The Pinchot Institute for Conservation is a non-profit natural resource policy, research, and education organization dedicated to leadership in conservation thought, policy, and action. The Pinchot Institute was dedicated in 1963 by President John F. Kennedy at Grey Towers National Historic Landmark in Milford, Pennsylvania, historic home of conservation leader Gifford Pinchot, to facilitate communication and closer cooperation among resource managers, scientists, policy-makers, and the American public. The Institute continues Pinchot’s legacy of conservation leadership as a center for policy development in support of sustainable forest management. Through Grey Towers Press, the Institute publishes policy reports, discussion papers, books, and the Pinchot Lecture series.
RETHINKING PUBLIC LAND GOVERNANCE FOR THE NEW CENTURY

By Daniel Kemmis

Pinchot Institute for Conservation
Distinguished Lecture

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PREFACE

In 1986, Grey Towers, in partnership with the Pinchot Institute for Conservation, inaugurated the Pinchot Distinguished Lecture Series in order to introduce new thinking to the public about the history and complexity of conservation. Since then, Pinchot Distinguished Lectures have covered such topics as the need for a vision in forestry, historical aspects of conservation, the politics of regionalism, and the history and future of the National Forest System. Grey Towers, the former home of Gifford Pinchot and now a National Historic Landmark administered by the US Forest Service, was the site not only of early twentieth-century discussions on conservation, but also of several early Pinchot Distinguished Lectures. In recent years, they have been presented in Washington, DC, home to the Pinchot Institute.

It is becoming increasingly clear that nothing we do in conservation is without historical precedence. Therefore, in order to understand the root of today’s environmental problems, it is essential that conservationists understand the challenges that leaders such as Gifford Pinchot, Aldo Leopold, John Muir, and Bob Marshall faced in squaring off against the adversarial situations of their day. History provides the insight necessary to address today’s conservation concerns, which are no less urgent and exciting. There is much we can learn by taking a multidimensional, historical view of these pressing issues.

The Pinchot Institute for Conservation and Grey Towers are critically examining some of these present-day issues and are co-sponsors of the Pinchot Distinguished Lecture Series. It is with a sense of pride that we present the diverse intellectual viewpoints that comprise the Lecture Series. We hope that the series inspires you to think deeply about the themes discussed in the lectures and provides further insight into the challenges that continue to face the conservation community.

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FOREWORD

In his 1913 book, *Citizenship in a Republic*, Theodore Roosevelt wrote, “It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena....” Dan Kemmis is a man who, to his credit, has never been afraid to be “actually in the arena” of public life, challenging existing ways of thinking with new ideas and unconventional approaches.

In the years following his graduation from Harvard and the University of Montana Law School, Dan Kemmis served four terms in the Montana House of Representatives, including terms as Minority Leader, and Speaker of the House. Mr. Kemmis then served as the Mayor of Missoula, during which time he refined the ideas that subsequently took the form of his very influential book, *Community and the Politics of Place*.

He moved beyond the conventional notion of “communities of interest” to the idea of “communities of place.” He helped introduce us to what is now referred to as the “New West,” wherein community economies that had once come together almost overnight around the extraction of one natural resource or another—and then dissipated almost as quickly when the resources were depleted—have now come to value a sense of place, of the unique social and environmental features that characterize a particular community, and are worthy of conserving and sustaining for this generation and the next.

Mr. Kemmis also questioned the conventional wisdom that it was only at the national level that people could think in terms of the broader public interest, and the conservation of natural resources over the long run. Local communities concerned with jobs and maintaining a degree of economic stability are also concerned with protecting their environmental quality, and the sustainability of the resource base upon which their continued prosperity depends. Mr. Kemmis has challenged the existing concepts of federalism in the American system of government, and questioned the inherent superiority of federal agencies over local consensus when it comes to sustainable natural resource management.

