

**The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly:  
The Political Economy of the Wise Use Movement**

Proposed dissertation research  
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**PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The Wise Use movement is the most important development in environmental politics in the United States in decades. It has had major effects on environmental legislation and regulation since 1988 and is still growing rapidly. Its actions engage crucial issues in the political economy of rural areas and political geography more broadly. Yet Wise Use's many anomalous features have been little explored. The strongest anti-environmental backlash in the twentieth century U.S., it nevertheless presents itself as a genuine environmental movement. It promotes privatization, deregulation, and market measures for handling environmental issues, yet it also advocates subsidies, protectionism, and the conservation of rural land uses and ways of life threatened by economic changes. It decries government intervention yet operates through political influence, lobbying, and the courts. It claims its central goal is increased local control over resource use and access, yet it is a coordinated national movement using the most up-to-date communications technologies available. Wise Use is also riven with contradictions and tensions: its politics include complex and contradictory alliances of corporations, labor, small businesses, individual property owners, and environmentalists, while multiple governmental agencies intersect these and each other in myriad ways.

How then are we to understand Wise Use and its role in contemporary environmental politics? Given its political importance and complexity, the paucity of academic research on the movement thus far is surprising. The only sustained treatments of it — all of which are severely lacking — have come from within it or from highly critical environmental and left political writers. Three major questions have been insufficiently explored: First, what are Wise Use's *origins*, both in recent economic and regulatory restructuring and in the history, politics, and social structures of the West? Second, how does it *vary* by region and sector now that it is a national movement? Third, how have these variations been *bridged* in its rapid growth into a national movement — i.e., why do superficially incompatible groups participate in it? Fourth, whose interests does it mainly serve?

My dissertation will address these questions and explore the movement's internal contradictions by examining it from three major perspectives: as a particular response to recent global and rural economic restructuring, as a direct outgrowth of long-standing debates in the American West, and as a reactionary, populist 'environmental' movement as a distinctive political vehicle at the turn of the millennium. Bringing these three together, I argue that Wise Use is deeply paradoxical, being simultaneously a project in favor of radical marketization and deregulation of rural environments and a deeply conservative, reactionary project in favor of defending established rural land uses and economic and social relations against changing markets and regulatory structures. This tension has been temporarily bridged via the Wise Use's all-embracing definition of 'property rights.'

I will undertake this study through detailed analyses of Wise Use organizations at the national level and in three comparative local case studies. My examination of the national movement will link it to earlier debates and protest movements concerning conservation and economic development in the West, and also examine the economic forces and key individuals and organizations that first gave rise to and shaped Wise Use. The three local case studies, described in the research design, will highlight Wise Use's specifically geographic aspects, including how its local manifestations vary based on differences in regional histories, land tenure patterns, dominant industries, and social

structures, with a central focus on property rights and claims. Linking these local cases back to the national movement will illuminate how local differences have been bridged in the creation of the national movement, and how the need to do so has altered the national Wise Use agenda.

## **I. What is the Wise Use Movement? Existing knowledge and analyses**

The Wise Use movement is a broad coalition of over a thousand national, state, and local groups. Its existence by this name dates from a 1988 ‘Multiple-Use Strategy Conference’ attended by nearly 200 organizations, mainly Western-based, including natural resource industry corporations and trade associations, law firms specializing in combating environmental regulations, and recreational groups. The conference produced a legislative agenda intended to ‘destroy environmentalism’ and promote the ‘wise use’ of natural resources — an intentionally ambiguous phrase strategically appropriated from the early conservation movement. Defining a core ‘Wise Use’ agenda is difficult, as priorities vary by region, industry, organization, and more. But its overall goals are increased private access to public resources and reduced state regulation of private land and resources, categories embracing a range of more specific goals.<sup>1</sup> It defines itself mainly in opposition to environmentalists, environmental regulations, and federal agencies governing land uses, all of which it portrays as arrogant, ignorant outsiders attempting to deny local communities their livelihoods and rights. Broadly, Wise Use in the West is dedicated to defending continued commodity production on public lands, and in the East to resisting the regulation of private lands.

Activities by Wise Use groups have ranged from intensive lobbying at all levels of government to assertions of local control over federal lands, and from demonstrations and grassroots campaigns to shootings, arson, and other intimidation tactics directed against environmentalists and federal employees.<sup>2</sup> Estimates of the movement’s size range from a few tens of thousands of participants to several millions. It has certainly grown tremendously, from approximately 200 organizations in 1988 to as many as 1,500 nationwide by 1995 (Brick, 1995a). Large natural resource industry corporations remain its major funding source, and its national organizers admit to having set out to *create* a national “grassroots” movement, leading many to label it a mere front group for corporations hiding behind populist rhetoric. Yet its strong, undeniable grassroots components make its class composition unclear (Harvey, 1996).

Analyses of the Wise Use movement have thus far come from three sources: the movement itself, the environmental movement and left press, and a handful of academics. All leave unanswered significant questions about the movement.

