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To the teachers that have come before to light the way for us now.

- Myriem

“I arise each morning torn between the desire to improve the world and the desire to enjoy the world. This makes it extremely hard to plan my day.”

- E.B. White

“After the wind stops, I see a flower falling. Because of the singing bird, I find the mountain calmness.”

- Zen Poem in Zen Mind, Beginners Mind

“Do the best you can in the place where you are and be kind, kind to yourself, kind to your neighbors and kind to the land.”

- Helen Nearing

ABSTRACT

This case study describes an attempt to resolve disputed access to a historic, local, wildland trail in the Colorado Front Range. A local, historic, wildland trail is one that often traverses both public and private wildland and is accessed freely by a local community for non-motorized use, for connection to nature and for social visits. “Historic” implies use as found in the historic record and as reflected in the memories of older and previous residents. “Wildland” denotes an abundance of ecological processes significantly surpassing indications of human activity.

Environmental dispute resolution processes that engage diverse stakeholders in dialogue over issues in dispute are a critical component of ecosystem preservation. EDR processes administratively and procedurally recognize the essential value of a communication link to local knowledge, expertise, and volunteerism. This thesis assesses the contribution of participatory action research (PAR) in enhancing conventional environmental dispute resolution practices in cases of stakeholder disparity. Because PAR offers the opportunity for locals to empower themselves with knowledge and to pursue stable social outcomes, it can help address stakeholder disparity.

In this case, PAR fortified the EDR process so that a clear understanding of the substantive issues in dispute could be derived despite the absence of a key stakeholder. The PAR constructively de-escalated the local trail dispute by providing a focus on the substantive issues. PAR made room for patience and perseverance, dissipating the emotions that had escalated over a perceived injustice. At the same time, the EDR/PAR intervention required significant time and resources of its facilitator, offering many insights about management of such an intensive intervention process.

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