While at first blush this view might seem contrary to those of Gifford Pinchot and the other early proponents of a system of federal forest reserves (now national forests), a closer examination
suggests that Mr. Kemmis’ ideas are not altogether different from Pinchot’s conviction that “In the management of each reserve, local questions will be decided on local grounds” within a broad framework of national-level law and policy. Effective decentralized decision-making within such a national policy framework has come to be regarded by political scientists as well as natural resource managers as the key to the Forest Service’s early success in the management of the national forests. As Mr. Kemmis reflects on the situation today, in Montana and elsewhere in the West, his challenge may not be so much to the basic concepts espoused by Pinchot as it is to their execution.

The Pinchot Institute for Conservation is pleased to name Mr. Daniel Kemmis as the Pinchot Distinguished Lecturer for 2000.

V. Alaric Sample
President
Pinchot Institute for Conservation

INTRODUCTION

The American West has long been viewed, by itself and by others, as standing apart from the rest of the country. Since the early days of the nation’s history, the West’s distinguishing characteristics have been an object of conversation, celebration, misinterpretation, debate, and conflict.

If there is any one feature that sets the West apart from the rest of the country, it is the power and presence of its landscape. The West is about land, and about the relationship of people to land. No other region even comes close to the West’s expansiveness of landscape in proportion to the number of its people. But the dominance of land and landscape is not nearly exhausted by the West’s relatively low population density. Land is ubiquitous in every dimension of western life. Ask people why they live in the West, and the answer will have to do with landscape far more often than in any other region and far more often than any other answer they might give. Attend ten public meetings in the West, and see how many more of them involve land than in any other region. Map America’s public lands, and you have essentially mapped the West.

Over ninety percent of federal lands are found in 12 western states. These federal holdings are so vast that they dominate both the geography and the politics of the West. Geographically, the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management alone own over 411 million of the roughly 1.2 billion acres that make up Alaska and the 11 contiguous western states, approximately 34% of the total land area. Nationally-owned lands take up 83% of Nevada’s total land base, more than 60% of Idaho’s and Utah’s, and account for over 45% of the land base in each of seven western states.

These lands are owned by the federal government and run by its Washington-based agencies. The Bureau of Land Management, the Forest Service, and increasingly the US Fish and Wildlife Service have been given the primary responsibility to manage this vast western acreage. But this entire bureaucratic machine has begun to run aground. By almost imperceptible degrees, but now to an undeniable extent, the national government has lost its ability to manage the West in a way that assures the vitality of ecosystems, let alone the sustainability of western communities. The gigantic, increasingly gridlocked bureaucracy that is our national government simply cannot do justice to the vast spaces and unique species within this complex region.
As a relentless wave of migration into the mountains puts steadily increasing pressure on all western land, including the public land, the impossibility of a distant, centralized government successfully managing the West's gigantic landscapes becomes more and more apparent. One result is a new version of an old western tradition: a spreading and now frequently cross-ideological sense of discontent among Westerners who feel increasingly frustrated at being prevented from governing the places they inhabit. In the short term, this state of affairs is leading to a mounting tension: land-use decisions fraught with ill-will, finger-pointing, and name-calling, while the landscape itself continues to suffer.

Sooner or later, some version of what happened to this country's welfare system in the 1990s is going to happen to its public lands. When Congress abolished the old, entrenched welfare system, it essentially acknowledged that the federal government was no longer the appropriate jurisdiction for this particular issue. It had lost its ability to deliver the goods in a reliable and credible way. It had, in fact, suffered a fundamental loss of legitimacy in this arena. In the West, we are far down the road toward a similar loss of legitimacy on the part of the federal land management agencies, and we are witnessing a similar impulse to reform the federal system that controls and manages those millions of acres of western land. It is time to start thinking seriously about what form that devolution of responsibility might take and how it can become a positive chapter of American and western history.

