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Community forestry engagement with market forces: A comparative perspective from Bhutan and Montana[☆]

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ABSTRACT

This paper asks: (1) how has community forestry been informed by the ascendancy of particular forms of neoliberal restructuring and rise in market-based interests in environmental governance and (2) how has its engagement with these market forces affected its effectiveness in meeting the objective to reconcile livelihood and environmental protection? Towards answering these questions the paper examines two places known for their forest landscapes and livelihoods and with community forestry activities: the Himalayan country of Bhutan and the U.S. western state of Montana. Bhutan's top-down, national community forestry program and Montana's bottom-up, collaborative effort known as the Montana Legacy Program are shown to be highly different not only in their institutional arrangement but also in their engagements with particular forms of neoliberalism including type of markets, regulatory processes, market opportunities, and the role of the private sector. Their differences reveal important ways that market forces and market-oriented interests shape threats as well as solutions to meeting forest protection and livelihood objectives in the two contexts, but produce unpredictable partnerships and awkward contradictions in the process.

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1. Introduction

From its earliest beginnings, the relationship between market forces and community forestry has been fraught with tension. On the one hand, community forestry (and its predecessors) in the 1970s and early 1980s (e.g. social forestry programs) were in part created to protect forests and forest-based cultures and livelihoods from commercial forest extraction, development and seizure within developing capitalist economies (Arnold, 1991). Elsewhere markets assisted community forestry groups to maintain forest land tenure and livelihoods (Bray et al., 2003). Different orientations towards markets continue to permeate political conflicts within community-based natural resource management efforts: while NGO and other practitioners may view markets as a means to improve local income, livelihood security and conservation, rural residents may see community-based natural resource management (including community forestry) as the means to negotiate market forces and regain control over natural resources for improving their livelihood security and conservation (Western et al., 1994; Dressler et al., 2010). Neoliberal economic restructuring since the 1970s further complicates the interplay between community forestry initiatives and policies that support (free) markets, especially with the turn of conservation policy and practice towards employing market-based interventions (Büscher et al., 2012; Roth and Dressler, 2012).

Neither community forestry nor neoliberalism can be reduced to simple definitions, forces or formulations regarding how they operate across time and space, nor in their mutual engagement. Rather the processes that each entail, and their intersections, are highly contingent and influenced by local contextual conditions (Büscher and Dressler, 2012; Roth and Dressler, 2012). Community forestry has been defined as an exercise by local people to wield power or influence over decisions regarding forest management, including rules of access and disposition of products, and which further necessitate “local” being defined and bounded within particular settings and conditions (McDermott and Schreckenberg, 2009). Understanding this exercise demands attention to the intersection of place-based socio-political dynamics and broader processes. McCarthy (2005) brought attention to the remarkable congruence with the rise of interest in community forestry and particular forms of neoliberalism, and suggests a definition of community forestry which reflects their engagement:

I see community forestry as a complex amalgam of trends in environmental governance, neoliberal policy agendas, and responsiveness to contingent historical and geographical factors. Rather than striving for fixed, programmatic definitions of it, we might do better at times to examine closely what other agendas and legacies it has hybridized with, and to what effects, in various locations.

[McCarthy (2005, 997).]

Li (2007, 279) builds on the view of community forest management as practices of assemblages which bring together an array of agents and

[☆] This article belongs to the Special Issue: Community forestry.

objectives and, "... cannot be resolved into neat binaries that separate power from resistance, or progressive forces from reactionary ones. It is difficult to determine who has been co-opted and who betrayed. Fuzziness, adjustment and compromise are critical to holding assemblage together."

In light of the above, this paper asks: (1) how has community forestry been informed by the ascendancy of particular forms of neoliberal restructuring and rise in market-based interests in environmental governance and (2) how has its engagement with these market forces affected its effectiveness in meeting the objective to reconcile livelihood and environmental protection? Towards answering these questions the paper examines two places known for their forest landscapes and livelihoods, and with activities which constitute community forestry: the Himalayan country of Bhutan and the U.S. western state of Montana. The overall goal is to contribute towards understanding the ways that (different) practices have come together in response to the interplay of local conditions and translocal forces to inspire local mobilization to influence forest ownership and governance, and for whose interests they serve.

2. Neoliberal market dynamics and environmental governance

Neoliberalism has been defined as an attempt to reorganize capitalism, institutionally, politically, and ideologically along "free market" principles. It is often depicted as a project of social change for which human welfare can be improved by freeing individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework harboring robust property rights, free markets, and free trade; the role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework to enable these practices to occur (Harvey, 2005, 2). The central organizing mechanism is the market. While neoliberal capitalism shares with liberal capitalism a commitment to limit state intervention to enable capital accumulation through market exchange, under neoliberalism the market needs active regulation; it must be purposefully crafted (Pellizoni, 2011). This is done through an assemblage of practices, techniques and mentalities through which subjects are governed to follow these rules.

