded on the premise that all citizens should be able to participate equally in the decisions and in the institutions that affect their lives. This notion of democratic participation emphasizes the importance of community-based decision making in which, through face-to-face deliberation, common purpose and common good can evolve. Civil society, social capital, and place, or the local environment, are the three constitutive elements of civic democracy, according to Shutkin (2000:31). Shutkin argues that the strength of civic democracy may be ascertained by examining the extent and nature of social capital, the degree of political participation, racial and socioeconomic equality, and the extent of public investment and privatization. These indicators of civic health also provide the basis for determining effective ways to strengthen communities and their environmental problem-solving abilities.

Shutkin (2000:128) suggests that civic environmental projects embody six core concepts: participatory processes, community and regional planning, environmental education, industrial ecology (reflecting the urban focus of civic environmentalism), environmental justice, and the importance of place. In any civic environmental project, to varying degrees, each of these core concepts is present; much the same could be said for most community forestry efforts. Here, we briefly dwell on participation and planning processes within civic environmentalism because of their close association with similar processes within community forestry. Participation within civic environmentalism involves face-to-face deliberations among all stakeholders to collectively craft mutually acceptable solutions to environmental problems and simultaneously strengthen and create community. In contrast to the traditional top-down expert-driven model of environmental problem solving, civic environmentalism empowers communities, with the help of experts, to devise their own solutions. Meaningful participation of this sort strengthens community-based decision-making capacities, enables citizens to monitor environmental problems, builds social capital and civic infrastructure, and facilitates productive collaboration with both the public and the private sector.

Civic environmentalism incorporates models of community and regional planning rooted in the work of regional planners concerned with the question of how to plan for sustainable communities. These models, originally developed by regional planners and thinkers such as Frederick Law Olmsted, Lewis Mumford, Benton MacKaye, and Jane Jacobs, embrace a systems approach to planning for community and environmental health. When combined with participatory processes, this approach to planning enables communities to identify the systemic issues that underlie and give rise to particular problems, devise long-term, comprehensive responses to those

issues (which often include attracting and channeling investment for collective benefit), and engage in the important process of developing a shared vision of a community's future. Part of the planning process entails identifying information needs, strengthening feedback mechanisms, and monitoring changes over time. One innovative approach to developing community-based feedback mechanisms is the Community Indicators Network of the public policy group Redefining Progress. This civic science–oriented network uses community-based indicators of community health that stakeholders developed themselves to track trends, assess current conditions, prioritize actions and issues, and measure progress (Shutkin 2000:133). The process of developing and using community-based indicators strengthens community capacity and fosters the development of a collective vision of the future.

The Sustainable Communities Movement

The sustainable communities movement parallels civic environmentalism, and they both overlap community forestry along key dimensions. Civic environmentalism and the sustainable communities movement share the intellectual legacy of Patrick Geddes and Lewis Mumford, particularly with regard to the relationships between environmental quality, equity, and community well-being, the importance of place-based solutions to regional planning, the need for social cohesion and civic engagement, and the lack of faith in technological progress to solve pressing urban social and environmental issues. The sustainable communities movement is also centrally concerned with revitalizing democracy. Consistent with notions of bioregionalism and local self-reliance, also part of the movement, this concern often focuses on regional and local forms of democracy. Communitarianism and the community values it promotes, as illustrated by the grassroots communitarian movement of the late 1940s and recently revived by a number of scholars and policy makers (see Etzioni 1994, among others), is another important element of the contemporary sustainable communities movement.

Lamont Hempel (1999:51), in his review of the sustainable communities movement, suggests that it emerged out of "decades of frustration" by planners, local officials and business leaders, citizen activists, and environmental groups that resulted from their inability to manage growth in a socially and environmentally sustainable manner. The failure of traditional planning, zoning, and redevelopment instruments led to the search for different, community-based ways to steward the environment and support the growth of vibrant communities. Much like the systems approach of civic environmentalism, the sustainable communities movement incorporates interdisciplinary approaches that are based on the assumption that integrated solutions are needed to address contemporary environmental and social challenges. Hempel (1999:53) identi-

fies four main orientations within this movement: a "capitals" framework approach, the urban design approach, the ecosystem management strategy, and the metropolitan governance orientation. Each has its own analytical focus, theoretical and applied questions, and set of sustainability indicators. Although all four orientations are interesting in their own right, only those that correspond closely to community forestry are discussed here.