For several years now, the West has been feeling its way toward greater self-determination. As Westerners have slowly fashioned a more cooperative and more credible role in the management of the land around them, a new, more mature West is emerging: one that is defined by the reality of face-to-face human responsibility; grounded in the necessity of building and nurturing community; and slowly emerging into a self-aware, self-confident region prepared to claim and responsibly exercise an unprecedented share of sovereignty over its own landscape. If, indeed, the loss of legitimacy on the part of the national land management system coincides with the emergence of a West that no longer needs to be protected against itself by a paternalistic public lands system, then the time has come for the West to begin claiming sovereignty over its own landscape. This lecture traces the historical roots, describes the current determinants, and projects the future outlines of this new chapter of western history.

A LEGACY OF IMPERIALISM AND RESISTANCE

There is no possibility of creating a newly self-determining West without understanding the deep historical roots of the present situation. We turn first, then, to a discussion of those historic trends and forces that have brought the West to its current political, social and environmental state. Historically, that peculiarly American brand of imperialism that we called Manifest Destiny was extremely significant in shaping the Washington-dominated West we know today. When Thomas Jefferson sent Lewis and Clark’s Corps of Discovery in search of the so-called “Height of Land”—the legendary physical point where the headwaters of the continent’s great rivers lay only “an easy portage” from one another—he was pursuing what Bernard DeVoto called “the course of empire.” Patricia Limerick has documented the West’s “legacy of conquest,” and in fact even the most progressive policies applied to the region often carried imperial overtones.

Teddy Roosevelt, one hundred years after Lewis and Clark, extended his Rough Rider form of imperialism into the mountains by unilaterally reserving more forest land in federal hands over a seven-year period than had been set aside in all the years before (and than have been set aside in all the years after). Gifford Pinchot was in the middle of it, of course, most dramatically as he burned the midnight oil over the map tables with Roosevelt in 1907 to reserve 16 million acres of land for the national forest system. This “Midnight Reserve” episode is emblematic of the prevailing spirit of the day. In the absence of well-organized Western leadership and a unifying community ethic, this “top-down” method of land conservation and control may well have been necessary. However, the legacy of this centralized approach is still felt and deeply resented in the West, and 21st century western citizens are still expressing their unwillingness to accept such heavy-handed maneuvers.

Roosevelt’s “New Nationalism” established more than the legacy of the public lands. The Progressive approach of relying on national solutions to address large-scale problems, or of relying on the national government to counterbalance the power of large corporations, is still clearly evident in modern-day, national environmentalism. Between the pervasive federal presence of the public lands and the multiple layers of federal statutes governing those lands, no region has more acutely felt the effects of either the old imperialism or the new nationalism than the West.
As a result of this essentially imperial legacy, resentment toward and resistance to the national presence have also had a long history in the West. Like many other people throughout history who have found themselves under the sway of a remote government seated in a distant, dissimilar region, westerners have long nursed a deep resentment toward Washington. For decades now, western politics have been an increasingly bitter and dysfunctional struggle between those who support and defend centralized control of the West and those who use all the tools they possess, including some formidable tools of demagoguery, to resist or undermine that control.

The western response to the Clinton Administration’s recent decision to create more than 40 million acres of what amounts to new wilderness out of existing public lands illustrates this divisive tension in stark terms. Bill Clinton follows in the footsteps of William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt with this eleventh hour decree. McKinley and Roosevelt (and Pinchot) were guaranteeing that millions of acres of forestland would remain in the public domain, whereas Clinton is trying to ensure that millions of acres already within the public domain will remain roadless. All three cases are much alike, though, in terms of administrative tactics and of the outrage they engender in the West.

Western Republicans are already up in arms, girding for battle with a wide array of blocking devices, determined to run the clock out on the Clinton administration. But the harder Western conservatives fight this move, the happier Clinton (and more to the point, Al Gore) will be, simply because Western resistance will motivate members of national environmental groups to work hard for a Democratic victory in November, 2000.