Analyses generated within the movement (e.g., Arnold, 1993; Gottlieb; Greve, 1993; Pendley, 1994; 1995; Yandle, 1995) or by highly sympathetic writers (e.g., Chase, 1995; Shanahan, 1995) present Wise Use as an unambiguously genuine, grassroots, working class response to arrogant environmentalists and bureaucrats who are using bad science to destroy rural communities and

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<sup>1</sup> Major Wise Use agenda items include: overturning or neutralizing much of the major environmental legislation of the past 25 years; opening reserved public lands to commercial uses; the use of “economic impact statements” to counter environmental impact statements; the recognition of traditional entitlements on the public lands, such as grazing allotments, as private property rights; the compensation of ‘takings’ when government regulations reduce the value of private land; the turning over of federal lands to state, local, or private ownership; a general reduction in the federal government’s role; and skepticism regarding scientific definitions of “environmental” problems.

<sup>2</sup> There are unquestionably ties between Wise Use and other conservative movements in the U.S., notably militias, but the extent and significance of these are unclear. I am confident that the proposed research will be safe because: the central strategy of Wise Use is to present itself as more mainstream and reasonable than the environmental movement, there have been no reported instances of any violence or threats against any of the many journalists who have covered the movement, and Wise Use members seem eager to get their story out. Only a few Wise Use organizations have publicly endorsed violence against environmentalists and government employees, with most organizations, leaders, and participants in the movement publicly denouncing such tactics, most, I believe, sincerely.

livelihoods for the sake of aesthetic pleasures for the elite. Any corporate involvement is coincidental or beneficial. This view is far too rosy and simplistic: the most prominent Wise Use groups have in fact been funded primarily by natural resource industry corporations; their agendas are not limited to self-preservation; and they are far from innocent (cf. Williams, 1973).

The currently dominant analysis of Wise Use has emerged from the environmental movement and the left media.<sup>3</sup> It interprets Wise Use as a 'response' to economic decline in the rural U.S. since the early 1970s due to the decreased competitiveness of many U.S. primary commodities in international markets, which has put increasing pressure on rural communities, workers, and industries. Over the same period, environmental regulations in the U.S. have increased considerably in scope and stringency, as have non-productive uses of public lands, but these have not been major factors in the decline of rural primary production. They have nonetheless become lightning rods for protest as corporate-funded organizers have manipulated rural communities and workers, using their real grievances to justify intensified corporate exploitation of public resources. While Wise Use may now have grassroots components, it is essentially a corporate front group.

This analysis has much to recommend it, but serious flaws as well. First, tracing funding sources and connections between groups is vital but no substitute for social analysis: by itself it provides no insight into the structural reasons for support for Wise Use, or its relations to larger social processes. Second, the foregoing analysis does little to situate the movement in U.S. regional and political history: far from being a mere shell created out of thin air with corporate dollars, Wise Use has deep connections with previous western protest movements. Third, most accounts of Wise Use mention its complex social composition, but then insist that it is essentially *either* a real grassroots movement *or* a corporate shell. Little research has actually explored Wise Use's complex class dynamics. Fourth, it pays little attention to geographic variation. Fifth, environmentalist writers are hardly objective analysts of Wise Use, and their analyses have done them little credit.<sup>4</sup>

A third set of analyses of the movement is just beginning to emerge from academics (e.g., Brick, 1995a; Harvey, 1996; Klyza 1996; Stauder 1995; Switzer, 1996; White, 1995). Most of these recognize that both of the previous analyses are true in part, but that Wise Use varies enormously by region, by industry, and more (e.g., Switzer's research reveals significant internal differentiation among Wise Use activists by gender, major area of concern, and class). However, none of these studies has been in-depth or based on field research: the movement has as yet received only passing considerations in works on other topics or at most single articles.

## **II. Theoretical Debates**

The proposed research is situated at the intersection of three bodies of literature: theories of 'global economic restructuring,' with specific attention to rural restructuring; the history and historiography of Western regional development and 'underdevelopment'; and studies of environmental politics, particularly those taking the form of social movements. Analysis of Wise Use also contributes to explorations in contemporary geographic theory of how local histories, cultures, and economies shape struggles over restructuring due to national and global forces (cf. Hart, 1993; Wells, 1996).

### ***1. Global economic restructuring and rural areas***

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<sup>3</sup> This has grown into a substantial literature. Central and representative examples include: Americans for the Environment, 1993; Echeverria and Eby, 1995; Erm, 1994; Helvarg, 1994a; 1994b; 1995; Knox, 1991; 1993; O'Callaghan, 1992; Nixon, 1992; Reed, 1994; Rowell, 1996; Tokar, 1995; Wilderness Society, 1993.

<sup>4</sup> While some environmentalists have seen in Wise Use a call to redefine their goals and methods, many have reacted to it solely in defensive or highly confrontational ways (see, e.g., Americans for the Environment; Watkins, 1995; Snodgrass, 1995; Helvarg, 1995; Wilderness Society; W. Alton Jones Foundation, 1992).

The historic dominance of natural resource industries in the rural West has been challenged by drastic economic restructuring over the past two decades. The relative significance of most natural resource industries in the region has declined and alternative valuations of rural spaces have increased in power (Albert et al, 1989; Snow, 1994). These shifts in the region's economic base are best interpreted as part of post-1970 "global economic restructuring," a collective term for a number of complex and related processes, including increased mobility and flexibility of capital and major changes in the international geography of production and consumption (Dicken, 1986; Flora, 1990; Harvey, 1989; Pred and Watts, 1992; Storper and Walker, 1989; Sayer and Walker, 1992).

