

Review: Making Collaboration Work: Lessons from Innovation in Natural Resource Management

By Julia M. Wondolleck and Steven L. Yaffee

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Julia M. Wondolleck & Steven L. Yaffee. *Making Collaboration Work: Lessons from Innovation in Natural Resource Management*. Washington, DC: Island Press, 2000. 277pp. ISBN 1-55963-462-6 (paper). US\$25.00. Recycled, acid-free paper.

During the last two decades, Wondolleck and Yaffee have examined the emergence of more than 200 collaborative groups working on natural resource issues. Their observations and the lessons they draw from them are brought together in this work. In it, they succeed in chronicling the rise of civic-environmental efforts and establishing an adequate reference for those involved. Their work falls slightly short of being an ideal how-to volume for those same people, however.

The book's three-part organization provides a structure that manages to be academic without dry weightiness. Part I establishes the conceptual framework on which their lessons and suggestions hang. Part II lays out eight key factors the authors deduced from successful collaborations. Part III shifts into an instructional tone and aims to guide collaborators in their work. Findings and citations of the work of others are supported by ample endnotes.

Wondolleck and Yaffee's findings boil down to this: "In successful collaborative partnerships that we studied, individuals and organizations lived up to their commitments. They did what they said they would do" (p. 148). While this essence is simplistic, it is not overly so. Many less-than-successful collaborations could have benefited from the application of this lesson.

Other key factors for making collaboration work have the same clang of the obvious. Take for example, "build on common ground" or "focus on the problem in new and different ways." But, to the best of the authors' knowledge, these are the elements of effective collaborations. Listing them is important.

Still, like components of suitable habitat or crystalline substances in a gemstone, the arrangement of these elements may be more important to the final product. Future studies of collaboration should shed more light on the best ways of putting these elements together.

One requirement that I would have highlighted more is funding. Successful collaborations had at their disposal infrastructure, most often from a government agency. Collaborations need care and feeding in the form of computers to hold mailing lists, phones to call, machines to photocopy agendas, and persons to serve as points of contact. These things don't happen for free. But, there is little examination here of how much collaborative processes cost. That is the book's biggest omission.

To return to strengths, I appreciated the book's index and thoughtful structure, both of which make referring to it easy. As a source of inspiration, truisms, and positive examples, I will use *Making Collaboration Work* in my state-level environmental education efforts. For those seeking environmental progress through collaboration, this volume may also be helpful. What it lacks in pizzazz, it makes up in usability.

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