The influence of neoliberalism on the interactions between nature, society and environmental governance has been closely examined (and debated) among geographers and other social scientists (Peck and Tickell, 2002; McCarthy and Prudham, 2004; Castree, 2008; Bakker, 2010; Brockington et al., 2010), and community forestry (McCarthy, 2005, 2006). These studies illuminate the interplay between environmental subjects, development policies and programs, environmental governance and key neoliberal processes of decentralization, privatization and marketization. They have shown that they can operate in part or variegated forms across time and place, and coming together with local conditions in hybridized and often contradictory ways. The negative impacts of neoliberal markets have been noted, such as on producing new property rights and the loss of local resource access and control, as goods once produced for home use are converted into commodities for market sale (Nevins and Peluso, 2008). But outcomes are not always negative for society or some parts of society, nor do they involve straight-forward state actions. A simplified interpretation of community forestry as reflecting a rolling back of the state and reducing official involvement in local affairs has been shown by Li (2002) to not be the case in the uplands of Indonesia; rather she provides evidence that community-based natural resource management has the effect of intensifying state control over upland resources, lives and livelihoods. As a result some people in these areas may resist such programs while others may view greater involvement and integration into state systems as a benefit. Scholars of the "double movement" described earlier by Polanyi (1944/2001) further our understanding of complexity and contradictions of states as they may move back and forth between actions that facilitate laissez-faire capitalism through deregulation, and regulation to deal with environmental degradation that may result, and in the process create progressive opportunities such as local protests and "counter-movements" (Higgins et al., 2012).

Nonetheless, the idea that free markets and an active civil society are best suited to guide environmental governance and solve conservation problems has increasingly infused the conservation landscape around the world today, including community forestry. McCarthy (2005) suggested that community forestry became popular because the approach aligned with growing beliefs in the flexibility of markets and the non-governmental sector to finance and promote conservation in ways responsive to particular localities; however its expression varies with the particular configuration of neoliberal policies and practices (for example in Canada versus the United States). While the specifics vary, community-based conservation as well as conventional top-down efforts has increasingly come to incorporate expressions of market logics in their programs. For example, its tool box includes a strikingly similar array of programs centered on payment for ecosystem services, certification, private parks, and especially ecotourism.

How market-oriented forces operate in environmental governance and conservation, and for whom they serve, are highly variable (Igoe and Brockington, 2007; Igoe et al., 2010; Dressler and Roth, 2011; Roth and Dressler, 2012). Examples from the South suggest that impoverished classes, communities and other marginalized groups rarely benefit from market-oriented forces in conservation (Fortwangler, 2007; Igoe and Brockington, 2007; McAfee, 2012). Empirical cases from South East Asia document that markets in biodiversity conservation efforts represent a new source of income generation for elite capture and accelerates agrarian differentiation (Dressler and Roth, 2011; Büscher and Dressler, 2012; Dressler et al., 2013). On the other hand, farmers in Australia have been able to shape markets to their advantage amidst new conservation policies and rural economic restructuring (Higgins et al., 2012), while in England partnerships between governments and private corporations have protected public forest governance values (Hodge and Adam, 2013). In New Zealand "strategic brokers" or "partnership champions," often former community activists, have rebuilt social and communitarian links severed by new markets and other neoliberal dynamics (Larner and Craig, 2005). The value of public-private partnerships, MacDonald (2010) describes how mainstream non-governmental conservation organizations previously hostile to corporate interests have become willing to forge partnerships with them, and become central within conservation practice today (MacDonald, 2011). In the western U.S. there are many stories of civil society embracing collaboration with historic rivals to break impasses and forge innovative policy on government-owned ("public") forests (Brick et al., 2001; Wondolleck and Yaffee, 2000). The success of grassroots environmental organizations working in partnership with non-governmental and government sectors in the U.S. has led to them to being labeled the "new environmental vanguard" (Weber, 2000).

Understanding neoliberalism and its intersection with socio-environmental action is complicated by the fact that "... while the contours of neoliberal conservation are observable, we do not assume there to be an absolute, fixed set of neoliberal characteristics in all places at all times, but rather a messy moshpit of market-based factors based in political economic conditions, past and present (Dressler and Roth, 2011, 852)." Local experience will reflect the interaction between local dynamics and translocal neoliberal forces which themselves vary from place to place, and require tracing "chains of explanations" across socio-theoretical perspectives and geographical landscapes as employed by political ecologists (Robbins, 2012). Empirical case studies remain crucial but need to be understood as to how they articulate with the larger assemblage of factors associated with broader trends. As such, scholars suggest the benefit of research involving "multi-sited comparative ethnography within a global perspective" (Büscher and Dressler, 2012, 367).

