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BALANCE: A CRITICAL PRINCIPLE

IN THE DESIGN OF A

DECENTRALIZED DECISION PROCESS

Dr. Alan R. Murray

Fisheries Branch

Saskatchewan Parks and Renewable Resources

and

Bruce L. Smith

Resource Policy and Economics

Saskatchewan Parks and Renewable Resources

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ABSTRACT

BALANCE: A CRITICAL PRINCIPLE IN THE DESIGN OF A DECENTRALIZED DECISION PROCESS

Alan R. Murray and Bruce L. Smith, Saskatchewan Parks and Renewable Resources, 3211 Albert Street, Regina, Saskatchewan S4S 5W6

A proposal for stakeholder involvement in fisheries management and decision making as the central strategy for fisheries management in Saskatchewan in the 1990s underwent public review between September 1990 and June 1991. The strategy was presented in broad, general terms, without proposing specific implementation details. Seven principles were suggested as a framework for local co-management structures and initiatives. Positive public response was strong, however some concern was raised about the lack of specific detail.

This paper presents a brief case study of the recent Saskatchewan experience with public consultation regarding the establishment of a cooperative, decentralized decision process. Initial government rationale is presented, and public response discussed. The relationship between stability and equity provided by a central framework and flexibility and responsiveness of a cooperative localized process is considered. The paper concludes with a description of the actions proposed by the authors to find the balance required for a decision process which combines the stability and equity of a central framework with the flexibility and responsiveness of decentralization.

1. Strategic Planning Process

Strategic planning is like preparing for an automobile trip: we look at where we are and determine where we want to go, the nature of the vehicle that will take us there, and where we might stop along the way for refreshment, fuel or an interesting view. Strategic planning is essential to ensure clear direction and focus for actions, and public involvement is a central element.

In Saskatchewan, the fisheries strategic planning process for the 1990s began with internal and external discussions leading to the development of a paper titled Proposed Goals, Policies and Strategies for Fisheries Management in Saskatchewan in the 1990s. Public responses were sought, to be incorporated into a final strategy paper.

An "environmental scan" identified 3 major fisheries issues in Saskatchewan for the 1990s as:

1. loss of fish and fish habitat;
2. conflict among users; and
3. poor economic performance of commercial fisheries.

The issues resulted from a inequitable allocation policy, which is an ineffective means of providing access to fish, and has failed to facilitate adequate conservation measures. With the exception of commercial uses, open access and first-come, first-served have been the methods of allocation. The inequitable allocation policy, in turn, resulted from the inability of the province to understand and deal with the common property nature of the fish resource. (Figure 1)

In treating the fish resource as common property, Saskatchewan failed to implement appropriate mechanisms to ensure that the total harvests by all users were within sustainable limits on all lakes. In order to address the issues for the 1990s, three sets of goals, policies and strategies were proposed. (Figure 2) The strategies were:

1. conservation;
2. co-management; and
3. rationalization.

Conservation included a wide range of fisheries management activities designed to improve fish supplies and habitat, a popular but superficial strategy given the nature of the problem.