Restructuring has been particularly pronounced in rural areas in the U.S. dominated by primary production, which enjoyed a massive boom during the 1970s followed by overproduction, excessive debt, and a severe crash in the early 1980s that virtually devastated many such areas (Albert et al, 1989; Flora, 1990; Maughan and Nilson, 1995; White, 1991).<sup>5</sup> Primary production now appears unlikely to regain its dominance due to increased competition, resource exhaustion, declining federal subsidies, and increasing environmental regulations (Buttel, 1992; Flora) and many rural localities have aggressively sought to diversify their local economies, attracting new uses of rural spaces and accelerating the restructuring of rural environments as they compete for limited investment capital. Such changes have led many contemporary observers (e.g., Kittredge, 1996; Marston, 1989; Powers, 1996) to make millennial claims heralding the birth of a 'New West' that is finally leaving behind its nineteenth-century origins and whose twenty-first century economy will be based upon high-tech industries, tourism, and environmental amenities.

These changes are broadly congruent with an analysis of "rural restructuring" in the advanced capitalist countries put forward in recent work by a group of (predominantly) British academics attempting to extend the analysis of the French regulationist school to rural areas (e.g., Lowe et al, 1990, 1993; Marsden et al, 1990, 1993). They argue that contemporary rural restructuring is best understood as a consequence of the collapse of a post-WWII 'productivist regime,' in which many rural areas were dominated by agriculture and other forms of primary production, with state supports. This system became untenable beginning in the 1970s due to the international economic changes outlined above. As support for its social relations eroded, spaces for new firms and other actors opened up in rural areas, leading to the current active — and contested — formation of a more socially diverse and functionally differentiated countryside in which consumption plays at least as direct a role in shaping landscapes as does production. Regulation of rural localities has begun to shift to accommodate these changing land uses and 'regional social contracts' have begun to unravel (Fitzsimmons, in Lowe, et al, 1990).

This analysis is helpful in understanding recent changes in the rural West, but not sufficient. It relies too heavily on the problematic notion of a "post-Fordist divide," and analytically conflates industry and agriculture (Goodman and Watts, 1994). And although it advances general claims about rural areas in advanced capitalist countries, most of the underlying research has been specific to the British countryside. Yet many authors have claimed to see parallel patterns of change and resistance elsewhere (see, e.g., Lowe et al; Marsden et al; Pawson and Scott, 1992; Buttel). The proposed research contributes to this growing body of literature by exploring both transnational similarities in rural responses to international economic changes and the ramifications of the geographical and historical differences presented by the U.S. context, particularly in the West.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The Reagan administration's expansion of opportunities to exploit public resources helped Western and U.S. primary producers, but its monetary and deregulatory policies encouraged overproduction and severely undercut their competitiveness, contributing to the farm crisis and severe downturns in timber, mining, and oil and coal industries.

<sup>6</sup> E.g., greater state and corporate land ownership, an enormous military presence, extensive forestry and ranching industries, Native American claims to land and resources, and considerable climatic constraints (cf. Davis, 1993; Goodman and Watts, 1994).

## 2. *Western history and development*

While its immediate origins may lie in contemporary economic restructuring, Wise Use also has deep roots in the U.S. West and cannot be understood without reference to them.<sup>7</sup> Many central Wise Use issues have been major themes in western politics for over a century and have been taken up by a series of previous resource-centered western protest movements, beginning in the last decades of the nineteenth century with opposition to the creation of federal forest reserves and recurring periodically up through the Sagebrush Rebellion of the late 1970s and early 1980s and the 'privatization movement' and New Resource Economics of the 1980s.<sup>8</sup> Wise Use has to be understood in relation to these earlier movements, with which it has remarkable rhetorical and substantive continuities, including: assertions that the region is treated as a colony of the East; claims that the extent of federal ownership and bureaucratic control in the region is fundamentally undemocratic; attempts to increase private commodity production on the federal lands in the West; and attempts to either privatize or turn over to the states portions of these lands. These claims and demands, always made in the name of economic development and democracy, remain widespread and potent rallying cries in the region, however much they may diverge from reality.<sup>9</sup>

The claim of 'underdevelopment' has been central to both popular and academic interpretations of Western history.<sup>10</sup> While underdevelopment is a gross overstatement, it is vital to recognize that Wise Use is picking up on real issues: the West's political economy and social structures have been fundamentally and enduringly shaped by natural resource industries and patterns of state ownership and regulation that placed real constraints on its development. Many areas in what is now the rural West were essentially set aside in the late 19th century as guaranteed sources of natural resources considered vital to the national interest, and have remained locked into these economic specializations (CQ Researcher, 1994). The relative economic significance of natural resource industries in the West has declined in the twentieth century, but they still have a greater role than in other regions of the country, have continued to dominate many rural western areas, and have maintained disproportionate political and ideological power in the region: in short, many Westerners, particularly in rural areas, believe these industries are far more central to the region's economy than they actually are (Maughan and Nilson; Snow; Wilkinson, 1992). Current attempts to reduce subsidies to, and increase restrictions on, these industries are thus being interpreted in much of the rural West as a "war on the West" (CQ Researcher, 1994).