3. Method and context

This paper is a qualitative inquiry involving an analysis of policy documents, secondary literature, and a small amount of primary data. The latter includes survey research conducted by the author and others in

both places over time: in Bhutan since 2006 and in Montana since 1996. In Bhutan these include attention directly to community forestry and local use of forest products (Dorji, 2011; Wangchuk, 2011; Wangchuk et al., 2014). In Montana these involve projects conducted in the Swan and Blackfoot valleys documenting residents' attitudes towards forests, land use, corporate timberland divestment and creating community forests (Cestero and Belsky, 2003; Belsky, 2004, 2008; Duvall, 2006; Duvall and Belsky, 2005).

Bhutan and Montana share many similarities. While Bhutan is only one-fourth the size of Montana, both have 800,000 to one million inhabitants, are mountainous, and have extensive forest cover. In rural areas, livelihoods and culture remain closely connected to forest landscapes and forest products in both places. Historically, most households in both places derived a significant portion of their livelihoods from forestry, farming, livestock, and/or mining. Forests provided construction timber, fuel wood, fence posts (flag poles in death rituals in Bhutan) and a range of non-wood forest products for home use and sale, including mushrooms and berries. An important contrast in forest livelihoods is extensive hunting in Montana for food and recreation, whereas hunting (and killing of sentient beings) is prohibited by law and culture in Buddhist Bhutan and serves to limit if not totally eradicate the practice.

Both Montana and Bhutan share a celebrated position in the global imagination. Their mountainous terrains, relatively undeveloped landscapes, history of natural resource-based livelihoods, and distance from major commercial centers contribute to their exotic image. A highly restrictive tourism policy in Bhutan limits the number of foreign tourists (all are required to pay at least \$250/day and travel through a registered Bhutanese tourist agency). Bhutan's contact with global consumer culture has also been limited by the relatively recent introduction of television (1999) and internet, as well as government laws including requiring traditional dress in public offices. While Bhutan is not a member of the WTO, it is actively engaged in foreign trade (i.e., selling hydroelectricity to India) yet the popular image of the country among foreigners remains one of self-sufficient, subsistence-oriented mountain farmers. The image of Montana is also as remote and comprised of cattle ranches and cowboys, despite the fact that ranching and forestry have been in decline for decades (Headwaters, 2013). Most tellingly, both places are similar in popular representations: Bhutan is "The Last Shangri La" and Montana "The Last Best Place."

With respect to forestry, the majority of forest land in both Bhutan and Montana is owned by national governments. Government land ownership began in Montana and the American west in general in the late 19th century, whereas nationalization of forests occurred in Bhutan in the mid-20th century. In both locales, the national government asserted ownership over lands not clearly privately held and introduced professional, scientific forest management practices under the jurisdiction of government forestry departments (Hirt, 1996; Webb and Dorji, 2004). Over the past two decades, government policies in both places have begun to decentralize forest management. However, the institutional arrangements associated with decentralization, and defined here as community forestry, are very different in Montana and Bhutan and are the subject of the next section.

4. History of community forestry in Bhutan and Montana

4.1. Bhutan

Rural peoples and households have used and managed forests for food, fuel wood, medicines, housing and spiritual purposes for centuries throughout Bhutan. Forest ownership and institutions for governing access and use were historically based on customary and common property traditions. The Government of Bhutan nationalized forests in the mid-20th century and established a professional forest department to manage the country's extensive forests (Webb and Dorji, 2004). Nationalization occurred despite the lack of visible forest degradation in line with regional trends (e.g. in Nepal and India; Dorji, 2003). In the

decades following forest nationalization, the breakdown of customary governance without the development of alternate authority led to an "open access" tragedy with the government and rural communities increasingly concerned over unregulated forest product extraction, particularly by non-local harvesters. Similar to other countries in South Asia (Springate-Baginski and Blaikie, 2007), the government of Bhutan decentralized forest management with legislative acts in the 1970s–1990s (Dorji, 2003), and in 1995 the Bhutanese government passed laws to develop a national program in community forestry. The design and active implementation of Bhutan's community forestry program began in 2000 with technical and financial assistance provided by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) through its "Participatory Forest Management Project" (PFMP). The number of designated community forests in Bhutan increased from zero in 2000 to 500 in 2013 (MOAF, 2013).

Community forests are designated by the following government rules and procedures. Land ownership remains with the national government, but authority to implement an approved community forest management plan is devolved to community forestry management groups (CFMGs). Providing CFMG members with forest products and fostering environmental protection of community forests were the original objectives of the Bhutan community forestry program. Rural households can obtain fuel wood either from community forests if they are a CFMG member or through a permit to harvest wood from government reserve forests. Residents prefer to obtain fuel wood from a community forest because the process is less time consuming and burdensome than obtaining fuel wood from Government Reserve Forests and is a major reason why households join a CFMG (Dorji, 2011; Phuntsho et al., 2011).

