Engaging Local Communities in Recreational Planning

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BLM: Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument

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**Professional Background**

**Tim Casey, PhD.**
Professor of Political Science, CMU 1996-present  
Natural Resource Center Director, 2010 - present

Research focus:  
- Public lands policy: formation, implementation  
- Connection to place  
- Impacts of public lands on local communities  
- Recreation

Recreation Research:  
- Began 2007  
- 12 studies  
- ~130 rec focus groups

Other projects  
- BLM socio-economic
Professional Background

Allysia Angus
Landscape Architect, BLM-GSENM 2000-present

Land Use Planning
Recreation Planning, Research
NEPA
Visual Resource Management
Scenic Byways
Dark Skies
BLM-Guidelines for a Quality Built Environment Project Lead
Recreation Site Planning, Design, Construction
Sign Planning, Design, Installation
Interpretive Planning, Project Management
Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument

- First BLM National Monument – 1996 – established for scientific research and preservation of frontier character
- In two counties with several small cities/towns – population of <12,500
- Surrounded by NPS, USFS, and BLM – visited by millions
- Utah’s only All-American Road – Scenic Byway 12 along north
- Steady increase in outdoor recreation visitation
- Study area included some surrounding public lands (Vermilion Cliffs NM, etc.)
GSENM Recreation Experience Baseline Study

• Understand and document the language participants use to describe their connections – senses of place - to a particular landscape.

• **Understand** and document the public’s interests and preferences regarding a landscape

• Facilitate the articulation of those interests to the GSENM staff, other agencies and other groups within the public  thus enhancing on-going communication between agencies and the publics they serve

• Create a **baseline** for on-going dialogue between GSENM, their partners and public (visitors and gateway communities)

• **Inform** future planning and management of landscape
5 Phases of Research

- **Phase 1 – 2013**
  - Hole in the Rock, Escalante Canyons region

- **Phase 2 – 2014**
  - Grand Staircase region

- **Phase 3 – 2015**
  - Hwy 89, VCNM and KFO

- **Phase 4 – 2016**
  - Hwy 12 and Burr Trial

- **Phase 5 – 2017-18**
  - Monument wide analysis
Methodology: Mixed Methods – Focus Groups

• **Discussion/Discourse** – Ask open questions first, then organize through audience polling.

• **Audience Polling** – Quantifying those connections and “hearing” from every participant rather than just the vocal or articulate.

• **Photo Elicitation** – Use of photos as discussion prompts to articulate public preferences and concerns about certain landscape settings.

• **Special Places Mapping** – Participants identified special places by placing post-it notes on wall maps that were then translated into a GIS layer with all the information they provide.

• **In-person and Digitally** – Local residents, leaders and business owners (including outfitters and guides) as well as those who live outside local areas.

• **Public Process** – Putting the public in public lands. On going dialogue from focus groups to presentations to reports. Active, anonymous, participation is essential for the research.
Topics of Discussion

- Demographics
  - Zip code
  - Affiliation
- Values and Outcomes
  - Why a special place?
  - What could diminish specialness?
  - Change? Better or worse?
  - Interests and Expectations?
- Settings questions in photo elicitation slides
  - Crowding
  - Roads
- Activities
- Management/Boundary issues
  - Awareness of?
  - Change in perception or behavior?
- Services
  - Information
  - Other Services
  - Communities where services are located
Methodology Innovations: 1) Audience Polling

- Ensures we hear from everyone who participated.
- Allows us to link answers to different questions for further analysis.
- Further anonymity
- Addresses the threat of the “loud guy” effect hijacking the discussion.
- Mixed methodology to capture nuance in data
- Produce a database to be compared across all phases and focus groups (Phase 5).
Methodology Innovations: 2) Photo Elicitation - Crowding

Phase 1: Escalante Canyons

Phase 2: Grand Staircase

Phase 3: HWY 89 – Paria Canyons
Methodology Innovations: 2) Photo Elicitation - Roads

Which of these do you prefer when traveling across the landscape?
Methodology Innovations: 3) Special Place Mapping
Methodology Innovations: 3) Special Place Mapping

- Phase 1 – Hole in the Rock
- Phase 2 – Grand Staircase
- Phase 3 – Highway 89 - VCNM
- Phase 4 – Highway 12 - Burr Trail

- 1,097 Special Places mapped in four phases
Methodology Innovations: 4) Digital Focus Groups

- Useful to capture visitors – can participate after vacation
- Allows those connected to landscape but not living locally to participate
- Convenient for business owners who might not be able to attend an in-person group
- Results were more text than talk
- Example (WA, PEI, NJ, CA, FL, CO discussing southern UT)
Methodology Innovations: **5) Heterogeneous Focus Groups**

- Traditional vs. heterogeneous
- Public invitations
- No one left out by invitation (less complaint of bias)
- Hear other perspectives on landscape – fight echo chamber effect
- Understand the challenges and tradeoffs in public land management and recreation planning
- Build community capacity for democratic dialogue
Sample of Results: Special Qualities
Why is it a special place?
Sample of Results: Diminish Specialness
Sample of Results: **Interests - Expectations**

- Natural Landscapes
- Rural Landscapes
- Cultural and Heritage History
- Natural History and Science
- Health and Fitness
- Self-Reliant Adventure
- Tranquil Escapes
- Youth, Family, and Friends
- Community Life
- Economic Well-Being
- Learning and Instructing
- Stewardship and Caretaking

Legend:
- Phase 1 - HITR
- Phase 2 - GS
- Phase 3 - Hwy 89
- Phase 4 - Hwy 12
- Phase 5 - GSENM
Sample of Results: Change

Change in 5 Years

Value of Change
Sample of Results: Activities
Sample of Results: Information Sources
Themes Emerged Across Study Area

- Uniqueness and diversity of landscapes, opportunities, and experiences across the monument
- Wild, remote, rugged landscape
- Accessed by vehicles but encountered by foot
- Familiarity and surprise - opportunities for discovery and connection to place abound
- Strong support for science and culture heritage on GSENMM
- The scenic beauty of the Monument was one of the most consistent and important special qualities of the place.
Benefits for Public

• Voice is heard – cathartic effect
• Participation is at the root of democracy
• Local community voice in planning
• Education about planning process and requisite tradeoffs
• Community capacity building
Benefits to Public Land Recreation Planners

• Provides documentation of value of place to public for planning and analysis
• Allows interests and expectations to matter as much or more than activities
• Helps influence what services agencies should/could provide and which others should provide
• Increases connection to communities – opportunity to be better neighbors
Questions?

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