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## Coastal Management

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### Book review

Mitchell Allen<sup>a</sup>; Gary Pivo<sup>b</sup>; Thomas M. Leschine<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Institute of Archaeology, UCLA, Los Angeles, California <sup>b</sup> Department of Urban Design and Planning, University of Washington, Seattle <sup>c</sup> Institute for Marine Studies, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington

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## Book Review

David J. Brower and Daniel S. Carol, editors, *Managing Land Use Conflicts: Case Studies in Special Area Management* 1987, (Durham: Duke University Press), 323 pp., \$50.00 (cloth)

### Reviewed by

Gary Pivo

Department of Urban Design and Planning,  
University of Washington, Seattle

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*Managing Land Use Conflicts* presents an overview and case studies of what its editors consider to be "an important new approach to land use planning and management." It was recently reviewed in this journal by H. Grant Dehart (vol. 16, no. 3). The book is of interest to readers of *Coastal Management* because the approach is frequently employed in coastal settings and because the book presents several case studies of coastal planning and management.

Although it covers important material and makes a number of interesting observations, the book suffers from methodological and conceptual flaws that limit its ultimate significance. Most of these were overlooked in the Dehart review, but they should be considered as much for what they say about the general style of research represented by the book as they do about this book in particular.

According to the book's editors, special areas exhibit an underachievement of management goals or resource enhancement, an inadequate management framework, conflicts between conservationists, developers, and government agencies, and a historically identifiable spatial resource system.

It is frustrating that "special area management" is never directly defined by the editors other than by what they claim it can achieve. It is difficult to conduct comparative studies of a planning and management method that is poorly defined. Special area management is described by the editors as a generic process for resolving conflicts, increasing predictability, creating efficient management strategies, and providing varying outcomes depending on the situation. Similarly, Dehart defines it as "an approach to providing greater predictability and more certain environmental protection than the increasingly contentious ad hoc permit procedures."

A definition of the process does emerge, however, in the second chapter by Charles Walters entitled "Special Area Management Planning in Coastal Areas: The Process." According to Walters, the process begins with the creation of a planning task force composed of agencies or groups that are expected to be important in the decisions on the issues in the planning area (p. 12). These players must decide that "a need exists for a comprehensive, long-term, balanced plan with enough detail for predictability," select a "lead agency" and retain a "neutral and trusted" facilitator (pp. 12-13). According to Walters, the task force should use a natural resource database for decision making and

plan for uses of the area that are compatible with long-term resource conservation (p. 14). It is considered a "basic principle" that agreements be made by consensus (p. 14). It is also important that plan amendments be made by the same task force used to develop the plan (p. 19).

The nagging problem with this definition of the process and the book overall is that they make special area management sound like any other cooperative interagency planning or mediation effort. However, it is not at all clear that so-called special areas are the only places where such a process may be appropriate, that interagency task forces and mediation are the only ways to manage special areas, or that the results of special area management cannot be achieved in some other way. The reader is left with a sense that the editors are not sure whether the book is really about interagency cooperation, mediation, or critical areas planning, all of which are well-established topics of scholarship. In the end, none of these subjects is given adequate treatment, and instead the reader must deal with an unnecessary and confusing fusion of several concepts under a heading that is never clearly defined.

The book contains a number of diverse case studies. Several cases are located in coastal areas, including Grays Harbor, Washington; Baltimore Harbor, the Upper Delaware River, and three estuarine sanctuaries (Elkhorn Slough and Tijuana Estuary in California, and Apalachicola Bay in Florida). Other sites include San Bruno Mountain in the San Francisco Bay Area, New York's Adirondack Park, the New Jersey Pine Barrens, and Montgomery County, Maryland.

Two chapters make general observations about special area management and offer recommendations from the experience of the authors and the case studies. Two other chapters, by Gerald Cormick and Gail Bingham, discuss environmental mediation, which is considered to be a central element of special area management, although they are reprints of material available from other sources (Cormick, 1982; Bingham, 1986).

