ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The ridges, rocks and forests of Gold Hill have sculpted me into the person I have become. In that transformation, the people of Gold Hill have been my friendly and not so friendly companions. I thank them for all of it and mostly for being here with me in this beautiful place. In particular, I would like to thank Nancy for her steadfast capacity to listen and translate. Her competent and gentle advocacy of the EDR/PAR process in Gold Hill breathed into my vision her own grounded capacity to “make it real.” To Peter, for his awe-inspiring mind and soul that playfully and brilliantly deepened the inquiry. To Lynne for her trust in me. To Kevin, Vaughn, Joe, and Deepika for their special awareness of “building relationships around trails.”

To my professors who accepted my attempt to resolve an intractable dispute by the simple grace of being willing to serve as my advisors. Over the course of formulating and writing this thesis, I have greatly benefited from the guidance of Dr. Julia Wondolleck, Dr. Patrick West and Dr. Richard Tucker. Writing for their review honed my capacity to think and write clearly. I wrote in reflection of the expansive breadth and depth of their knowledge in natural resource policy. Thank you for strengthening the core thread of my research and validating each toehold of sound judgment.

To Jennifer P. and Diane W. at the School of Natural Resources and Environment who handled each administrative request with accepting steadiness and reliability. Your help and constancy really made a big difference for me at critical times. And, to all the wonderful students and professors that I have learned from in my sojourn at the University of Michigan. Despite all the personal and financial hardships, this act of being a student with the University of Michigan as my backdrop has been irreplaceable and forever meaningful to my life.

To the four lovely people who chose to step forth as editors and provide me their lifelong skills as highly proficient craftsmen of the English language. In particular, I deeply bow to Dr. Todd P. and Susan N.

To Peter K. who provided me a flexible source of abundant income whenever the need for money loomed and who patiently understood as I - on and off again - attempted to refocus on “my other work.”

To Monique and Mike who oftentimes incredulously wondered, but yet with constancy showed interest in my ideas and supported me through the challenges and small successes of this “trails” project. Their financial support made completion possible.

To my dear sisterhood, Camille, Karyn and Grace, who patiently listened to me saying, “I’m almost done.” And to Emily, the “Nature Priestess,” who connected the liturgy of Earth Mother to my daily life. Your foursome of goddess energy sustained me over many a dull day of perseverance.

To James, for his love.
To my Morgan, for growing up so beautiful of spirit in the shadow of my struggle to realize my dreams. Your brave heart has not wavered. And despite also having to find your path during a time - yet again – in which aggression is disguised as peacemaking, you have blossomed in steady and compassionate awareness. You are my greatest joy, always.

To the piercing blue-green flame of wilderness eyes afire.
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 volunteership. 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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