Clinton’s initiative is inciting a predictable backlash from the timber, mining and off-highway vehicle industries and their political minions. When the dust settles, Clinton will have gained Democratic votes outside the West; Republicans will have strengthened their hold inside it. The result is likely to be more deadlock, with no new policy and no clear sense of direction. We will have survived another chapter of what is becoming a tiresome story. But we are catching glimpses now of a way out of the existing political deadlock, emerging from two major contemporary trends of historical significance in the West: devolution and the decline of nationhood, on the one hand, and a new, home-grown brand of western self-determination on the other.

**THE CURRENT WESTERN SITUATION**

While the industrial era made nations the fundamental form of political jurisdiction, and while the strengthening and expansion of nationhood has defined the history of the American West, in the post-industrial age, nationhood has begun to lose its historical force, and the West is feeling that change more acutely than any other region. The fact is that the world order is no longer fundamentally an international order, but is becoming genuinely global. Post-industrial capitalism, now utterly triumphant around the world, has little use for nations as we know them. But capitalism does depend on more natural and organic clusters of economic activity: city-regions and coherent subcontinental regions are emerging as vastly more relevant economic entities than states, provinces or nations.

Nor is the economy the only arena where old, arbitrary jurisdictional boundaries are being slowly rendered irrelevant. As global environmental issues like greenhouse gases or the thinning of the ozone layer force us to operate at the organic level of the earth itself, we are becoming steadily more aware that no environmental issues actually correspond to existing jurisdictions. Some of those issues are global, some continental, some regional or local. None of them is really a national or state issue. While they often seem at odds with one another, then, global economy and global ecology speak with one voice in proclaiming the growing irrelevance of existing structures of sovereignty and the inevitable emergence of much more organic, global, continental, regional, and local forms of self-government.

The Rocky Mountain West is one of those regions that will emerge as a self-determining global player in the next decade or two, or pay the price for not having done so. While perhaps not yet as sophisticated in global economic terms as some other North American regions, the Rocky Mountain West is nevertheless almost certain to play a leading role in rethinking the relationship of regions to nationhood. There are at least two overlapping reasons for this. First is the fact that the global sorting-out into more organic, less arbitrary units is powerfully driven by landscape and land-forms, and the West, more than any other region on this continent, defines itself in terms of land forms and landscape. The second reason is the overwhelming federal presence in the region. Because Washington controls so much western acreage, and because the West so deeply resents that national
domination, the region is perfectly poised to play a major role in the ongoing worldwide phenomenon of challenging nationhood.

But it is not resentment alone that will enable the West to create a new relationship between region and nation. It happens that the historical phenomenon of declining nationhood coincides with the fact that the West, despite its troubled past and tension-ridden present, is finally growing up. There is at last an emerging western democracy, which was prophesied by Wallace Stegner over thirty years ago, when he wrote these words in The Sound of Mountain Water:

Angry as one may be at what heedless men have done and still do to a noble habitat, one cannot be pessimistic about the West. This is the native home of hope. When it fully learns that cooperation, not rugged individualism, is the quality that most characterizes and preserves it, then it will have achieved itself and outlived its origins. Then it has a chance to create a society to match its scenery.¹

For several decades after Stegner wrote those lines, it would have been almost impossible to find any but the most scattered bits of evidence of westerners learning lessons of cooperation. If anything, the region became increasingly polarized after the adoption of the national environmental laws which overlaid their confrontational tone so pervasively across an already fractured region. But then, against all odds, something new started emerging in the West, and soon began to gather force in a way that would eventually make Stegner appear prophetic indeed.

This is a story almost totally unknown outside the West, but urgently discussed every day now in the western press: the story of the steadily growing number of local agreements among western environmentalists, ranchers, loggers, miners, and recreationists about how the public land should be managed in their particular river drainage or their ecosystem. The list of such local collaborative efforts is growing too fast now to be catalogued, but names like the Henry’s Fork Watershed Council, the Quincy Library Group, the Willapa Alliance, the Malpai Borderlands Group, and the Applegate Partnership are beginning to add up to a matter of genuinely historical proportions. A steadily growing number of westerners on both sides of the political fence are coming to believe that they can do better by their communities, their economies, and their ecosystems by working together outside the established, centralized governing framework (which had only taught them how to be enemies) than by continuing to rely on the cumbersome, uncertain, under-funded and increasingly irrelevant mechanisms of that old structure.