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<sup>7</sup> "The West" is an ambiguous term, referring as much to processes and perceptions of expansion and modernization as to any specific locale. It has moved steadily throughout U.S. history; criteria include climate, administrative arrangements, overall population densities, and the dominance of particular industries. It refers here to the region from the eastern edge of the Rockies to the non-metropolitan areas of the West Coast — a debatable definition, but one necessary for analytical purposes and based on the distinctive niche this region has occupied in the national economy.

<sup>8</sup> This history is too extensive to review here; see *CQ Researcher*, 1994, 1995; Cawley, 1993; Graf, 1990; Klyza, 1991; Limerick, 1995; Maughan and Wilson; Snow, 1994; Steen, 1992). Despite substantial continuities, each major phase of Western protest is of course significantly different from the others (Limerick, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> These debates merit book-length treatments; see Cronon et al, 1992; De Voto, 1934; Hays, 1959; Limerick, 1987; Nash, 1985; Robbins, 1986; Truettner, 1991; Klyza, 1996. In fact, Western resource users have repeatedly backed off from real possibilities of privatization (Snow; Limerick, 1995; Klyza, 1996; CQ Researcher, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> The thesis that the West was a mere 'colony' of the East and Europe, first advanced by Frederick Jackson Turner, dominated Western history for the first half of the twentieth century (Webb, 1937; Howard, 1943; Mezerick, 1946; Kraenzel, 1955). Later Western historians severely critiqued both the fundamental accuracy of this view and its applicability as the region's political economy evolved, on empirical and theoretical grounds (De Voto, 1934; Kraenzel; Limerick 1987; McWilliams, 1949; Nash, 1985; Nash and Etulain, 1989; Pomeroy, 1968). Nevertheless, it has persisted in popular and academic discourse. Historians in the 1980s still referred to the "colonial exploitation" of the West by the East" and asserted that "only the financial dexterity and mobility of those doing the milking have changed since the 1890s" (Rodman and Malone, 1985; Robbins, 1986; Faragher, 1993).

### *3. Environmental politics and social movements*

The environment is a fundamental arena of social conflict, in forms ranging from contestation over material resources to powerful discourses invoking the "natural" for myriad social ends (Williams, 1973; 1980). This is nowhere more true than in the American West: the development and regulation of its extensive lands and natural resources have been perhaps the defining features of its history, while the traditions of conservation, environmental politics, and environmental history in the U.S. have been disproportionately focused on the West (Beinart and Coates, 1995; Cronon et al, 1992; Hays, 1959; 1987; Steen, 1992; Worster, 1985).

Wise Use, as a western-based social movement centered on the environment, fits directly into this lineage. Social movement theory, unfortunately, offers little guidance on how to define a social movement or how to measure one's effects (Rochon & Mazmanian, 1993), or on how structural contradictions or grievances may lead to organized opposition (Peet and Watts, 1996). Much recent social movement theory has focused on 'resource mobilization,' i.e., what interests can mobilize what resources to pursue desired goals in the public policy arena.<sup>11</sup> This approach is unsatisfying because it assumes perfect rationality in the pursuit of individual interests. I prefer a more political economic approach, linking social movements to the class tensions inherent in capitalist societies (Harvey, 1996). Klyza (1996), for example, describes Wise Use as an example of "interest group liberalism" solidly rooted in the distinct institutional histories of the three major public lands industries. While this explanation of Wise Use is too narrow, the approach is far more compelling.

More recently, many authors (see Buttel) have posited the existence of 'new social movements' (NSMs), whose issues of concern and modes of operations in the political sphere differ fundamentally from those of the large social movements of the postwar era (e.g., in being more issue-specific and cutting across class boundaries). Buttel characterizes environmental movements as NSMs, structurally linking their rise over the past two decades to a general drift towards neoliberalism, the collapse of postwar social democratic parties, and significant changes in how class politics work. Some authors have interpreted Wise Use as a NSM (Snow; Maughan and Nilson). While NSM theory's emphasis on recent structural changes is valuable, I think it would be a serious mistake to read Wise Use as being in any way 'beyond' class politics. Also, this literature has thus far focused on large-scale movements at a high level of abstraction, providing few tools for actually solidly linking complex social movements and local struggles to economic changes without reducing the former to simple, predictable 'responses' to the latter (cf. Harvey, 1989).

Wise Use can also be understood in relation to another body of literature, that looking at contemporary environmental social movements outside the U.S. (see, e.g., Escobar, 1995).<sup>12</sup> Much of this work would seem to support interpreting Wise Use as the legitimate, populist, environmental movement it claims to be: many of its participants work closely with the land and have long histories of doing so, supporting claims to customary use rights; it has strong support in rural communities; it is reacting to the blindnesses of a technocratic, managerial environmental movement; and it addresses substantive issues of resource use, access, and control. But it is easy to overstate and romanticize these aspects of Wise Use: the 'local' is often cynically manipulated, is not intrinsically superior, and is substantially shaped by extra-local processes (Watts and

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<sup>11</sup> Factors recognized in this literature relevant to Wise Use include perceived grievances, structural capacity to organize (e.g., time and financial resources), and the availability of social networks (Switzer).