Since meeting local household forest product needs and protecting forests were the original objectives of Bhutan's community forestry program, selling timber and other forest products were originally not permitted. This changed in 2006 when the government granted CFMGs the right to sell timber and non-wood forest products if there is a surplus after meeting CFMG member needs in the hope that community forestry could help reduce rural poverty. Studies suggest that there is potential for Bhutan's community forests to meet this objective, although many infrastructural and practical barriers exist (Gilmour, 2009; Temphel and Beukeboom, 2007). These include limited capacity of CFMGs to determine competitive market prices, construct infrastructure to transport timber, and undertake mandated forest inventory and monitoring; nevertheless some community forests have begun to sell forest products (Phuntsho et al., 2011).

Additional actions have been implemented by the Bhutanese government to increase the capacity to commercialize community forests. Initially, most forests allocated to community forestry were degraded due to previous harvesting and thus little commercially valuable timber was available to harvest. More recently, forests allocated to community forests include larger trees and denser stands, as well as valuable non-wood forest products such as lemon grass, mushrooms, bamboo, and chirata (*Swertia chirayita*). Guidelines have also been formulated to assist CFMGs with sustainable harvesting protocols for non-wood forest products (Meijboom et al., 2008). Community development funds have been set up in each community forest and financed through membership fees, forest product sales, collection of fines charged to outside "poachers," and levied on CFMG members for missing meetings and work obligations. Donations received from other stakeholders are another potential way to increase these funds. Funds are to be allocated using transparent and democratic practices, and to benefit CFMGs and the broader community. Studies of the allocation of community development funds suggest that they have been useful in a limited number of communities and small number of households providing emergency funds or loans to families in need, and financing community projects such as construction of prayer wheels (Dorji, 2011). It is important to realize that there is much variation across the different designated community forests due to local conditions despite the otherwise highly prescriptive national program.

4.2. Montana

The community forestry activity highlighted here is the Montana Legacy Project (MLP). MLP is a large, landscape-level conservation effort involving three counties and millions of acres of mixed ownership forest lands, a considerable proportion of which are located in the Swan Valley. The Swan Valley is situated between the Bob Marshall Wilderness and Mission Mountain Wilderness area, and is part of one of the world's largest intact forest landscapes known as the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem (Little, 2009). Land ownership in the Swan Valley prior to the MLP resembled a checkerboard pattern, reflecting the legacy of 1860s railroad land grants. During this era, the U.S. government removed Native Americans to encourage white settlement and economic development. The government allocated alternate sections of land (i.e., 640 acres or 1 mile²) on either side of the tracks to the Northern Pacific Railroad. Over the years, Northern Pacific sold its forestland to Weyerhaeuser who later sold it to the Plum Creek Timber Company. Forest land prices in the Swan Valley increased from about \$500/acre to \$5000/acre since the early 2000s (Parker, 2014). The Plum Creek Timber Company took advantage of tax laws that enabled them to restructure into real estate investment trusts (REIT) and drastically reduce tax obligations, and began converting its land portfolio in western Montana from timberlands to real estate (Block and Sample, 2001; Little, 2006; Stein, 2005). Beginning in 1997, Plum Creek identified land in the Swan Valley with the highest real estate prices for divestment, calling them “higher and better use” lands based exclusively on market price, despite other local forest values. Residents, local environmental groups and others in the government land management agencies were concerned that these lands would be sold for recreation homes and complicate the management of an already mixed ownership landscape, further fragment wildlife and wilderness characteristics, and reduce public access, recreation and (sustainable) natural resource based industries. Melanie Parker, a local leader in the Montana Legacy Project and co-founder of a community forestry education and outreach center in the area (Northwest Connections), noted:

In other words, profits received in the short term for selling the land far outstripped all potential future profits that would come from manufacturing wood products from the trees growing there. This was the residents' first lesson in the shifting economic conditions of the region. Working landscapes, whether they were forest, range or farm, were beginning to have a hard time outperforming the real estate market, and so were increasingly vulnerable to conversion.

[Parker (2014, 174).]

Beginning in 1997, residents and leaders from grassroots community groups began working with members from a national nonprofit conservation organization, Trust for Public Land (TPL), to identify alternatives to the sale of the Plum Creek timberlands and their conversion to recreational subdivisions. TPL had experience with federal acquisition programs and assisted the local coalition to purchase the first divested lands in the Swan Valley (2500 acres) for \$13 million using the U.S. federal government Land and Water Conservation Funds, a mitigation fund created by the U.S. Congress to offset the effects of offshore oil drilling and allocated on a competitive grant basis.