The steadily expanding collaboration movement is a radically democratic phenomenon through which westerners have begun to assert direct and effective control over their own landscape. This movement is bringing together in a most unexpected way the western love of powerful landscapes with the old western strain of independence and rugged self-determination. Almost in spite of themselves, westerners have been learning that they can take good care of their land and be self-governing, and that indeed the two seem to depend upon one another.

THE UNRESOLVABLE TENSION BETWEEN WESTERN DEMOCRACY AND NATIONAL CONTROL

The revolutionary implications of this grass-roots phenomenon have still not been widely recognized or analyzed. However, I believe that the deeply democratic, hands-on, problem-solving collaboration movement is fundamentally at odds with the top-down, centralized, bureaucratic form of governance that has for so long characterized public lands management in the West. These two approaches are so deeply and directly opposed to one another that one or the other must give way. Because the grass-roots movement is irresistibly vibrant and growing, while the old system is increasingly paralyzed, there is little doubt about where the give will finally occur. The question is no longer whether the old system will be replaced, but whether the tension between the old and new can be handled in a constructive way. The answer depends on how a handful of key groups and institutions understand what is happening. Federal land management agencies and national environmental organizations, in particular, will play key roles in the emerging dynamics of collaboration.

More clearly than anyone else, national environmental organizations have recognized (and resisted) the revolutionary implications of the collaboration movement. Almost without fail these national groups have condemned consensus projects, not out of ill-will or mean-spiritedness, but because they have clearly seen that the old, top-down and the new, grass-roots systems of decision-making are fundamentally incompatible. Because environmentalists were so instrumental in constructing the existing decision framework, because they understand how it works, and still see it as the best available bulwark against the forces of greed and exploitation, they react with understandable anxiety to a movement which by its nature challenges the basic premises of that framework. The result has been a deepening ideological rift within the environmental movement, with some factions in staunch resistance to the new approaches to land management, while others throw themselves wholeheartedly into advancing those new approaches. The sources of this deepening tension within the environmental movement are complex; yet ultimately it will be futile and self-defeating for the movement to defend the established statutory and regulatory system as unquestioningly as it has been doing.

Meanwhile, caught in the middle between the old decision-making framework which defines their mission and the new techniques of collaboration which had not even been dreamed of when that framework was created, the federal land management agencies often seem to be standing in a freeze-tag daze. The Bureau of Land Management, for example, went through five different directors and acting directors in the first six years of the Clinton Administration. While personalities and other factors have no doubt played a part, the underlying problem is that the national government no longer has the capacity nor the legitimacy to govern those vast stretches of western landscape. The loss of legitimacy is even more evident in the case of the Forest Service, which is plagued by harsh attacks from the outside and dismal morale from the inside. Critics accuse the Forest Service of poor land management, insufficient scientific research, bureaucratic inefficiency, and even fraud. Despite its nearly 100-year history, a convergence of historical forces all but guarantees that the agency will not last another hundred years. Indeed, there are those who doubt that it will even last until its centennial in 2005.

The steadily expanding recourse to local, place-based collaborative problem-solving on western land and natural resource issues is now seen by the federal land management agencies as a way out of their crisis of legitimacy, and in the short term it may buy the bureaucracy some time. But, as the national environmentalists instinctively and anxiously understand, this recourse to western democracy now constitutes a fundamental challenge to the national domination of the West.