<sup>12</sup> E.g., it fulfills all five of Escobar's criteria for an environmental NSM: it has a strong local component and is outside of the state sphere; it relies on constructions of specific 'indigenous' or local cultures; it asserts the superiority of local environmental knowledge over that of professional scientists; it refashions local communities and traditions as hybrids; and it defends the local in the face of the global (cf. Watts and McCarthy, forthcoming).

McCarthy; cf. DuPuis and Vandergeest, 1996). Wise Use's defense of the 'local' or 'property' also has a particular theoretical orientation and would benefit mainly those who already own property.<sup>13</sup>

## V. Research Design

Together, the perspectives above make it possible to move well beyond the standard analysis that Wise Use is a 'response' to global economic restructuring. While this is a reasonable starting point, a 'response' could take almost any form, and indeed the movement has advocated such a wide variety of measures that neither its ideological nor its practical coherence can be assumed. An adequate explanation of it must therefore move beyond such simplistic functionalism to explore *how* and *why* the *particular* configurations of Wise Use have emerged, contributing to current work on the significance of geographic variations in responses to international restructuring.

I begin this explanation with three propositions. First, Wise Use is in large part an alliance between private interests responding to economic restructuring with somewhat contradictory strategies: radical marketization and deregulation on the one hand, and social and economic protectionism on the other (cf. Polanyi, 1944). Both are historically common responses to heightened competition, but which one is chosen by a given actor or group depends on the specifics of its situation, which in turn are often best understood in terms of their class positions and historical access to rural land and resources.<sup>14</sup> Wise Use has, for now, reconciled these opposing impulses within itself by defining the goals of each as private property rights (see, e.g., Hess, 1992 and Yandle, 1995; cf. Harvey, 1996). Second, Wise Use must be interpreted as in part a reaction to major omissions in the historic agenda of the mainstream environmental movement.<sup>15</sup> The movement's appeal stems in part from its focusing on livelihood issues in a way that environmentalism never has.<sup>16</sup> Third, Wise Use is deeply shaped by its roots in Western politics and local resource struggles; any analysis of it must therefore include historical depth and specificity. I hypothesize that Wise Use sprang from the conjunction of these three sources.

These propositions lead me to three levels of research — national, local, and historical — and to a qualitative, historical methodology. Wise Use's rapid growth from its base in an increasingly marginalized group of producers in one region to a potent national political force uniting diverse interests throughout the country has been striking, as has been its success in finding — or forging — sufficient commonalities among disparate local issues of resource use and access to weave them into an effective overall ideology and national agenda. Wise Use must thus be analyzed at both the national and local levels: detailed empirical research is needed to connect its broad and ambiguous rhetoric to the precise social relations and economic relations, including forms of land tenure, property rights, and state intervention and regulation, being sought in specific cases. My research

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<sup>13</sup> Wise Use's theory of property draws heavily on Locke and Bentham: i.e., the role of the state should be to facilitate individuals' appropriation and transformation of nature, which is best done by converting the commons into private property and protecting those rights; security of property provides an essential precondition for productive investment and a check on the power of the state (Roush, 1995; Bentham, 1978; Locke, 1978; MacPherson, 1978). Its regulatory takings doctrine has its more recent intellectual roots in the libertarian legal thought of Epstein (1985).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Ramos, 1995a, on Wise Use as part of a larger program of economic liberalism, and Bromley and Hodge, 1990 and Klyza, 1996 on the socially conservative portions of the Wise Use agenda.

<sup>15</sup> E.g., its historic lack of concern for local economies, communities, working class issues, and urban areas; its focus on achieving policy goals via access, legislation, and litigation at the federal level (Baca, 1995; Dowie, 1996; Erickson, 1995; Snow; Wilderness Society); its tendency to advocate ecological projects while ignoring both the desires of those most directly affected and the economic consequences, except as an afterthought (Vandergeest and DuPuis, 1996; Brick, 1995c); and its failures to see ecological and political economic projects as inextricably linked or to distinguish between resource use and resource depletion (Harvey, 1993; White, 1995; Snow).

<sup>16</sup> Witness, e.g., its rapid, strategic adoption of the lexicon of 'sustainable development' and indigenous management of resources. It is no coincidence that critiques of sustainable development's ambiguity and lack of a fundamental critique of development are directly applicable to 'wise use.' (Escobar, 1995; Watts and McCarthy).

will thus center on comparative, intensive studies of selected Wise Use organizations at both the national and local levels. I will begin with the following questions, hypotheses, and methods (please see attached research schedule for times and locations of specific research activities).

### *Questions, hypotheses, data, and methods*

#### 1. National level, contemporary: What are Wise Use's origins, and what explains its rapid growth?

*Hypotheses:* Wise Use has emerged and grown largely due to increasing economic and social insecurity due to recent economic and regulatory restructuring in the rural West.

*Data:* Data on changes in the economic base of rural areas, particularly in the West; review of major regulatory changes affecting the public lands; detailed accounts of key cases, organizations, and individuals in the formation of the Wise Use movement.