Plum Creek continued its timberland divestments. In 2000 the corporation announced a ten-year plan to sell 10,000 acres in the Swan Valley, and then in 2001 announced plans to sell 20,000 acres over 5–7 years. Local residents were deeply concerned, particularly about potential adverse effects on wildlife, landscapes, livelihoods, and community social cohesion (Cestero and Belsky, 2003; Belsky, 2004). Local conservation leaders formed the Swan Lands Coordinating Committee (SLCC) to devise a coordinated strategy. The committee included members from the local community forestry groups (Swan Ecosystem Center and Northwest Connections) as well as the U.S. state and federal land management agencies, and environmental groups in Montana and

began meeting regularly to examine potential strategies, including land exchanges, conservation easements, community forests, land use planning and, land purchase. By 2005, the SLCC concluded that acquisition was the most effective tool to achieve landscape-scale response to corporate land divestment in the Swan Valley.

The mammoth scale of the project demanded unprecedented cooperation. Two nonprofit conservation organizations known for their work in conservation land acquisitions took the lead: the Trust for Public Land (TPL) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC). TNC had recently assisted a nearby community-driven partnership to acquire Plum Creek divested land in the Blackfoot Valley, including 5200 acres for a community conservation area (Belsky, 2008). After much negotiation with Plum Creek, the final result of the MLP was the purchase of 310,000 acres of former Plum Creek timberlands. The cost was nearly a half a billion dollars raised through public and private sources. A new government fund established by Montana's then Senator Max Baucus (Chair of the Senate Appropriations committee) was particularly instrumental in raising funds. In the 2007 Farm Bill, he created a fund to protect landscapes over 40,000 acres in size that are also under a Habitat Conservation Plan for native fish and wildlife (Parker, 2014). The majority of the former Plum Creek lands were resold to the U.S. Forest Service and state agencies to be managed as public lands. Others were resold to private owners with conservation easements that restrict future development options. The transaction also included mandates for timber sales to ensure a supply of wood fiber to support mills over the decade.

5. Comparative perspectives on market forces in Bhutan and Montana community forestry

The next section examines how specific market forces may have influenced community forestry in the two case studies. Four areas are compared: 1. market type; 2. regulatory processes; 3. new market opportunities; and 4. role of the private sector. Their differences reveal important ways that market forces and market-oriented interests shape threats as well as opportunities and solutions for meeting forest protection and livelihood objectives in the two contexts, but produce unpredictable partnerships and awkward contradictions in the process.

5.1. Market type

The Bhutan's community forestry program centers on conventional natural resource commodity markets in trees and non-wood forest products. The commodification of Bhutan's community forests is a purposeful action by the government to encourage the sale of community forestry products on an open, competitive market which has just begun to be developed in the country, and is consistent with building a modern capitalist economy. Until recently, the value of community forests and forestry products to both the government and local residents was strictly for local, domestic and non-market use. The growing use of market exchange in Bhutan can be seen in growing interest by the government and some community forests to explore their possible participation in REDD+ and other payment for ecosystem service programs as a means to raise income (Phuntsho et al., 2011).

In contrast, the Montana community forestry case centers not only on a spiraling land market but also greater abstraction of nature and commodification consistent with a capitalist economy informed by neoliberalism. Land in this scenic and telecommunication-connected area has become of far greater value than the forest, forest products or even potential payment for ecosystem services. Montana's rural economy has transitioned from a landscape of natural resource production to one increasingly based on amenity or consumption values, especially lifestyle. Plum Creek's divestment and marketing strategies are based on the view that whatever brings the highest market price is its “higher and best use.” With regard to its former timberlands, this means as recreational real estate. Cast in this light, the Montana Legacy Project can be

viewed as a direct response to an ever growing commodification of nature and land. Those involved in and supporting the MLP represent strong resistance to this trend. They seek to conserve forest landscapes for purposes including but extending beyond income generation notably for public recreation, wildlife and ecosystem services. Forest-based recreation in this area is highly connected to personal identity, memory and well-being (Belsky, 2004). Protecting forests for these non-economic values is the glue that binds diverse constituents of the MLP initiative together (i.e., U.S. Forest Service managers, members of environmental organizations and rural residents).

5.2. Regulatory processes

Commercializing Bhutan's community forests through a voluntary, market incentivized approach is a policy consistent with neoliberalism and clearly espoused by the country's elected government in 2013, the People's Democratic Party (PDP). Included under the section on Environment and Sustainable Development, the new government's manifesto explicitly states, "We will encourage community forests and will incentivise product marketing of community forestry groups (PDP, 2013)." Towards this objective the government plans to support and assist development of free and open markets in the environmental sector. However, it is pursuing this objective within community forestry with safeguards: the sale of community forestry products can proceed only if there is a surplus after community forestry management group members' needs are met. The few empirical studies conducted thus far suggest that CFMG members welcome the opportunity to raise income from selling community forest products (Phuntsho et al., 2011; Dorji, 2011). Encouraging the sale of community forest products while enacting some regulation is as an example of hybrid neoliberalism as it works through particular contexts, in this case a country where some sectors embrace the market economy and the modern lifestyle that it offers but others willing to do so within the parameters and concerns of its ancient political economy and (Buddhist) culture.