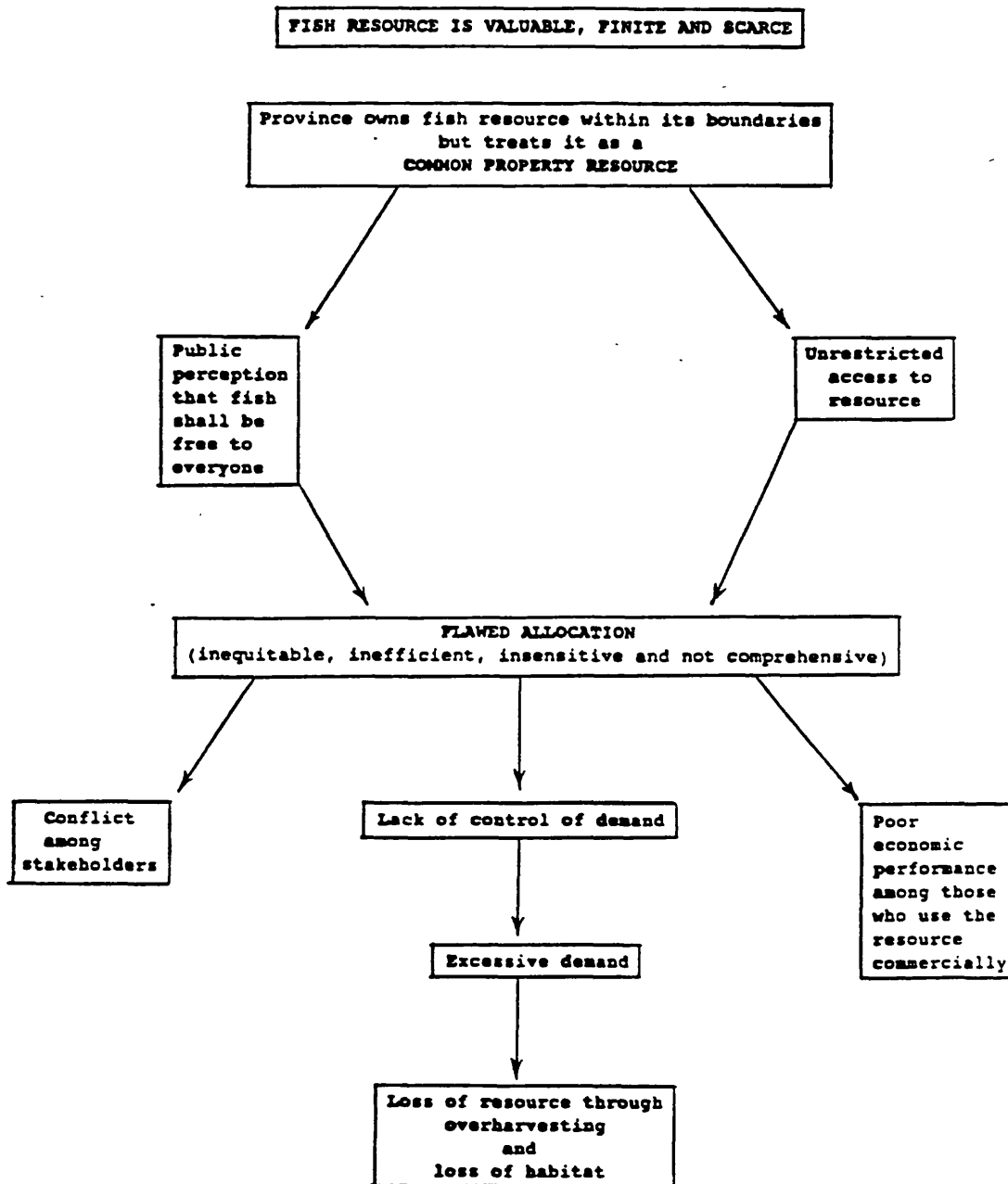


Figure 1. Issues affecting Saskatchewan's fisheries for the 1990s.