*Methods:* I will utilize economic data gathered by government and local agencies regarding the regional economy and published reviews of changes in legislation and regulation affecting the public lands, and conduct primary research on pivotal Wise Use organizations and cases (the most important cases in the genesis of the movement being in OR and NM). Methods for the latter will include interviews with key figures<sup>17</sup> and analysis of Wise Use, environmentalist, and governmental publications and policy documents, of proposed and passed legislation, and of public nonprofit documents.

#### 2. Historical: What are Wise Use's historical origins, and how have they shaped it?

*Hypotheses:* Wise Use draws on and has been shaped in important ways by both a lineage of resource-centered protest movements and debates in the West, and major omissions of the environmental movement.

*Data:* Reviews of major milestones in the uses and regulation of public lands, the history of conservation movements and debates in the U.S., mainly in the West; and the policies and legislative strategies of the modern environmental movement with respect to these lands.

*Methods:* Archival work in the records of the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management in San Bruno, CA and Washington, D.C.; the Forest History Society in Durham, NC.; and the Natural Resources Law Center of the University of Colorado at Boulder; and review and interpretation of published sources.

#### 3. Local level case studies:

i) How does Wise Use vary along major axes (e.g., land tenure patterns, dominant industry, etc.)?

ii) How have these variations been bridged in the building of a national movement, and what are the relations between local and national Wise Use organizations and activity?

iii) Why do people participate in the Wise Use movement, and how do they perceive and negotiate tensions regarding competing interests within the movement?

*Hypotheses:* First, issues of regional concern within the Wise Use movement vary substantially based on local patterns of land tenure, history, and economic composition; second, these

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<sup>17</sup> Including Wise Use participants and organizers, representatives of environmental organizations, representatives of corporations supporting Wise Use, and representatives labor organizations supporting or opposing Wise Use.



differences have been bridged by defining virtually all Wise Use goals as private property rights; third, there are competing and conflicting economic interest groups within the movement; and fourth, local and regional Wise Use organizations draw on and are substantially shaped by local histories of contestation over resource use and control.

*Data:* These questions will be approached via the three intensive, comparative local case studies of Wise Movement activity below, chosen to illustrate and explore variations in major areas of concern for Wise Use organizations in different regions and sectors; these will be the heart of the dissertation.<sup>18</sup> Each case will focus on a county as the spatial unit of analysis, a particular legislative or regulatory Wise Use struggle as an institutional unit of analysis, and the local Wise Use conception of property rights as a theoretical unit of analysis. These cases have been central to the movement, illustrate the extremes of a typology of Wise Use definitions of property rights, and have other important commonalities and differences. I will seek to explain how these local Wise Use organizations have grown out of local histories and issues; how they have both influenced and been transformed by the national movement; and why participants engage in Wise Use activity and how they see conflicting interests within the movement. I will gather data on: their agendas, membership, funding, activities, and rhetoric; how their affiliation with the national Wise Use movement developed; their activities and before and after becoming involved with it; and local interpretations of Wise Use issues and environmentalist interventions.

*Case studies:* In Boundary County, Idaho, Wise Use activity centers on continued access of extra-local corporations to national forests. The county is historically dependent on the timber industry and is over 60% national forest, with less than 25% of the land in the county privately owned. It passed the first 'county supremacy' ordinance to be tested in court, in a case involving a complex constellation of national and local Wise Use groups, local environmentalists, and the timber industry. Proponents emphasize a moral economy interpretation of property issues, arguing that economic need and established patterns add moral to economic and juridical claims. I studied Boundary County in my M.A. thesis, giving me a solid background in local history, resource use, and contacts; I have also done subsequent research on the original creation of forest reserves in the area. In Catron County, New Mexico, one of centers of the movement, Wise Use activity centers on the redefinition of private grazing allotments on federal land as private property; producers are predominantly locally based. This goal has also been pursued via passage of a 'county supremacy' ordinance, but the emphasis is on the claim that historical patterns of range use and management, predating intensive federal management, legitimize property claims and anti-federal sentiment (Hess, 1992). In the Adirondack park and preserve area in New York most Wise Use struggles are attempts to redefine regulation of private lands as 'takings', utilizing a strong Lockean conception of property. Yet it also connects to Western struggles in important ways: the Adirondack forest reserve legislation predates the national forests and was used as a model for them, and there is a strong local history of resentment of and resistance to these land use restrictions. Recognition of these continuities was a major factor in leading Adirondack groups to join with Western Wise Use groups, the first major East-West link in the national Wise Use coalition. I have extensive lists of both academic and personal and organizational Wise Use contacts in all of these areas.