Bhutan only recently evolved from a hereditary monarchy to a constitutional democracy, and to be supportive of developing a market economy. While western modernization was promoted by former kings beginning in the 1950s, mostly involving building roads, schools and health facilities, the country remained a patrimonial welfare state committed to the Fifth's King's development philosophy of "Gross National Happiness" (Gallenkamp, 2010). Gross National Happiness (GNH) strives to pursue psychological, social, economic and environmental wellbeing rather than just to pursue "Gross National Product" (GNP). GNH is critical of market production and commodity values that dominate development goals and projects, and seeks to balance modernization with the preservation of cultural traditions and environmental sustainability. Despite the world's fascination with GNH, analysts suggest that Bhutan's prime minister elected in July 2013 and his PDP party will pay more attention to raising GNP and increasing economic development through emphasizing historic ties with India (Harris, 2013). The PDP manifesto includes many (neoliberal-oriented) policies including the party's goal to release and foster an entrepreneurial spirit, reduce the role of government in regulating the economy and providing services and incentives, such as in community forestry, to sell products as a means to finance the program and reduce poverty (PDP, 2013). Promoting market activity occurs, at least for the time being, alongside the country's ongoing commitment to providing its citizens with free healthcare and education.

The case of the Montana Legacy Project also reflects layers of partial neoliberalizing forces weaving through a particular context, and resulting in hybrid and contradictory outcomes. First, Plum Creek timberlands for decades permitted local residents access to their corporate timberlands for recreational purposes. Residents treated these forest lands as de facto open access property. Permitting local access (as well as providing timber jobs) countered some of the otherwise strong opposition to the company's extensive timber holdings in the state but

suggests an interesting blend of a private timber company supporting public forest access and use (of course, also providing good public relations). Second, Plum Creek took advantage of the liberalization of tax laws in the U.S.A. during the late 20th century to restructure and reinvent itself as a real estate company. At the local level, there are no regulations on land use in the area containing Plum Creek lands to mandate timberlands remain as working forests. Neoliberal ideologies extolling private ownership as well as their efficacy in management, stewardship and economic activity are widely popular in this area, as they are in the region (Yung and Belsky, 2007), and make pursuing land use zoning or regulation an unpractical solution to the Plum Creek divestment, despite its otherwise greater durability over time. Additionally as a majority land owner in the area, Plum Creek would have been able to vote down such a move. Third, the role of the government in the MLP displays a type of Polanyi "double-movement" in that the (federal) government opens up conditions for corporate wealth accumulation but then arms of (federal and state/Montana) government step in to resolve socio-environmental problems wrought in the process. What emerged is a rather bizarre scenario with government partnering with private and non-governmental organizations and funders to rebuy previously-owned government lands (and at the market's highest price), and resell them to public and private landowners for safekeeping.

5.3. New market opportunities

As noted above, markets in Bhutan today are assuming a new and enlarged role in economic development and conservation, including community forestry. The impetus for developing modern, state-led community forestry in Bhutan was to follow regional trends to devolve forest management. As described above, residents join community forest management groups to more easily obtain forest products and to protect local forests from harvesting by outsiders. They can now also earn income from selling forest products in accordance with resources and approved management plans; in the future this could potentially include carbon market programs and payment for ecosystem services. In principle they enjoy the benefits of marketing community forest products with safeguards to protect against new markets leading to overharvesting and environmental degradation: one, that only surplus forest products from community forests can be sold, second, that forest product harvest follow approved community forest management plans, and third, the central government's continued, strong commitment to protecting forest cover and environmental processes nation-wide. A final characteristic of Bhutan is also worth noting. At present, foreign investments in Bhutan are limited which reduce market opportunity for selling forest products from community forests and their potential degradation. However, Bhutan is already seriously invested in economic markets given it funds most of its development by selling energy to India. But it raises the important question as to what extent Bhutan's community forestry sector can be in the market but not ruled by it in the future (Taylor, 2005).

