Speaking with nature: the social worlds of the mountain huckleberry

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PhD research – overarching questions

• How do our cultures and our experiences shape the way we understand the natural world?

• How do these understandings shape our actions toward the environment?

• What are the social and environmental consequences of our understandings and behaviors?
Matthew Offenbecher: “Captain of a Huckleberry Party.”
“Berry pickers needed to fill pill bottles”
A “Tragedy of the Commons?”

Hardin’s argument: Maximizing one’s own gain is rational from an individual perspective, but when everyone behaves this way, the result is a less than desirable state for all.
What is a “Commons?”

• *The classic definition:*

  1. Quality/quantity of resource decreases as use of resource increases (“subtractability”).

  2. Exclusion of other users is difficult and/or costly.

These can be related both to harvest *and* management.

*Is this an accurate description of the “huckleberry dilemma?”*
Enabling Conditions for Sustainability on the Commons

**Resource system characteristics**
Small size
Well-defined boundaries

**Group characteristics**
Small size
Shared norms, identities and interests
Appropriate leadership
Interdependence among group members
Low levels of poverty

**Relationship between resource system characteristics and group characteristics**
Overlap between user group residential location and resource location
High levels of dependence by group members on resource system
Fairness in allocation
Low levels of user demand (low economic value)
Enabling Conditions for Sustainability on the Commons

**Institutional arrangements**
Nested levels of appropriation, provision, enforcement, governance.
Locally devised access and management rules
Rules are simple and easy to understand
Ease in enforcement of rules
Monitors and other officials are accountable to users
Central governments support local authority

**Relationship between resource system and institutional arrangements**
Match restrictions on harvests to regeneration of resources

**Economic factors**
Low levels of articulation with external markets
Scales of complexity

**Global:** Movements of people & resources

- Global markets
- Migration & immigration

**National:** Federal laws and policies

- NEPA, NWFP & NTFP policies
- Federal trust responsibility to tribes

**Local:** Local laws and regulations, diverse communities, ecosystem characteristics

- Histories
- Livelihoods
- Cultural perceptions
- Cultural survival
Announcing the First Annual

Huckleberry Summit

Bringing together tribes, agencies, horticultural professionals, and researchers to share knowledge about thin-leaf huckleberry (Vaccinium membranaceum).

- Cultural value to indigenous peoples
- Traditional Management Practices
- Propagation of Vaccinium membranaceum
- Research results of field treatments to enhance production
- Sustainable use in light of increasing harvest pressures

June 21, 2007
Scott Hall in Pack Forest, near Eatonville, Washington.
Proposed research

• Comparative analysis of collaborative efforts to restore berry fields and manage the allocation of the harvest:
  – BC & US
  – Indigenous harvesters
  – Non-native harvesters
  – Ecologists
  – Land managers
  – Policymakers
  – Agricultural scientists
  – Buyers
  – Producers
Participatory research

• A collaborative relationship, in which participants are involved in every aspect of the research:
  – Design
  – Implementation
  – Analysis
  – Information sharing
“Squishy” topics

• *Engaging the collective*
  – Involving/engaging all participants – who is absent from the conversation?
  – Non-native harvesters.
  – Plants and animals.

• *Who speaks for nature?*
Commitments

• Listen with an open heart and mind
• Honor confidentiality
• Share results
• Stick around
Next steps

• Southwest Washington harvester survey and pilot interviews in late summer 2008

• Salish language study at University of British Columbia 2008-09 academic year.

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