"You call it forest, I call it woods."

Incorporating Meaning in Forest Management

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Overview

- Focus on private forestlands and landowners
- Previous approaches
- Need for new approaches
- Case study approach to discerning PFL perspectives
- Findings, Conclusions, Implications for Professional Practice
- Ongoing research

Private forest landowners (PFLs)

- Definition
- Majority forest land is in private ownership.
  - **~ 50 - 60% US** (Butler and Leatherberry 2004; Egan and Jones 1993)
  - **- 82% TN** (TN Agricultural Extension Service 2003)
- Important source of timber supply.
- Increased pressures on private forest land.
  - Social, political and technical change
    - » Industry → TIMO

Previous Approaches

- Numerous studies conducted to:
    1. Increase natural resource professionals' (NRPs) understanding of private forest landowners (PFLs), and
    2. Engage more PFLs in forest management.
- Primarily survey based.
    - Characterize and predict
    - Management objectives & Value prioritization
    - Predetermined categories and variables of interest
- Few qualitative studies.
    - Focus on active PFLs, management objectives, ownership interests.

Previous Approaches

- Major findings:
    – Most private forest land not under active management.
    – Lack of PFL awareness education & assistance
    – Lack of sustainable practices (high grading).
    – Unanimous importance of non-commodity values.
    – Internal motivating factors for management may be more important than external ones.
    – Difficult for PFLs to identify single dominant reason for owning forest land.
    – Land can be an extension of personal identity and lifetime.

Need for New Approaches

- Concerns:
    – PFLs not getting the message re value of forest land management.
    – Diminishing returns from primary existing methods.
        • Stagnating survey instruments
        • Repetitive findings
    – Understanding of PFLs remains largely the same.

Need for New Approaches

- Conclusions:
  - Need to do a better job of
    - (1) linking NRP messages to what PFLs value,
    - (2) identify specific subsets of landowners with specific interests, and
    - (3) increase specificity of the message for each market segment.

Case Study: East Tennessee

Research Purpose:
- To increase understanding of PFLs through novel approaches
- that describe how PFLs in Tennessee, and the Central Hardwood Region, experience their forestland and the meanings they ascribe to these experiences
- in order to inform the practice of natural resource professionals working with PFLs.

Research Approach: Phenomenology

- Combined research method and philosophy that examines people's *experience(s),* and the *language* used to describe them, to discern the *meaning* of an experience or phenomenon.
- Particularly useful in any field in which a "professional consultant seeks to discover the wishes and needs of a client." (Pollio, Henley, and Thompson 1997).

1. Experience

- Study of the "lived experience" of humans
  - Experience is the combination of thoughts and behavior created as we live in the world and interact with it and with others.
    - Focus on landowners' direct experience with land, not their abstract "thinking" about land.
    - "Think of two or three times when you were on your land that stand out to you, and describe the one that stands out the most."
    - Much easier for landowners to communicate significant experiences than abstract ideas such as objectives, reasons, or values.

2. Meaning

- Key Assumption = "what I am aware of reveals what is meaningful to me."
  - Landowners significant experiences indicate what is most important, meaningful, to them.

3. Language

- Allows participants to describe meaningful experiences in their own language.
- Allows researchers/practitioners to uncover the language those we are interested in use to ascribe meaning to significant experiences.
- Allows identification of opportunities and barriers for improved dialogue between professionals and landowners by finding shared/unshared understandings.

Research Approach: Phenomenology

- Interviews to collect rich, or "thick", first person descriptions of experience
- Iterative analysis with diverse peer research group.
- Develop patterns and relationships of meaning (themes).
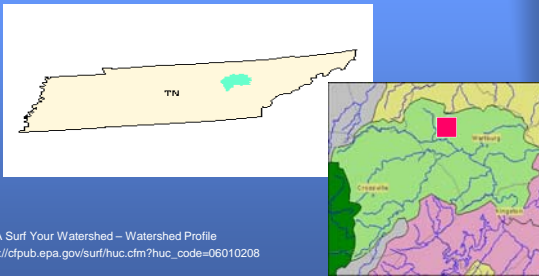- Used in many health and social science fields, including in wildland recreation studies of visitor experience

Case Study: East Tennessee

Emory-Obed Watershed, Cumberland Plateau

EPA Surf Your Watershed – Watershed Profile
http://cfpub.epa.gov/surf/huc.cfm?huc_code=06010208

Case Study: Methods

- Phenomenological **interviews**
  - Identified via phone survey of PFLs concerning engagement with forest management activities.
    1) Non-participant PFLs (n = 7)
    2) Active PFLs (n = 8)
  - Appropriate sample size, n = 6 – 12

- **Mail Survey** of randomly selected PFLs in entire watershed informed by interview findings.
  - 1,010 PFLs >= 1 acre
  - 563 Responses, 55% response rate

Findings and Discussion

PFL perspectives on meaning of land
1. Thematic analysis
2. Preliminary conclusions
3. Implications for professional practice