The capitals approach to defining and achieving community sustainability is rooted in ecological economics. Initial formulations of natural capital were later expanded to include other types of capital such as human capital, human-created capital, social capital, and cultural capital (Viederman 1996). Within this formulation sustainability "is a community's control and prudent use of all forms of capital . . . to ensure . . . a high degree of economic security and achieve democracy while maintaining the integrity of the ecological systems upon which all life and all production depends" (Viederman 1996:46, quoted in Hempel 1999:55). This approach, though not without its critics, draws attention to the relationships between the various forms of capital, facilitates full-cost accounting, and emphasizes the importance of developing measures of the different types of capital—a prerequisite to any form of mutually beneficial exchange.

The ecosystem management orientation in the sustainable communities movement emphasizes ecosystem preservation and restoration as the overriding factor in community design and development in both urban and rural contexts. Hempel (1999:58) notes that sociopolitical factors have been underemphasized in this science-based management approach but that recently this imbalance has begun to be corrected. Furthermore, because of the scale associated with most ecosystem management efforts, their multijurisdictional nature, and their science-intensive monitoring and evaluation protocols, most ecosystem management initiatives have been initiated either by federal and state agencies or by large, national environmental groups. Therefore, they are not easily meshed with community-scale processes, although community participation is certainly an essential component of any successful attempt at ecosystem management.

The metropolitan governance orientation in the sustainable communities movement at first appears to be a somewhat contradictory mixing of scales. However, the underlying thrust behind this approach is the fact that communities are interdependent. They can exert both positive and negative influences on each other, and they are affected by nonlocal economic processes and global relationships. This underscores the need to connect local with nonlocal policy making and to develop regional governance frameworks to coordinate the interdependent effects of local communities' actions and to promote regional environmental quality and economic opportunity. Otherwise, as Hempel notes, "the goals of sustainable community end up looking

parochial and selfish" (1999:61). Hempel suggests the concept of a "community of communities" as a possible vehicle for achieving intracommunity coordination and advancing community-based policies within state and national policy-making arenas.

Finally, as with civic environmentalism, community indicators are a central feature of the sustainable communities movement. These indicators of community sustainability assess economic, social, and ecological health; they are monitored to determine changes in direction and intensity. Given the emphasis on deliberative democracy within this movement, citizens must be involved in the development of indicators as well as monitoring. This can create problems if academics and professional analysts challenge the validity of community indicators. On the other hand, insisting on the use of community-based indicators can be an important step toward developing civic science.

Community Forestry

The degree of symmetry between the core components of community forestry and civic environmentalism and the sustainable communities movement is startling but not surprising. As we noted at the beginning of this chapter, these three movements are part of a family of community-based social movements that share the same warp and weft, although the specific features of their patterns are different. For example, although this book focuses primarily on community forestry in rural areas and extends to urban areas where rural–urban linkages and exchange relations are emerging, the goals of community forestry parallel those of the other two movements. In short, the objectives of the community forestry movement are to conserve or restore forest ecosystems while improving the well-being of the communities that depend on them. Although the connection between community well-being and forest ecosystem health may be more direct than in most civic environmental or sustainable community initiatives, the assumption that environmental and community health are interdependent links all three.

A useful way to frame the objectives of community forestry is through the triad of environment, economy, and equity. This triad can be conceived of as a three-legged stool; each leg is an essential component, necessary to ensure the stool's stability. Community forestry is an integrative enterprise that seeks to reorder relations between forest-dependent people and communities, between them and the wider political and economic systems with which they engage, and between them and the forests they depend on, in a manner that advances equity (especially within contexts of historically marginalized or disenfranchised communities) and promotes investment in both natural and community capital.

