

A WAY OF LIFE:  
GREAT PLAINS  
CITIZENS TALK ABOUT ECOSYSTEMS

A Great Plains Partnership Report

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Spanning the 13 Great Plains states and the corresponding regions of Canada and Mexico, The Great Plains Partnership is an experimental program comprised of federal, state, and local agencies, tribes, non-governmental organizations and landowners who believe that through cooperation rather than conflict, economic and environmental interests can be compatible.

The Partnership's mission is to catalyze and empower the people of the Great Plains to define and create their own generationally sustainable future.

To this end, the Partnership brings together individuals and groups who commit appropriate resources, work to remove institutional barriers, develop the necessary science and data, and enhance local, regional, and world-wide learning from these efforts. A series of on-the-ground projects being conducted by local partners provides both sources of group learning and opportunities to test new approaches to achieve sustainability.

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The Harwood Group is a public issues research and innovations firm that works with private- and public-sector organizations to figure out the essence of public challenges and how to take effective action. Much of the firm's work centers on rebuilding public relationships and creating effective social change.

The Harwood Group has undertaken projects on various public issues including the environment, education, youth, health care, economic development, science and technology, the political process, civic life and community development.

The firm's environmental- and ecosystem-related initiatives include projects with The Merck Family Fund to identify the concerns, beliefs and values people bring to bear in thinking about the role of consumption in their lives and society; the National Religious Partnership for the Environment to identify the concerns that members of five distinct faith groups have regarding consumption and its meaning for environmental sustainability. The Harwood Group is currently undertaking a new project with the Great Plains Partnership to identify conditions for change that people seek in a specific ecosystem — the Glacial Lake Agassiz region of Minnesota, North Dakota, and Manitoba, Canada.

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**Introduction**

The Great Plains Partnership (GPP) was formed to develop a broad-based strategy to manage ecosystems — the relationship between people, wildlife species, and the elements that make up the environment — and to help Great Plains citizens find ways to maintain vibrant economies and communities.

An important part of developing this strategy is to engage those who live on the Plains to learn how ecosystems fit into their lives and how they think about ecosystem management. The hope is to work with people to find ways to act on ecosystem challenges before reaching situations such as one in the Pacific Northwest involving the spotted owl and those working in the timber industry.

*A Way of Life: Great Plains Citizens Talk about Ecosystems* was prepared for GPP by The Harwood Group. It captures the voices and perspectives of Great Plains residents. It is based on a series of focus group discussions held in eight Great Plains communities. In these conversations we asked people to talk about the region, their communities, and their livelihoods. We asked them to explore ecosystem management situations — such as what to do when wildlife species are threatened. We listened for the language people use, the values they emphasize, and the hopes, fears, and aspirations they share around this set of issues.

## Key Insights

What we learned is that people living on the Plains are struggling to find ways to hang on to what they value about their lives and their communities. And, ecosystem management issues are directly connected to this struggle.

Indeed, conversations about ecosystems are fundamentally about people's way of life. This

becomes abundantly clear when people who live on the Great Plains talk about ecosystems.

Here are four key findings that emerged as we explored people's views about ecosystem management.

1. **People see ecosystems as directly connected to their way of life.** They think of ecosystems and related issues in terms of their personal health, their livelihoods, their value system, and the next generation.
2. **People seem perplexed about how to manage ecosystems.** They say many current land use practices such as chemical applications to crops may pose threats to people's health and water supplies. Yet the region's future — and thus people's way of life — seems to depend on these very same practices. People are unsure how to work through this tension.
3. **People approach ecosystem management from a perspective of maintaining their way of life.** They think about ecosystem management primarily in the context of people and the future of communities. But they believe that they are losing control over their future — their traditional economic base is eroding, their value system seems under attack, and they feel isolated from the institutions that affect their lives. They are looking for a framework for managing ecosystems that will enable them to hold on to what they value about their way of life.
4. **People want ecosystem management to be driven by an ethic of *rights* and *responsibilities*.** They believe that landowners and communities should

have greater leeway to make decisions that make the most sense for their unique circumstances — so long as they fulfill their obligation to manage their resources in ways that do not harm others.

Differences among the various discussion groups were, for the most part, a matter of the intensity of people's views. For instance, people living in smaller communities talked with more passion about the challenges facing farmers than those living in larger cities. Meanwhile, people from larger communities talked more about landowners who take unfair advantage of farm programs. But the essence of people's views were generally consistent across the conversations.

### **Struggling with a Paradox**

Across the findings from our conversations emerged a paradox. Great Plains residents show an intuitive understanding for how land use practices affect the elements that make up the environment, wildlife species, and people. They express keen concerns for how many land use practices may be posing a threat to their families, their communities, and themselves.

Yet everyone who took part in our discussions knows someone who uses land — and depends on these practices — to make a living. And they hold firm to a belief that those who own and manage land should be left to make decisions that they believe are best.

This paradox seems to make people uncomfortable exploring ecosystem management issues. Indeed, people say they seldom talk openly about these issues — except, perhaps, for landowners who talk to other landowners. The tensions that make such discussion delicate were readily apparent when people would talk about such concerns as chemical use, knowing full well

that landowners such as farmers who were sitting around the table depend on these practices.