Market dynamics in Montana's MLP are vastly different than in Bhutan and help to explain the different interpretations of the project. Supporters of the MLP exclaim its contribution towards erasing the historic checkerboard ownership pattern, reducing real estate development and land fragmentation, and encouraging partnerships and cooperative approaches in conservation (Little, 2009; Parker, 2014). However critics of the project note the MLP was not sufficiently transparent as negotiations between project organizers and Plum Creek were conducted behind closed doors, and that an exorbitant price was paid to Plum Creek for its former timberlands (Cramer, 2008). Land values were at their peak when MLP transactions were finalized (i.e., just before the 2008 recession) and local leaders were eager to conclude an agreement before land was sold to real estate developers. Critics also note that former the Plum Creek timberlands were heavily logged before their sale and will require major and costly restoration

for wildlife, forestry and recreation values to be realized, that timberland values were overrated, and that claims of support for local timber jobs through mandated fiber sales were unrealistic (Skinner, 2009). TNC has been criticized for purchasing land with government funds and then selling them back at a higher price, giving special deals to its corporate board members, and enabling huge profits for Plum Creek from lands that were publicly owned before the railroad land grants were made; many question why the lands were not just returned to the public if not used for their original purpose (Cramer, 2008).

Another problem for some, as well as a contradiction, is that the MLP used a market transaction to basically resolve a market failure (i.e., to account for the multiple forest land values and services beyond just as real estate). Some residents were incensed that the MLP altered what should have been a straight-forward market transaction, and conducting some of the transactions in secret. They referred to it as “communism” and criticized it as contrary to the country’s endorsement of freedom and free trade (Belsky, 2004). Ironically, these same people were also concerned about the potential loss of public access to forests which would have occurred if the lands were sold for private real estate development. There is great irony in the fact that the market represents both the problem and the solution to the issue of corporate timber divestment in the MLP, and that the project found its most workable conservation solution through purchasing lands and reselling them to conservation buyers (the largest one being the U.S. government).

5.4. Role of the private sector

The Bhutan case reflects a regionally characteristic model of top-down, community forestry, instituted on government-owned lands amidst broader national decentralization efforts. Community forestry management groups can organize and operate only within the context of government regulations and oversight which also adhere to modern (western) silviculture. This includes today the government’s decision to encourage market activities as a means to implement national development goals, and to do so through increasing the role of the private sector while maintaining a strong central state (and behind it Royal Monarchy). How rural households and communities, and an increasingly active civil society, interpret opportunities associated with market-oriented processes, as well as the government’s policies towards them, remain important questions and influences in who benefits from the inclusion of (forest) markets in the future.

The Montana Legacy Project exemplifies the growing strength of the private sector in conservation (as well as in other realms) albeit with tensions and contradictions. In contrast to Bhutan and other Asian countries, there is no central, nationally-organized and operated community forestry program in the United States. Decentralization of forest management is occurring in part because of the lack of resources by federal agencies to perform the necessary forestry tasks. The country may have been guilty as McCarthy (2006) suggested earlier of aborting federal devolution by its unwillingness to “hand over” forests to designated community forest management groups or communities as in British Columbia and Bhutan. But this has not stopped active civil society (and working in tandem with powerful U.S. senators in the case of the MLP) to carry out their work. But such capacity is highly situational and depends in large part on particular individual personalities and leaders, including a willingness to work with historical adversaries. As suggested by MacDonald (2010, 2011) mainstream non-governmental conservation organizations were often hostile to corporate interests, whereas now partnerships between these actors are common, and indeed central to much conservation practice in the partnership with Plum Creek. It also involves tenuous links within the private sector itself. In the case of the MLP, residents question the basis for (unelected) leaders from local organizations (such as the Swan Ecosystem, Northwest Connections and Blackfoot Challenge) in the authority to serve as community leaders and representatives in what are often billed

(because of their participation and leadership) as “community-driven” conservation.

A final example of the hybrid and seemingly contradictory aspect of the MLP is that former private timberlands will be protected through their resale to the U.S. government public land system charged to be managed for the greater public good. On one hand, reducing the mixed “checkerboard” pattern of land ownership in the area should greatly improve the capacity of the government agencies – now the largest landowner – to manage them as a landscape. However, there is also significant local concern over government land ownership and belief that the private sector can more efficiently and effectively manage resources. While the primacy of private property often receives the lion’s share of attention in this region (and the U.S.A. as a whole), it is important to note that there also exist strong property ethics and practices based on public values and community goods, especially when they serve to sustain resource-based livelihoods, such as ranching and public access to forests (Yung and Belsky, 2007). It is these latter values which inspire collective action such as the MLP.

6. Conclusion

The community forestry efforts discussed here reveal that they are concerned with different types of market forces, regulatory processes, new market opportunities, and the role of the private sector. This comparison reinforces the findings of other studies on the highly context-specific nature of neoliberal processes and markets in conservation. What then are the implications for community forestry and its ability to meet objectives to reconcile livelihood and environmental protection?