*Methods:* My primary methods will be structured but open-ended interviews with local Wise Use participants. My research interests focus on their understandings of, and motivations for handling conflicts over resources via involvement in, Wise Use politics; my methods will therefore be primarily intensive and qualitative rather than extensive and quantitative. After initial conversations

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<sup>18</sup> This methodology follows Martin's (1989) suggestion that "Generalising interpretations and locally-specific studies provide distinct but complementary perspectives. The locality approach...is valuable for both its 'individualising' function...to reveal and contrast the singularities of restructuring in specific places, and its 'variation-finding' function...in helping to identify common principles of spatial variation in restructuring by examining systematic differences between the experiences of different areas." Following Sayer's (1984) model of intensive research, I am searching for broader analytical insights rather than statistical generalizations from these case studies.

with key figures in the local communities to choose categories, I will define 4-5 relevant categories of people active in local Wise Use politics (either directly or by opposition) and interview 5-10 members of each category (e.g., local elites owning substantial amounts of land and engaged in primary production; representatives of extra-local corporations; local wage laborers in natural resource industries; Wise Use organizers; local environmentalists; employees of federal land agencies; local officials). As some of these groups are quite small, this interviewing methodology will cover most of the important players. I will also interview some local residents who have chosen not to get involved in Wise Use activity. I will use life histories, local archival sources, and economic statistics (see, e.g., Salant and Waller, 1995) to research local histories of resource use, access, control, and regulation; prior local protest movements; and 'environmentalist' interventions. Each case study will entail three months of local fieldwork; I believe this is an accurate estimate of the time required based on my analogous master's level research.

#### 4. What are the major forces shaping and benefiting from the Wise Use movement?

*Hypotheses:* First, the interests advanced by the Wise Use movement are complex and contradictory, varying in local cases, but the main beneficiaries are corporate; second, its agenda has two major components: opening rural environments more completely to market forces via deregulation, yet conserving many historical social relations and access to input in rural areas; third, the tension between these competing imperatives will be central in defining local Wise Use struggles and their relations to the national movement; and fourth, Wise Use focuses on anti-environmental and anti-state action because of the centrality of those issues in Western history, and because they are more accessible, malleable arenas than are international markets.

*Data:* Information relating to the political and economic positions of specific interests within Wise Use; information on why interests within the movement pursue the specific legislative, regulatory changes they do and analysis of the likely results of these changes, whether proposed or passed, for specific interests; and analysis of the broader social goals of the movement.

*Methods:* This question will have to be addressed after those above, and its answer is largely a matter of interpreting the social and economic data gathered for them. However, it will also require more specifically legal research and analysis. Fortunately, a number of organizations are documenting Wise Use legislative initiatives in detail (e.g., the Environmental Working Group, the American Resources Information Network, and the Western States Center).

### **V. Qualifications of the Researcher**

Research and coursework in regional studies and economic development, Western conservation policy and development, and other theoretical work in Geography and related disciplines at U.C. Berkeley have given me a strong academic base for this research. My M.A. thesis, a political-economic analysis of rural restructuring in the contemporary West, led directly to the proposed research. I have done primary research on previous regional protest movements and the evolution of conservation efforts in the U.S., also leading directly to the proposed research. My experience working for land conservation organizations is directly relevant to the current research. Research on Wise Use at the national level and on key aspects of its genesis is already well underway.

## IX. Research Timetable

Research Phase	Objectives and Data	Methods
<p><b>PHASE I:</b></p> <p><b>Extensive Survey of National Wise Use Organizations and Organizers</b></p> <p>January - February, 1997</p> <p>Berkeley, California, with trips to Oregon and Washington</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extensive investigation of Wise Use organizations and organizers active at the national and regional levels; gather data on: major legislative and regulatory goals, strategies, and accomplishments; funding sources; strategies for maintaining the coalition; internal class composition and dynamics; relations with local Wise Use organizations; and use of specific ideologies and discourses.</li> <li>• Choose two local organizations for intensive case studies of Phase III (criteria specified in research design, above). (Probably Boundary County, ID and Adirondacks.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews with representatives of major Wise Use organizations at this level.</li> <li>• Analysis of publications and major policy documents.</li> <li>• Analysis of proposed and passed legislation.</li> <li>• Public disclosure documents nonprofits must file (e.g., federal tax form 990; state incorporation documents; charitable organization funding lists).</li> <li>• Attendance at and participation in regional Wise Use events.</li> <li>• Interviews with “rank and file” members.</li> <li>• Interviews with representatives of corporations supporting Wise Use.</li> <li>• Interviews with representatives of labor organizations, both those supporting and those opposing Wise Use.</li> <li>• Interviews with representatives of environmental groups analyzing Wise Use.</li> </ul>
<p><b>PHASE II:</b></p> <p><b>Archival Research</b></p> <p>March, 1997</p> <p>California; Washington, DC; North Carolina; Colorado</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a historical context and comparative basis for the study of the contemporary Wise Use movement.</li> <li>• Records concerning previous regional and resource-based protest movements, both first-person and administrative accounts</li> <li>• Records concerning the history of the uses and regulation of public lands and of the history of conservation movements and debates in the West and the U.S.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Archival: Forest Service and BLM archives in Washington, D.C.; the Forest History Society in Durham, NC.; and the Natural Resources Law Center of the University of Colorado at Boulder.</li> <li>• Academic consultations.</li> </ul>
<p><b>PHASE III:</b></p> <p><b>Intensive Local Case Studies (3)</b></p> <p>April – December, 1997</p> <p>Boundary County, Idaho; Catron County, NM; Adirondack region in NY (county to be chosen after initial interviews)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Detailed, comparative local case studies of three months each of local Wise Use organizations.</li> <li>• Class dynamics of each local case.</li> <li>• Major vehicles of movement in each case (e.g., ordinances vs. lobbying).</li> <li>• Roots in local histories and issues, particularly local participation in previous protest movements.</li> <li>• Effects of relationship with national Wise Use movement.</li> <li>• Property rights or claims at stake, particularly use of public resources vs. deregulation of private property use.</li> <li>• Data on agendas, membership, funding, activities, and rhetoric.</li> <li>• How and on what perceived basis their affiliation with the national movement developed.</li> <li>• Local interpretations of main Wise Use issues, nationally and locally.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open-ended interviews and life histories.</li> <li>• Local archival sources.</li> <li>• Economic base analysis (e.g., input-output analysis) over time. Data sources include: federal census, state and local governments, regional banks, and economic development agencies.</li> <li>• Surveys of Wise Use participants in local organizations (e.g., Women in Timber in Boundary County; Adirondack Blueline Confederation; Catron County county commission; numerous other local organizations in each place, Alliance for America in all three).</li> <li>• Data on patterns of land tenure and use over time in case study location (county, state, and federal records).</li> <li>• Document land use restrictions, particularly of an 'environmental' nature, over time in study areas.</li> <li>• Legal and academic research on restrictions and property rights on public vs. private lands.</li> </ul>