The resulting situation is deeply and inherently unstable, and something has to give. Three different outcomes could possibly resolve the tension between the grassroots consensus movement and the centralized federal lands system. The first seems to be the favorite of most national environmentalists: that the place-based collaboration movement would simply disappear, or at the very least learn to subordinate itself to the supremacy of the existing statutory and regulatory framework. But there is simply too much historical momentum in the collaboration movement, and too much dry-rot in the old framework, to make this a real option.

A second possibility, which seems to be the goal of many government agencies and of a number of foundations and progressive think tanks, is that the current land management system can be gently tweaked to make room for consensus approaches. The
next few years will almost certainly witness a growing number of efforts to accomplish this, both by changing the way the agencies operate (through revisions to their regulations) and very likely by amending their governing statutes. These efforts may have some limited success in incorporating place-based collaboration into the existing governing framework. But this is essentially a case of pouring new wine into old wineskins. An even more telling metaphor is Lincoln’s “house divided” theme: the West cannot long continue half colonized and half self-determining, and it will soon be necessary for the region and the nation to choose one path or the other.

The third and most realistic scenario for resolving the tension between western democracy and national control, then, is that public land management will undergo a thorough transformation in the coming years. Devolution will indeed occur on the western public lands, and new, decentralized governing structures will emerge. This is the outcome that I predict, and the one that I believe will finally create a western society and democracy to “match the scenery.”

RE-IMAGINING SOVEREIGNTY

If indeed there are now two irreconcilable ways of governing public lands, and if no immediate and comprehensive resolution of the tension between them is apparent, it is still possible to engage in a constructive discussion about this vital issue. While I clearly have my own opinions about how things should unfold, and my own predictions about how they will, my strongest motivation is to invite and further a meaningful discussion about a crucial question: Who is going to run the West in the next century?

I would argue that only the West and its people can successfully and sustainably govern the West. The sooner westerners understand that this is where the arrow of history is pointing, the sooner they can begin to control events instead of being controlled by them. I propose that we look toward the future. In doing so, I recommend that we find constructive ways to deal with tensions in the short term, all the while seeking a long-term resolution that will leave the West sovereign over its own landscape.

For some time to come, it is inevitable that the central contradiction I have described will remain unresolved, and that it will continue to play out in often unsatisfactory and frustrating ways. But in a number of settings, a clear vision of emerging western sovereignty can begin transforming that frustration into the creation of more stable and satisfying governing structures.

One example is the increasing use of pilot projects on national forests and grasslands. These experiments provide on-the-ground laboratories where collaborative processes can be developed and tested, while giving the existing structure a full chance to incorporate this new form of decision-making. This testing of the resiliency of the existing system is a necessary step in working out the tension between the old and new decision-making processes. But if the old system is as worn out as I believe it is, even these pilot projects will often lead to failure and frustration.

I therefore recommend that in addition to a cautiously reform-minded approach to pilot projects, far bolder experiments should also be launched. Under this devolutionary approach, the communities most directly involved with a national forest or BLM district pilot project would be bound by broad, nationally defined principles of sound, sustainable ecosystem management. Within those general constraints, however, they would be given a full
range of responsibility over that parcel of public land. They would be in charge of devising, adopting and implementing management plans and even hiring and directing the forest or BLM district supervisor.

One way to implement these ideas within the current national forest system would be to re-create a “Region 7” of the US Forest Service. Currently, there is no Region 7. We could bring Region 7 to life as a series of experimental forests governed by watershed-level collaborative groups. Allowing anything like this to happen, even on an experimental basis, will of course be bitterly resisted by many national environmentalists, but it is safer and saner to give westerners a chance to prove themselves in controlled experimental settings than to run the risk of politically-driven and essentially uncontrolled devolution.