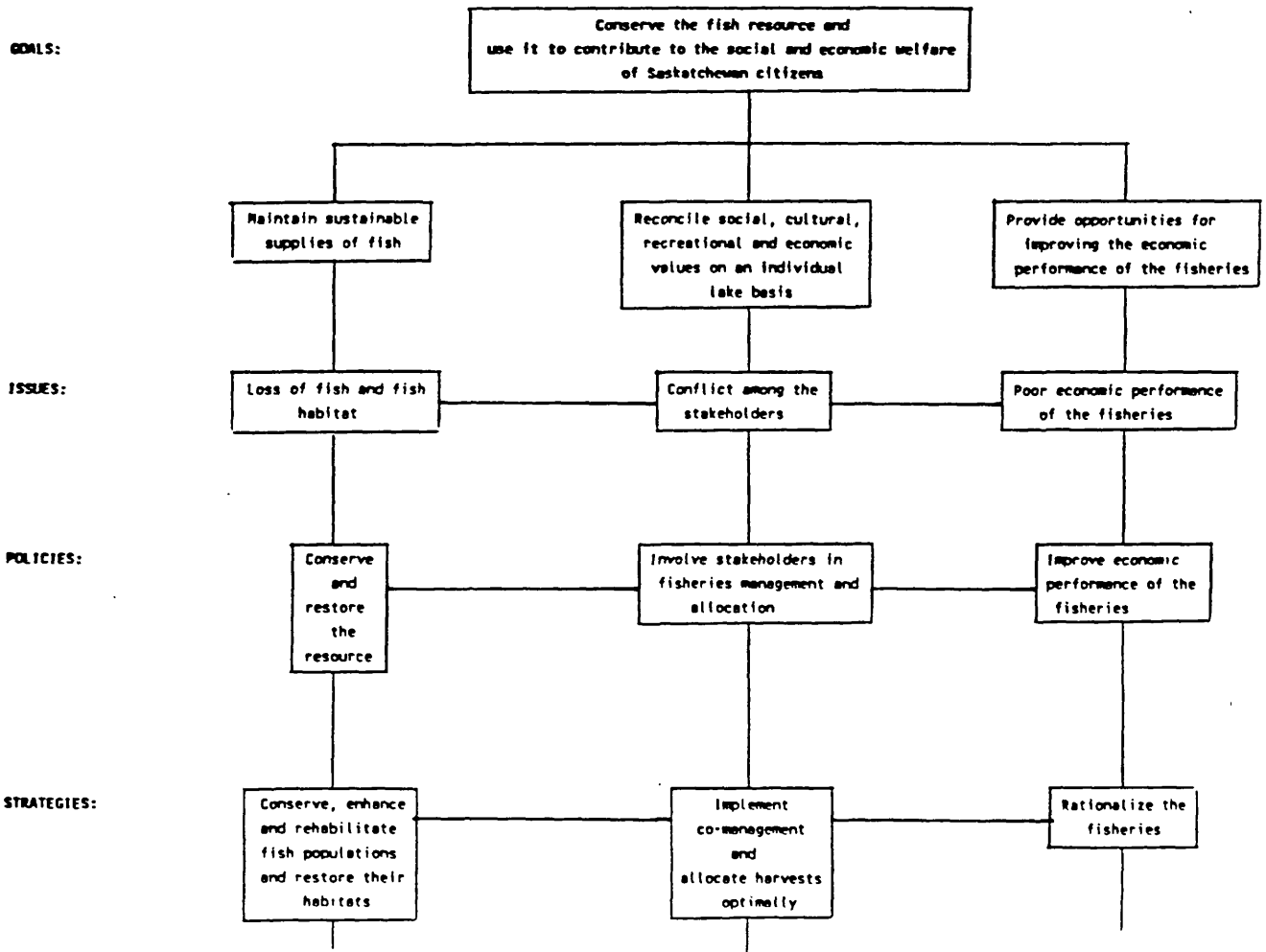


Figure 2. Proposed goals, policies and strategies for Saskatchewan's fisheries in the 1990s.

Co-management and rationalization were proposed to address the root of the problem in two different ways:

- through co-management, to provide a mechanism through which the users of the resource have a direct role in resource management, and in the design and workings of the decision process; and
- through rationalization, to provide a mechanism to include in the fisheries management tool box a system of transferrable property rights. Individual transferrable quotas (ITQ's) were suggested.

During development of the strategy paper and internal discussions with branch and department staff, concern was expressed about the nature of co-management arrangements on individual lakes, how decisions would be made, power held, etc. This concern was expressed in spite of the fact that some informal co-management involving commercial fishermen's cooperatives, multiple-use lake management committees and joint fish stocking and enhancement activities have been carried out in Saskatchewan for the past ten years or more. In order to answer these concerns, a set of seven principles was build into the document, each principle intended to address a specific concern expressed during consultations.

2. Public Consultation

Public consultation was a carefully planned phase of the strategic planning exercise. It involved a variety of activities and was carried out between September and December 1990, with an extension at stakeholder request until May 1991.

Specific activities included:

- a Minister's press conference;
- distribution of the proposed Goals and Strategies paper in full and overview forms;
- availability of supplementary material on co-management, sustainable development and common property resource issues;
- posters announcing the process and requesting public review of the document;
- presentations to a variety of groups;
- media interviews; and.
- direct invitations to major stakeholder groups

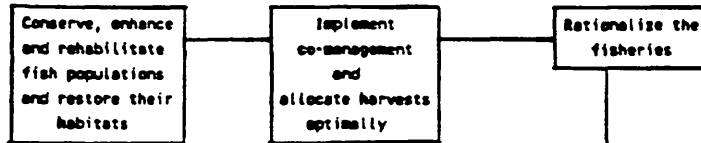
Responses to the proposed goals, policies and strategies were clear. Conservation was well received, with full support from all groups and individuals.

Co-management was well received in principle, with reservation expressed by many stakeholders about the lack of specific detail - many questions began.. "But on my lake, will there be.....?" or, "How will it work if.....?". The specific tactics proposed were insufficient as indicators of a reasonable probability that the individual stakeholders notions of a desired future were likely to be achieved. (Figure 3) The seven principles in the paper reduced the discomfort and uncertainty somewhat, however for many a lack of assurance, comfort and certainty remained.

