



Cultural entrenchment: Explaining gaps between ecosystem-based management policy and practice in the forests of Newfoundland



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ABSTRACT

Forests in North America have been managed, or unmanaged, under a number of different policy regimes, most recently ecosystem-based management (EBM), which has emerged in response to perceived widespread ecological degradation. But as policy regimes shift, links between stated objectives and the tools or mechanisms to achieve those objectives need to be forged. This case study of forestry on the island of Newfoundland provides an illustration of the gaps between EBM policy and practice, and insights into why EBM can be difficult to implement. Though the case of Newfoundland is unusual because of its isolation, narrow set of economic options, and weak ENGO sector, its adherence to a traditional timber regime offers lessons for the ways that policies move from agenda setting to implementation. In this case, the role of cultural entrenchment—a commitment to timber-based management and to a provincial model of economic support for large-scale industry—created a negative feedback loop that undermined new policy objectives. But a window of opportunity has emerged as a result of pulp and paper industry decline, and so overcoming cultural entrenchment and building a new forest management regime centered on EBM is possible through clearly articulated policy mechanisms and the integration of new forms of expertise.

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1. Introduction

Forests in North America have been managed, or unmanaged, under a number of different policy regimes, from unbridled exploitation to fastidious regulation (Howlett and Rayner, 2001). Ecosystem-based management (EBM), or management intended to maintain ecological integrity (Grumbine, 1994), has emerged as a management regime in a number of natural resource sectors in response to perceived widespread ecological degradation (Berghofer et al., 2008; Murawski, 2007; Olsson et al., 2008). But numerous studies point to incomplete or inadequate implementation of EBM (Arkema et al., 2006; Berghofer et al., 2008). This case study of forestry on the island of Newfoundland¹ provides an illustration of the gaps between EBM policy and practice, and insights into why EBM can be difficult to implement. Newfoundland is an unusual case because of its isolation and narrow set of economic options, which have made the island vulnerable to the decisions of a few large-scale producers. But the experiences of Newfoundland in resisting policy regime change toward EBM offers lessons regarding the role of cultural entrenchment in policy dynamics.

In Newfoundland, EBM has been slow to implement because of a commitment to a traditional timber-based management regime and because of persistent governmental support for large-scale industrial operations, in this case the pulp and paper industry. The support of Department of Natural Resources Forestry (DNR Forestry) for the pulp and paper industry was in keeping with the provincial economic development pattern of supporting export-based industrial development (Cadigan, 2009). Newfoundland suffered the collapse of the cod fishery and subsequent moratorium in 1992, which devastated many of its rural communities, and since that time the government has steadfastly maintained support for the pulp and paper industry and its affiliates. The relationship between the pulp and paper industry and the government of Newfoundland has been and remains essentially collaborative, in a joint bid to develop the forest resources of the province, diversify employment, and bring jobs to remote regions of the province. Forest policy coalitions arose, with DNR Forestry and the central provincial government largely supportive of the status quo, and non-forestry governmental agencies along with Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations (ENGOS) attempting to advance EBM.

Forest policy language since the 1990s, crafted by DNR Forestry, changed from a narrow focus on wood fiber growth and extraction to policies embodying a more diverse suite of goals clustered around the ideas of EBM. Since that time, two of the three pulp and paper mills on the island closed—one in 2005, the other in 2009—and significant downsizing occurred at the remaining mill. Despite the declining

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¹ This paper focuses on the Island of Newfoundland. It treats Labrador, which is politically connected to Newfoundland but differs in terms of forest management and history, as a special case of EBM implementation.

demand for wood fiber, DNR Forestry resisted efforts from other agencies and the environmental community to significantly change forestry practices. This study considers reasons for the gaps between policy and practice including the use of cultural entrenchment to prevent implementation of new policies. It also identifies an opportunity—namely the decline of the pulp and paper sector—for EBM implementation, and considers possible solutions for narrowing the gaps between policy and practice.

1.1. The way things change: policy dynamics

EBM represents a significant change in forestry policies and can be considered in light of a succession of changing governmental oversight of the forest sector. Howlett and Rayner (2001) proposed multiple stages of forest management regimes in Newfoundland, from unregulated exploitation (prior to 1875), to government oversight consisting of licensing producers and charging stumpage and rent (1875), to regulation of wood removal (1955), to a sustained yield (timber management) regime focusing on optimizing yields and converting old forests to young tree farms (1970). This framework overlooks the very important shift in Newfoundland from subsistence use for the fisheries to policies favoring the pulp and paper industry in the early 1900s, a dramatic change that continued to influence forestry into the 21st century. Following the timber management regime, beginning in the early 1990s, there was a shift toward EBM (Nazir and Moores, 2001).

These shifts in forest policies have occurred as a result of the interactions of actors, institutions, and ideas (Hoberg, 2001). Actors are individuals and organizations, such as governmental agencies, industries, and NGOs. Actors can form policy coalitions, flexible groups of advocates for certain policy directions. New policies are often brought to the attention of government as multiple actors converge on common ideas, creating a “window of opportunity” (Hoberg, 2001). Institutions are the rules and procedures that affect strategies for achieving policy change, they “set the framework for the exercise of power,” (Howlett et al., 2009, p. 385). Ideas are the causal and normative belief systems that both set the agenda for policy change and then become embodied within new policies. Finally, the context or background for policy change includes exogenous variables such as public opinion, macropolitics, and economic circumstances (Hoberg, 2001).