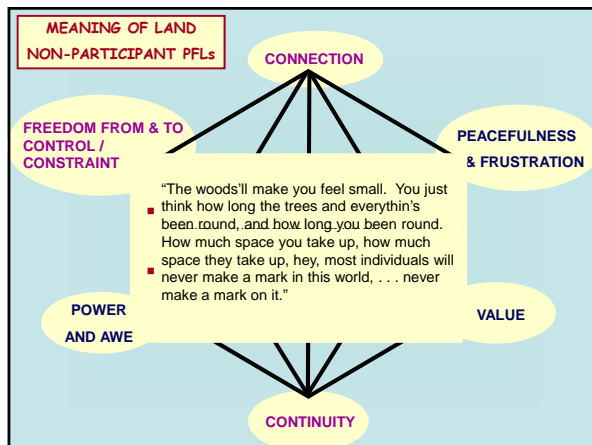MEANING OF LAND
NON-PARTICIPANT PFLs

CONNECTION

FREEDOM FROM & TO
CONTROL /
CONSTRAINT

PEACEFULNESS
& FRUSTRATION

"The woods'll make you feel small. You just think how long the trees and everythin's been round, and how long you been round. How much space you take up, how much space they take up, hey, most individuals will never make a mark in this world, . . . never make a mark on it."

POWER
AND AWE

VALUE

CONTINUITY

Preliminary Conclusions: NP PFLs

- Focus of experience is on the self.
  - Land and self are separate.
- Primary theme is Connection,
  - Connection to others
  - Connection to nature
  - Connection to place
- but a connection can be broken.
- Freedom is meaningful as *freedom from social constraint* and *freedom to control*.

Implications: NP PFLs

– May be willing to engage in forest management in order to ensure continuity of meaningful personal experiences.
  - Continuity, Peacefulness, Value, Power & Awe
– May respond to outreach such as "Keeping the Family in Family Forest" rather than "Forest Taxes".
  - Connection
– Nature is objectified and on a pedestal (power and awe). Forest management must recognize this.
– Policies and assistance programs limiting freedom and offering monetary incentives may be ineffective.
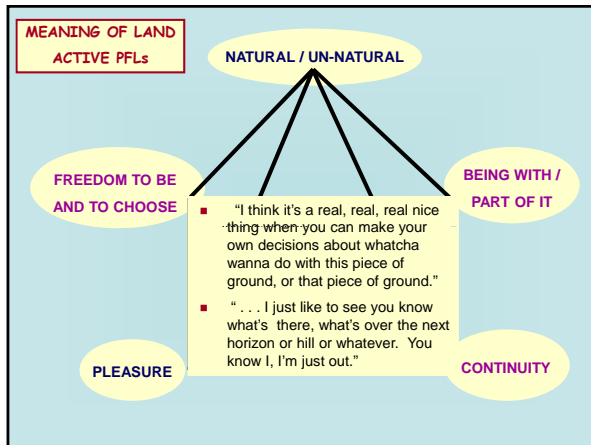

MEANING OF LAND
ACTIVE PFLs

NATURAL / UN-NATURAL

FREEDOM TO BE AND TO CHOOSE

BEING WITH / PART OF IT

- "I think it's a real, real, real nice thing when you can make your own decisions about whatcha wanna do with this piece of ground, or that piece of ground."
- " . . . I just like to see you know what's there, what's over the next horizon or hill or whatever. You know I, I'm just out."

PLEASURE

CONTINUITY

Preliminary Conclusions: Active PFLs

- Focus of the experience is on the land.
  - The land is "part of me", I am "with it, I am "bonded to it", "it gets into you".
  - Land and self can not be separated.
- Primary theme is Natural/Un-natural
  - This is noticed first, how it makes me feel is secondary.
- Freedom is meaningful as *freedom to be* who one is, not from or to control something external to the self.

Implications: Active PFLs

- More likely to engage in forest management in order to maintain continuity and integrity of forest resources.
- Appealing forest management is management that respects nature.
  - Nature is not on a pedestal, use of resources is a good thing, but it must be done respectfully.
- More likely to be personally and meaningfully engaged in any forest management that is done.
  - Actively managing the forest is "pleasure".
  - "nice when you can make your own decisions"

Language, Meaning & Experience

- "If we want to understand how people are related to environments such as forests, then we need to understand how people experience these environments. (Schroeder 1988)"

- "Our questions are fateful" they can shut people down, or open them up. (Cooperrider)

- "The use of one taxonomy to make statements to someone who uses the other places communication at risk. (Kuhn 1991)"

Ongoing Research

1. What do PFLs consider forest management to be?
   - How does this differ from NRPs traditional definitions?
   - Is there a relationship between activity level in traditionally defined forest management activities and how they define forest management?

2. What characteristics do PFLs who define forest management in different ways share? And how can those similarities be used by NRPs to improve education, outreach and PFL engagement with forest management?

THANK YOU.

QUESTIONS AND
COMMENTS.