Bhutan is in the process of developing a modern capitalist economy and constitutional democracy grafted to an enduring monarchy which governs in part by Buddhist values and concerns. Bhutan’s national community forestry program is an institutional arrangement which reflects these multiple transitions including the tenacity of the state to maintain ownership and control over forests and forest governance yet decentralizing some dimensions of forest management and encouraging citizen participation. Its recent embrace of markets in community forestry models the programs found elsewhere in the region and which resonate with ideas that such programs can dually fund their activities and increase rural livelihoods through permitting the sale of community forest products. But Bhutan does not permit a fully open-ended and deregulated community forest market to form, and consistent with the country’s historic commitment to promoting gross national happiness, the government has instituted safeguards that permit only surplus forest products (i.e., beyond what is needed by the community forestry management group) to be sold. This suggests that community forestry in Bhutan is attempting to promote both rural livelihoods and protect forest landscapes. But will actual forest harvesting follow approved management plans in light of new and expanded forest market opportunities? Could illegal harvesting and corruption rise given limited capacity for forest inventory and monitoring by community forestry management groups (and the national forest department as well)? If substantial income can be raised from community forests, what are the risks that meeting local household demand will become a secondary concern and elite capture will occur? There is evidence to suggest that these concerns are real and of great concern to the new government of Bhutan. In 2014 the government suspended designation of new community forests in light of reports of illegal harvesting (Dema, 2014). It is far too early to discern the implications of expanding community forestry markets, or capitalism in Bhutan more generally; nor to what extent neoliberal capitalism will impart discerning influence. Much will depend on the ways the Bhutan state permits global discourses, policies and institutions to influence its policies including its approach to environmental governance, conservation and development. Another important force (or counter-force) will be the evolution of Bhutan’s civil

society: that is, if needed to defend progressive social and ecological values will it be able to mobilize to do so?

In contrast, the Montana Legacy Project demonstrates the much touted capacity of civil society in environmental governance in a neoliberal world: it is a bottom up, place-based collaboration of public–private partners voluntarily cooperating to confront what they consider as threats to their forest values and landscape. Their concerns include but transcend economics. Forest devolution in the U.S. has opened up spaces for greater public involvement in public land management. But despite periodic calls to sell off and privatize public forest lands, this has not occurred; no “community forests” have been designated to local groups as with the nationally-organized community forestry program in Bhutan. Neoliberal policies and programs have enabled restructuring and divestment of the Plum Creek corporate timberlands, and their potential market-sale and conversion to recreational homes, and galvanized the MLP “community forestry” initiative to organize and intervene.

Neoliberal forces in many forms can be detected in the Montana case. Deregulation policies enabled private corporations to reinvent themselves, accumulate wealth and benefit from spiraling recreational land prices. While forests have long been viewed as a commodity in capitalist Montana, an excessive abstraction of nature has been occurring of late in the designation of some Plum Creek lands as “higher and better use” deemed entirely on the basis of market prices. Ironically neoliberal forces created both the problem but also a solution to corporate restructuring and threat of landscape conversion in Montana, that is, for the MLP to purchase and resell these lands to public and private conservation buyers. Private land acquisition has long been the main tool of a key MLP partner, The Nature Conservancy, and very much consistent with the ascendancy of market-based conservation approaches today.

While seeming to offer a positive outcome to the immediate problem, how effective and viable is land acquisition as a response to corporate timberland divestment? Given the enormous costs in terms of collaboration, legitimate leadership, financial resources, and logistics it is not likely that land acquisition represents a response available to all that face corporate timber divestment. The case also demonstrated many critiques as well as celebrations of the MLP, including concerns about using the market to resolve an essentially market-driven problem. The ability of the MLP to do so was highly contingent: on a willing seller, the capacity to raise the required funds (made possible by a powerful Montana senator and private contributions) and availability of charismatic and effective leaders from both the private and public sectors. It is unlikely such conditions will exist again in this place or in others facing the threat of corporate timberland divestment. While recognizing the accomplishments of the MLP, this example questions the capacity of community forestry in the U.S. as a form of ad hoc collaborative or collective action to be a durable and effective mechanism for the protection of local livelihoods and landscapes amidst the ongoing expansion of (corporate) power and market-based interests in environmental governance and conservation.

The comparison between Bhutan and Montana suggests a final reflection on the role of the state vis-à-vis environmental governance within a neoliberal/market-based framework. While a pure form of neoliberalism has the state retreating, the trend in these two cases point to a reconfiguration of how the state inserts itself into environmental governance, not necessarily a retreat at all. In Bhutan the government-led community forestry program enables the state to reach deeper into local forest governance and disposition of forest products, and in Montana with former private corporate timberlands now under direct ownership and management of the federal government. Empirical research is necessary to determine how state control in each of these cases influences the relationship between local forest livelihoods and landscapes.

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