*Managing Land Use Conflicts* is successful in several ways. First, it makes available in a single location two strong articles about environmental mediation. However, these articles are easily accessible in their original form and the price of the book (\$50) hardly justifies its purchase to acquire them within a single cover. The book also makes interesting reading for anyone wishing to learn about some important efforts in the land use and environmental planning field, although many of them have already been reported elsewhere (Booth, 1979; Tustian, 1983; Reilley *et al.*, 1984; Pizor, 1986). For example, the chapters on the Adirondack Park Agency, Montgomery County's successful transferable development rights program, and the New Jersey Pinelands Commission summarize programs that were important innovations when they were originated and should be familiar to students of the field.

The book also introduces the reader to two important trends in the land use policy arena. One is the use of interagency task forces to jointly develop plans for areas of interest to more than one public agency. The proliferation of specialized permits (Boselman *et al.*, 1976), the redundant "marble cake" structure of modern governmental systems (Grodzins, 1960), and the problem of spillover effects of governmental decisions have made this a necessity.

The second is the use of mediation in the planning process. Whereas this book is not the first one on the subject, it addresses it in the context of interagency planning that is its most frequent application.

*Managing Land Use Conflicts* makes these and other contributions to the field, but it has flaws in its selection of cases, analytical approach, and the range of issues it addresses.

The editors present a series of "ad hoc responses to common problems of manage-

ment complexity and use conflicts” and state that there is a need to “develop and refine such approaches” (p. 1). In order to do so they set forth what appears to be one of the book’s most important goals. This is to “demonstrate how these ad hoc responses are linked by the single process of *special area management* (their emphasis) and to identify important issues, concerns, and trade-offs likely to be faced in *any future attempts* (emphasis added) that employ this approach (p. 1).

The identification of a “single process” and the prediction of what will be faced in “any future attempt” to use it require the development of a theory of the special area management process that can predict with reasonable probability what will happen when it is applied. This requires an understanding of how the process functions and what elements in a given setting will cause certain “issues, concerns, and trade-offs” to emerge. This causal knowledge would then allow the prediction of what might happen when special area management is applied in a given planning and management situation.

The editors use a comparative case study approach to develop their predictions about what will happen in future attempts to use special area management. However, in order to develop a general theory about the nature and cause of phenomena using the case study method, one must be able to generalize from a limited number of cases to a larger population (Yin, 1981). This requires the careful selection of cases to ensure that they are representative of the general phenomenon being studied. But there is no discussion in the book about how the case studies were selected and whether they are typical or unique except for the statement that they “represent a wide range of management areas, goals, tools, and outcomes” (p. 5). It is necessary to know whether the attributes of the case studies that caused the reported outcomes are similar to the attributes that would be experienced in other situations. Because this is not addressed, the findings can be taken only as preliminary hypotheses discovered through the investigation of a limited number of cases that may or may not represent other circumstances where special area management may be applied. A scientifically valid selection of cases and testing of hypotheses should be undertaken in order to more thoroughly test their validity. In the meantime, readers should not expect the same results in other planning settings unless those other settings are similar to the case studies in ways that will cause the special area management process to have the same outcome that it had in the case studies.

It is also not clear from the case study approach whether the special area management process really caused the outcomes it is claimed to produce or whether some other factors were responsible. For example, was consensus decision making (an element of the process) really necessary to resolve management conflicts (a reported outcome of the process)? Was it even the reason the conflicts were resolved in the case studies? If it was responsible for resolving the conflicts, were there any other attributes of the cases that allowed it to be effective, which may or may not exist in other circumstances? This kind of systematic causal analysis was not undertaken and is necessary before special area management, as defined in the book, can be relied upon to have predictable results.

Eventually we may find general and predictable principles that can be drawn from the special area management approach described in the book. This has been and should continue to be a goal of planning process theorists who, like the editors, are seeking to predict the outcomes that result from using certain generic planning approaches in various settings (Faludi, 1973). The editors should be supported in their pursuit of that goal. Dehart was too quick in his review to dismiss this possibility when he stated that “there are nearly as many processes or approaches to special areas management as there are special areas.” The real issue should be which approach or approaches, or what common elements among them, are most effective in achieving societal goals.