The reality is, though, that pilot projects and other experiments in collaboration that attempt to conform to the framework of national ownership and control will not in the end be capable of addressing the West’s emerging historical situation in a satisfactory way. All too consistently, those efforts have foundered and will continue to founder on the embedded rigidity of the current decision-making system. The problem goes deeper than any amount of tinkering with the framework of national control can address. At some point, then, the phase of pilot projects and other experiments is going to have to give way to proposals for replacing the worn-out machinery with something radically new. The “something new” must rely upon the emerging capacity of westerners to make sound and sustainable decisions about their surroundings when they are given responsibility for those surroundings. But until westerners can overcome their own dysfunctional political divisions, they will not be able to speak with a united voice in proposing new governing structures which would put the West in charge of its own destiny and its own landscape.

It is time for a major political realignment in the West, proceeding from the already existing strains within both parties over public lands issues. This change must occur if the West is to determine its own future and take responsibility for its own land and its ecosystems. Western Democrats will sooner or later have to cut themselves loose from the Big Brother, Beltway mentality that is driving them deeper and deeper into political oblivion in the West. Democrats need to relinquish their profoundly undemocratic attitudes toward the West, acknowledge that the distant government in Washington can no longer run the West, and begin to trust westerners to govern their own landscape, by effectively westernizing control of the public lands.

But Democrats could only make that shift if Republicans simultaneously made one of equal magnitude. It is impossible to imagine environmentalists or other progressives trusting westerners to run the West unless they could be shown how western control of the land is not just a cover for corporate greed. Democrats, in other words, will not and should not abandon their undemocratic attitude toward the West until conservatives agree to abandon their own most anti-conservative approaches to western issues. A few responsible western Republicans are beginning to recognize that the pursuit of quick profit at the expense of sustainable ecosystems and sustainable communities does not conserve anything but moneyed privilege, and therefore does not deserve to be called conservative, any more than the protect-the-West-against-itself approach of the Democrats deserves to be called democratic. Because of the historical force of factors described earlier—especially the weakening of the national government and the strengthening of a new, collaborative form of western democracy—a more thoughtful set of western Democrats and Republicans could now start asking one another, “If we were given the opportunity to govern this place together, could we agree to do it in a way that would sustain itself, sustain our landscapes and our ecosystems, sustain everything that makes us so proud to be westerners? Could we be genuinely conservative about this? And could we be genuinely democratic?”

There is an increasing urgency for the West to get on with some form of political realignment that will enable it to assert a steadily expanding degree of sovereignty over its own landscape. The West can simply no longer afford to let its increasingly frequent, but still always localized, bipartisan, problem-solving efforts be as consistently subverted as they are now by the existing system. Too many big, important issues are at stake. From national forest road policy to dam removal to tribal sovereignty, crucial western issues are now mired in the old politics and the old, centralized, dysfunctional governing machinery. The national tail is rapidly losing its ability to wag the western dog; the next decade must see the West beginning aggressively to occupy the driver’s seat with respect to its own destiny. The objective of western leaders of both parties during the first decade of the new century should be to reverse the relative positions of region and nation, so that the West is setting the course and the national government is learning to content itself with the role of a helpful junior partner.
There are already some tentative moves in that direction. One of the most intriguing is the "Three Sovereigns" proposal in the Columbia Basin. As salmon populations have continued to decline in the dam-clogged Columbia and its tributaries, and as more and more species have been listed under the Endangered Species Act, the prospect of a whole new layer of federal control over the Pacific Northwest has sent tremors through the body politic of the region. One response has been to try to fashion new ways of governing. The proposed Three Sovereigns Forum would include the basin's four governors, one leader from each of the thirteen tribes in the basin, and one federal representative. This new forum of state, federal and tribal representatives would have real authority to coordinate salmon recovery from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean. Oregon's Governor John Kitzhaber has played a leading role in this effort to create what he called, "a new regional governance structure for the Columbia Basin." "Without changes of this kind," he predicts, "we will cede control of the destiny of the Pacific Northwest to interests outside the region."