Rationalization was not well received by any group, drawing positive response only from a few individuals. In general, all respondents expressed concern about access to the resource being concentrated in the hands of a few individuals, with the resulting loss of the ability of the resource to provide for the wider public good. Even commercial users were uncomfortable.

The remainder of this paper will focus on the strategy of co-management as a decentralized decision process, and the concerns expressed about it by stakeholders during the public consultation process.

STRATEGIES:



TACTICS:

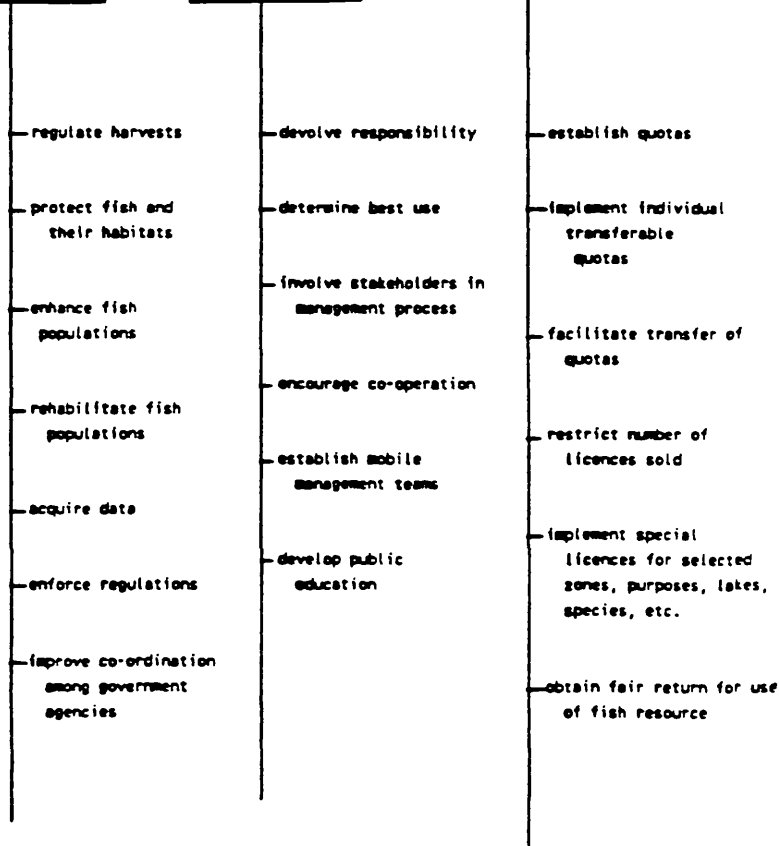


Figure 3. Proposed strategies and tactics for Saskatchewan's fisheries in the 1990s.

3. Need for balance between central and decentral elements

It was apparent from the early stages of internal consultation that a set of rules or principles would be needed to answer the concerns expressed about moving a decision process to the local level. During the internal consultations principles were enshrined on an ad hoc basis as concerns were expressed regarding the nature of co-management processes, and the possible outcomes of implementation.

The proposed strategy document ended up containing a set of seven principles which affirmed:

1. government responsibility for fisheries management;
2. maintenance of healthy ecosystems and species diversity;
3. management based on sustainable populations;
4. maintenance of diversity of opportunity;
5. maintenance of public access;
6. recognition of the rights of Treaty Indians; and
7. importance of data collection.

Both the internal and external consultation processes indicated that stakeholders felt the level of detail was insufficient, especially regarding the proposed strategy and tactics. All groups showed concern that their specific interests would not be recognized and affirmed.

The lack of specific actions in the paper was intentional, as it was felt that they would be developed at the local level in a process that included stakeholders. It did not seem correct to invite stakeholders to participate in a decision process in they would be told what the outcome would be.

This may have been due in part to the way in which co-management was being formally introduced to stakeholders as a tool with potential for widespread use. Concern was expressed even though it was specified that co-management was to be used only where it was needed for management and desired by all stakeholders. In situations or jurisdictions where co-management has developed in an *ad hoc* manner, including past informal activities in Saskatchewan, this does not seem to have been a problem.

Co-management should be viewed as part of a continuum of ways in which public involvement in resource management is achieved. (Figure 4). The possibilities for involvement include exchanges of information, consultation on specific issues, formal advisory roles, and a variety of situations which involve joint action, and sharing of authority and responsibility. A better understanding of this continuum by the public may reduce uncertainty and anxiety about co-management.