Policies go through multiple steps, from agenda setting to the formulation of alternative courses of action, to the selection of a course of action, and finally the implementation of policies (Hoberg, 2001). The gap between policy and practice (or implementation) is the focus of this study. The inability of governments to implement new policies results in their failure, and possibly reversion to older, familiar policies, creating a loop of institutional entrenchment. Sabatier and Mazmanian (1980) proposed that the gaps between policy creation and implementation could be explained by, among other factors, the extent of structures to enable implementation—whether there are clear policy objectives, policy instruments, and governmental commitment and support, and non-statutory variables such as political support and socioeconomic conditions—similar to the “background” variables proposed in the policy regime by Hoberg (2001).

Policy changes were long thought to occur incrementally, as governments made small policy adjustments over time as a result of negotiation and bargaining. But Repetto (2006) and others identified a second type of policy dynamics, characterized by sudden jumps or dramatic changes. The two concepts were linked through the metaphor of punctuated equilibrium, or punctuated incrementalism, in which policies are stable systems for periods of time, with punctuated spurts of change disturbing the stasis (Hagerman et al., 2010; Prindle, 2012).

Both types of policy behavior may occur as a result of feedback loops, either entrenchment or negative feedback, creating long-lived practices that may be maintained despite evidence of failure, or positive feedback processes, which build upon seemingly small events to create large-scale change. Negative feedback occurs through (for example) judicial

precedent, interest group defensiveness, and the ability of iron triangles to exclude dissent; positive feedback occurs with social learning and bandwagon effects, as well as the accumulation of new information (Repetto, 2006). The interplay between negative and positive feedback, or status quo and change, creates the observed punctuated equilibrium, as policy coalitions compete for influence. Hagerman et al. (2010) describes policy change as “historically contingent and nonlinear,” with delayed feedbacks and uneven implementation (Hagerman et al., 2010).

This study examines the actors, institutions, and ideas that resulted in policy changes in the management of Newfoundland’s forests, as well as the feedback loops—particularly the internal feedback loops of DNR Forestry—that resulted in a failure to implement policy changes into practice. This study integrates the idea of *culture* into policy change and implementation, in particular the use of cultural capital in resisting changes to forest management. Culture is “what constitutes knowledge, how knowledge is to be achieved, and how knowledge is validated” (Flora and Flora, 2008, p. 55). Following Bourdieu (1986), culture is embodied in actors, and cultural capital, as with any form of capital, can be accumulated and used to achieve the objectives of different actors. Cultural capital has an implicit element of entrenchment as it can be described as “cultural reproduction in action” (Lamont and Laureau, 1988). This paper uses the term *cultural entrenchment* to describe the use of cultural capital in order to maintain a previous policy regime.

1.2. Ecosystem-based management

For the purposes of this research, EBM is “management driven by explicit goals, executed by policies, protocols, and practices, and made adaptable by monitoring and research based on our best understanding of the ecological interactions and processes necessary to sustain ecosystem structure and function” (Christensen et al., 1996, page 669). EBM arose in response to timber-based management regimes alongside Sustainable Forest Management (SFM), two similar concepts with important distinctions. SFM was developed largely by policy makers and was “designed to embrace and reconcile the different interests” surrounding forests and forestry (Rametsteiner and Simula, 2003, page 88). As an approach, SFM tends to consider “the management of trees and timber as an *input* into decisions,” which places production and economics on equal footing with ecological concerns, while EBM “centres on timber as an *output* of the management of the ecosystems,” (Bourgeois, 2008, page 9, emphasis added). EBM is primarily concerned with ecological integrity, reintroduction of natural disturbance patterns, and biodiversity, while “accommodat[ing] human use and occupancy *within* those constraints,” (Grumbine, 1994, page 31, emphasis added). Both management approaches have contributed ideas to the broader debate surrounding more sustainable forest practices, and have influenced the translation of scientific principles into management practices.

EBM requires a shift in expertise from the utilitarian model of forestry, in which the forest is viewed primarily as a fiber factory and expertise centers on efficient timber production (Bliss, 2000) toward a management regime under which the “full array of forest values and functions is maintained at the landscape level” (SAF, 1993). From a governance perspective, this corresponds with a shift from command and control natural resource management to interdisciplinary management with significant interagency coordination (Hagerman et al., 2010).

Implementation of EBM has faced challenges across different sectors, including a dearth of relevant research for identifying and integrating multiple values and uses, lack of coordination across political boundaries, power disparities among divergent interests, and the need for resource allocation—time and money—for uncertain economic return (Berghofer et al., 2008). But many practitioners and scientists have striven to clarify EBM and its implementation. Common suggestions are to create clear guidelines and targets for management that are linked to EBM goals, build networks for sharing knowledge and for

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