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**Project Summary**

A complex new social movement has recently emerged in the rural western U.S. and quickly achieved national status. The Wise Use movement is in some senses an 'environmental movement,' but a highly anomalous one. It engages questions fundamental to rural political economy and sociology: what constitutes "wise use" of natural resources; who regulates such use, and who benefits or loses depending upon the answers? These questions are increasingly urgent as accelerated international economic and regulatory restructuring reconfigures rural economies in the U.S., engendering resistance and accommodation. The proposed research examines how and why the Wise Use movement has developed: its relation to contemporary restructuring, its variation in different geographical and sectoral contexts and its bridging of these differences, its roots in Western development and previous protest movements and in the omissions of the environmental movement, and the tensions in it between deregulation and privatization and the conservative protection of entitlements. It moves beyond the economistic functionalism and generalizations of existing analyses by rooting this analysis in the history and ideology of conservation in the U.S., the movement's class dynamics, and specific local contexts. Employing archival work, an extensive study of national-level Wise Use organizations, and three intensive local case studies, it contributes to contemporary geographic theory regarding the multiple and contradictory ways in which large-scale structural forces and changes manifest themselves and are contested and reshaped in specific locations.

**Period of Performance: January 1, 1997 – December 31, 1997**

## Budget Justification

### Rent and per diem for fieldwork

Three intensive case studies are an essential part of the proposed research. Living in each research site for three months appears to be the most cost-effective way to conduct the necessary in-depth archival and interviewing work; briefer visits would, I believe, result in reproducing the shortcomings of existing journalistic studies of Wise Use groups, failing to solidly link them to more complex understandings of local social dynamics. I am thus requesting both rent and per diem for this portion of the work.

1. Rent: As I will not move to the first of the sites of the local case studies until April, 1997, I can only estimate rent at this point.
2. Per diem: Presuming that I will be living somewhere with cooking facilities for this period, I have requested a significantly lower per diem for food, local travel, and other daily expenses than during my traveling periods.

### Travel

1. The trip to Washington, D.C. will allow me to conduct archival research at U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management headquarters, both of which house unique historical records concerning the creation of, and protests over, early federal land reserves and their management, and site-specific local information to supplement more generally available information on formal laws and regulations. It will also enable me to interview Wise Use organizers and lobbyists in the capital, as well as representatives of major environmental groups involved in these issues.
2. The trip to Durham will allow me to conduct archival research at the Forest History Society in Boulder, which maintains a unique and extensive collection specializing in the history and regulation of forests in the U.S., public and private.
3. The trip to Boulder will allow me to conduct archival research at the Natural Resources Law Center of the University of Colorado at Boulder, which maintains a unique collection specializing in the history and regulation of public lands in the West. I will make one long driving trip to visit these three locations as cost-effectively as possible, and am only requesting funding for the periods I will actually be in them conducting archival research.
4. Per diem expenses are based on estimates of \$35/day for lodging and \$35/day for food for time spent in U.S. cities of significant size. I have requested these for the above trips and for ten days at Wise Use conferences and events. These are not yet scheduled, but occur on a regular basis and will be invaluable research opportunities, as detailed in my research design. I will attempt to choose ones held locations near enough to my field sites so that I can drive. I will also visit other major Wise Use case locations that will not be among my case studies, but are too central to the movement not to interview participants myself (e.g., Nye County, NV).

**BUDGET**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Item requested</b>	<b>When needed</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Cost</b>
<b>Fieldwork: rent and per diem</b>	Rent: \$350/month for 9 mos. in local case studies	March, 1997	Estimate.	\$3,150
	Per diem for 270 days in local case studies @ \$15/day.	March, 1997	Estimate.	\$4,050
<b>Travel</b>	Per diem for 10 days each in Washington, D.C., Durham, NC, and Boulder, CO, and for 10 days for conferences and brief visits to visiting other Wise Use organizations. Total of 40 days @ \$35/day.	January, 1997		\$1,400
	Lodging for above 40 days of travel @ \$35/day.	January, 1997 (tied to above trips)		\$1,400
<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>\$10,000</b>