What is unique about the proposal (and what will almost certainly prevent it from being implemented anytime soon) is that it squarely addresses the now inescapable issue of sovereignty. In effect it would elevate various forms of local or regional sovereignty to a place of equality with, if not preeminence over, national control. Whether this particular proposal ever gets enacted or not, the mere fact that it has received serious consideration is evidence of the increasingly inescapable fact that the old, imperial regime cannot any longer govern the West, and that one way or another, a new, far less centralized structure of sovereignty will emerge.

It is impossible to know in advance what form that shift in sovereignty will assume. We may well see the emergence of new watershed governing structures to address particular endangered species issues, in particular drainages or ecosystems. But sooner or later, the issue of the governance of the public lands must be addressed more directly—and sooner or later the West is going to gain enough confidence in its self-governing capacity to propose an entirely new framework for public lands management. I believe the time has come for westerners to begin joining hands across party lines to pursue an agenda for western management of the public lands centered on the principle of self-determining, sustainable prosperity.

A politically realigned, united front of democratic and conservative westerners should now prepare itself to make a clear statement to the national government, roughly along these lines: "We seek control of all the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service lands in the West. We are prepared to impose a public trust on those lands, committing us to keep them public and to manage them for sustainable ecosystem health. To accomplish that objective, we will enter into an agreement under the Interstate Compact Clause of the U.S. Constitution, and work together to obtain from the rest of the country the congressional approval mandated by that clause. Under that compact and trust agreement, we propose to take over the BLM and the western portion of the Forest Service, assuming all the pension and other obligations attached to them, and assuming responsibility for any further adjustments in the staffing of those agencies. We will create by the trust instrument a governing structure capable of fulfilling all these responsibilities."

Whether the West will actually choose to make such a proposal is impossible to predict. What matters is that there should be a broader, bolder, more farsighted discussion both within the West and around the country about how democracy and ecological sustainability can go hand in hand. That question is now of the utmost urgency worldwide. While we might hope (or pretend) that a paternalistic system of ecological protection can work in the West, paternalism is not a global option. We might choose to tell the West that it cannot govern its own land base but it won't work to tell the people of the world that.
CONCLUSION

Perhaps the most urgent reason to revitalize democracy in a place like the American West is because the world itself must now acquire a capacity for self-government that it has until now been able to get by without. Given the almost overwhelming economic, ecological and social challenges we now face globally, we must be developing everywhere the fundamental democratic faith that when people are given the opportunity and encouragement to deliberate together, they can indeed rise above their narrow self-interests and devise solutions that are smarter, sounder, more humane and more sustainable than any undemocratic decision-making process can ever achieve.

But we cannot nurture democratic practice worldwide if we do not trust our own people to govern their own landscapes. If there was a time when national control of most of the West was the most democratic approach, there is also a time when that approach must give way to a more vital, more human-and-landscape-scale, more trustworthy form of democracy.

Daniel Kemmis

Daniel Kemmis is a graduate of Harvard University and the University of Montana. Currently the Director of the Center for the Rocky Mountain West, he is the former Mayor of Missoula and a four-term Montana State legislator.

Mr. Kemmis is a member of the Board of Directors of the Northwest Area Foundation, Kettering Foundation, the Institute for Environment and Natural Resources, and the Bolle Center for People and Forests. He is a fellow of the Dallas Institute, a member of the American Planning Association's Growing Smart Directorate, a member of the Advisory Boards of Redefining Progress, of the Western Governors' Association's Enlibra Project, and of the Brookings Institution's Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy. In 1998, he was appointed by President Clinton to the American Heritage Rivers Commission.

Mr. Kemmis is the author of two books: Community and the Politics of Place and The Good City and the Good Life. He has published articles in national and regional magazines and journals on such topics as community and community building, city design, bioregionalism, and the economy and politics of the West.

In 1997, President Clinton awarded Mr. Kemmis the Charles Frankel Prize for outstanding contribution to the field of humanities, and in the same year he received the Society for Conservation Biology's Distinguished Achievement Award for Social, Economic, and Political work. In the fall of 1998 he was awarded a fellowship at the Harvard Kennedy School's Institute of Politics.
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