In his review, Dehart recognized weaknesses in the selection of cases when he won-

dered why some were included while others were not. He was correct in concluding that a single process linking the cases was not demonstrated. However, he should have been more careful in drawing "valuable lessons" from the case studies, such as the need for local leadership or simplicity, or the conclusion that special area management has had "spotty" success and that less federal permit responsibility may be worthy of "serious debate." Although he may hypothesize these things from his own experience, it is simply impossible to make valid generalizations from this set of cases without knowing whether they are representative of the larger population.

Another problem is that inconsistent evaluation criteria are used in each case. Case studies can be effective for testing whether general theories hold in different settings. However, the cases in the book do not test an a priori set of hypotheses or investigate a consistent group of study questions. For example, the book ends with several general recommendations on how to make special area management successful, but they are not clearly tested in the case studies. The recommendations include ways of identifying the need for interagency coordination, overcoming inhibitions to cooperation, keeping the process moving forward, establishing an effective management team, and developing a process of "incremental commitment" to new policies and programs. If the importance of these factors had been systematically tested in each of the case studies, there would have been a much stronger basis on which to argue their importance for successful special area management.

There is also a lack of attention to certain key issues. Dehart mentions the issue that some resources may be too valuable to be compromised by consensus procedures or entrusted to local interests. In contrast to this concern for too much local control and negotiation, consensus approaches may also allow for too little public debate by circumventing the traditional legislative and administrative processes of government. A plan resulting from mediation must still pass through several public hearings and it is impossible to bind the hands of the hearing bodies and prohibit them from hearing new information that could cause them to alter the product of the mediation effort. This issue has presented serious problems in several actual cases familiar to this reviewer. It is necessary for the participants in these processes to recognize that their consensus plan may be amended during the public hearings. This requires flexibility on the part of both the hearing body and the planning task force and can discourage participation in the mediation effort.

Another problem is that the case studies emphasize the preparation of plans, what Dehart refers to as "achieving consensus," rather than their implementation, often through the very permit procedures they seek to hasten. This requires the continuous maintenance and adjustment of consensus. The generally positive picture painted in the case studies leaves out many of the implementation problems that can be encountered such as the discovery of new information, political changes, and the unraveling of consensus. This attention to implementation is essential if the consensus approach is to be taken as an effective alternative to contentious permit procedures.

Aside from these basically methodological problems, the fundamental premise of the book should be questioned. The authors are offering a new category of planning called special area management, which they feel can be distinguished from other forms of planning and management (pp. 5-6). However, it is not at all clear that the tools and processes of special area management should be treated as a particularly new category of planning practice. For example, the book considers several "unique management tools" (p. 269) to have been demonstrated by the case studies. However, most of these tools, such as the use of steering committees, transferable development rights, land classification techniques, land conservancies, and interagency memoranda of understanding, have

been a part of the planner's toolbox for some time (Patterson, 1979). Moreover, the "special area management process" is simply mediation, consensus building, and collaborative planning, which have been extant for a decade or more (Susskind, 1981; Bingham, 1986; Jacobs and Rubino, 1987). Finally, most of the so-called special areas are simply regions, counties, or river basins. The definition of a "special area" as a place with ineffective planning, a need for new management frameworks, debates over conservation and development, and interagency conflicts, alas, would describe most cities and regions in America today. Whereas the cases presented in the book certainly deserve study, gathering them under a new heading is akin to putting old wine in a new bottle.

In light of these criticisms, this book cannot be recommended as a significant contribution to our understanding of the planning process or various planning tools. Although its search for effective tools and methods is commendable and should be continued, its methodology is too flawed to ensure its external validity and its attempt to invent a new planning category seems poorly supported. In the future, similar studies should use more rigorous methods before purporting to predict what will happen when a planning approach is used in various settings. Whereas devoted students of land use policy should be familiar with these cases, they should not look to *Managing Land Use Conflicts* for an important new approach to land use planning and management.

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## About the Author

Gary Pivo is a professional planning consultant and an assistant professor of urban design and planning at the University of Washington where he specializes in land use and physical planning. He has worked in several "special areas," including the Adirondacks, the Lake Tahoe Basin, the Mt. Hood National Forest, and several wild and scenic rivers. He received his Master of Regional Planning from Cornell University and his Ph.D. in City and Regional Planning from the University of California, Berkeley.