Core community forestry concepts parallel those of civic environmental-

ism and the sustainable communities movement. For example, community forestry practitioners emphasize the importance of participatory, collaborative, community-based decision-making and planning processes that include all the stakeholders likely to be affected by the forest ecosystem management plan or practice under consideration. Inherent in this notion of collaboration is the recognition that not all stakeholders have been involved in these planning processes and that eliciting their participation will take substantial investments of time, energy, and resources. The creation of new institutional relations between forest-dependent communities and the public agencies and industrial or nonindustrial owners that manage forests is another core community forestry concept. These new relations focus on the rights and obligations of communities with respect to forest resources and the importance of developing community-based participatory and civic science models of research, monitoring, and evaluation.

Investment is a central community forestry theme. One of the primary purposes of community forestry is to stem the flow of value from ecosystems and the communities whose well-being is tied to them. This purpose is achieved by integrating investments for forest ecological restoration with opportunities for local community revitalization. Integrative community-scale investments that promote equity, social justice, and forest health are the heart of the movement. When tied to the practices of forest management and ecosystem restoration, they give structure, form, and content to the otherwise abstract three-legged stool of environment, economy, and equity.

Methods and Organization

This book is the result of a study of community forestry. It is developed from a survey of secondary literature, interviews, workshops, and the authors' insights born of their association with community forestry. The roughly 60 semistructured interviews with community forestry practitioners and leaders from across the country were conducted in 2000 and 2001, along with three workshops held during the same period. To ensure regional representation, care was taken to interview people from regions where we were unable to hold workshops. The workshops, one each in Vermont, Colorado, and California, were designed to bring together a small number of leading community forestry practitioners and supporters for region-specific discussions of community forestry. The discussions focused on the current state of community forestry, barriers and opportunities, support needs, and strategies for overcoming current challenges. The structure of the interviews paralleled that of the workshops. The workshops and interviews inform the structure and content of chapters in the latter half of the book. The following paragraphs provide a preview of the chapters.

Chapter 2 discusses the historical antecedents of community forestry in the United States, specifically as they presage and inform the current community forestry movement. These early examples of community forestry include Native American forest management practices, traditions of Hispano community forestry in the Southwest, and early examples of community forestry in New England. The chapter also examines the work of key figures in the turn-of-the-century Progressive movement who argued forcefully that communities should participate directly in and benefit from the management of forest resources. Although the arguments of these key figures were eventually marginalized by the dominant technocratic and bureaucratic orientation of the Progressive Era, both early traditions of community forestry and the writings of the more socially minded members of the Progressive movement constitute a rich historical tradition of community-based forest management with contemporary relevance, one that in many respects presages important components of current community forestry initiatives.

Chapter 3 chronicles the evolution and dominance of the Progressive Era model of forest management, with a specific focus on the social and ecological ramifications of that model. In particular, we focus on the ways in which the dominant forest management regime separated community well-being from forest health and undermined work and occupation as a basis for forest enfranchisement. This chapter sets the broader context for understanding the rise of community-based forestry by examining the development of the conditions that led to its emergence.

Chapter 4 describes community forestry as a synergistic process involving simultaneous "ignitions" across the country at primarily local rural levels but almost always involving state and federal players as well. The emergence of community forestry is discussed as a response to the negative social and ecological outcomes of the dominant pattern of forest management. Community forestry is characterized as a process that seeks to reverse historical drawdowns of natural and community capital through reinvestment and redirection of benefit flows toward local groups who have previously not been a part of the broader political landscape of pluralistic political process. The conditions that gave rise to community forestry and the common themes that underlie its diverse regional forms are discussed, along with the organizations and some of the activities that led to its establishment as a social movement.

Chapter 5 outlines a framework for understanding and evaluating the goals of community forestry and analyzing the constraints and opportunities for advancing the movement. The triad of environment, equity, and economy is presented as a useful heuristic to capture the core of the integrative and overarching objectives of community forestry: the development of new relations between people and the forests on which their livelihood depends that