People suggest that their experiences with institutions such as government agencies and other "outsiders" further closes down room to explore the paradox they face. People suggest that when they work with these groups in the context of ecosystems, they hear little about finding ways for *people* to maintain their way of life.

Indeed, these conversations suggest that engaging Plains residents in finding sustainable ways to manage ecosystems must create room for them to explore the paradox they face. People hold on to a sense that they can maintain their way of life and act as stewards of the land. They are searching for ways to fulfill this aspiration.

This report is organized in four sections. Following the introduction is the section, Ecosystems — A Key Part of Life, which looks at how people living on the Great Plains view ecosystem management issues and the connections they make between these issues and other parts of their lives.

A Way of Life Endangered looks at the concerns people hold for the future, their frustrations working with "outsiders," and how all of this lessens their sense of urgency for ecosystem issues. In our conversations, participants began to create a framework that might enable them to solve the paradox they face — to maintain their way of life and do what is important for ecosystems. The third section, A Framework for the Future, explores this framework.

The final section, Implications, is analysis by The Harwood Group that suggests conditions to more fully engage Great Plains residents on ecosystem management issues. These suggested conditions build on what we learned in this work and in other Harwood Group work. The

appendices contain the methodology for this project and a list of GPP member organizations.







## Section I: Ecosystems — A Key Part of Life

People who live on the Great Plains take pride in the land that defines the region and what it means to their way of life. They see the land as a key to their prosperity and to maintaining their communities.

This drives a reluctance among residents to embrace ecosystem management strategies that may make it more difficult for people to make a living and for communities to remain economically viable — a challenge that people suggest is already getting the best of them. For instance, they resent strident calls for strategies that focus on protecting wildlife species when their own way of life is at risk.

Yet those who took part in our conversations express a paradox. They show an intuitive sense for how land use — how ecosystem management — is connected to people, wildlife species, and the elements that make up the environment. And while they resist notions that suggest changes in land use, they articulate clear concerns for practices such as chemical applications to crops, irrigation, and housing development that may be compromising people's health and water supplies. Residents sense that many current land practices are doing irreparable harm.

People who live on the Plains seem perplexed about how to work through this tension. They say they seldom even openly talk about it. Ecosystem management issues — as typically framed — seem to give people little room to explore how they might change their land use *and* maintain their way of life.

### The Sanctity of Land

People in these conversations talk with passion about the physical geography of the Great Plains. "The environment [in this area] is grand and clean," said a Pampa man. "It's wide open and free," a Lisbon man remarked. In Grand Island a woman said, "It really is beautiful. You see beautiful sunsets every night." And a man in that discussion added, "It's not just flatland ... it's rolling hills and pastures and cropland."

They see a direct relationship between the land and their way of life. Two La Junta men summed up this sentiment during an exchange about the importance of the land. "People are saying ... this is the land we're going to live on. This is the land maybe our children are going to live on, or somebody's going to live on. And we've got to take care of it," said one. The other added, "If the land goes, so do we."

Indeed, people express an almost religious devotion to the land. "We have an obligation to one another and to generations that are coming ... if we pollute this land, if we destroy everything, what's it going to be for our kids or our grand kids, their kids and their grand kids and on down the line?" asked an Eagle Butte man. A La Junta man also talked about obligations when he said, "I think we all have a moral obligation to be a good steward of the land. I always like going back to the Native American [question] ... how can you buy and sell Mother Earth?" And a Wichita man talked about the sanctity of land in this way:

### AN INTUITIVE SENSE FOR ECOSYSTEMS

Our conversations suggest that people living on the Great Plains have an intuitive sense for how ecosystems work. While they may not use the term "ecosystems" (see box, "People's Language for Ecosystems," page 27), they talk easily about the relationships between land, water, air, wildlife species, and people. This understanding was expressed over and over again in people's remarks, in comments such as these:

If we don't see those birds that have lived here all these years and we grew up with them and all of a sudden they're gone, something's wrong with the environment.

— Eagle Butte woman

The stuff that come's off [the lawns]. The blanket treatments that we're throwing onto the fields. Maybe ten percent of it's being used. The rest is being flushed into the water system.

— Great Falls man

Each part of our world depends on other parts of the world ... I've walked around the head of the Arkansas River ... it's a little dinky stream that comes out of the spring in the ground and all these little tributaries come into it and each of them make up that river. If something happens up there, it's going to affect our river and it's going to affect our life down here.

— La Junta man

I think we fail to realize that we [may] own [the land] from this fence to this fence, but we don't really own it. It's not really ours ... We need to preserve it for 200 or 300 years for generations to come.

The devotion to the land that residents express

undergirds the love they have for the region. "We're an oasis on the Great American Desert," said a La Junta woman. "I would say it's probably as good a place as you can find to live in," a Twin Valley man remarked about the place he calls home. And a woman in the Great Falls conversation concluded, "It's the last best place."

## Health and Water Concerns

Health concerns are first and foremost on people's minds when they think about ecosystems. Indeed, when we asked people what they see happening with everything that makes up the natural environment, after one or two perfunctory comments, people talked at length about concerns for people's health.

"There are a lot of allergies in this area," remarked a Pampa woman. A Lisbon man made a similar comment, noting, "I hear more about kids with allergies and all that than I've ever heard before. I think that's a big problem." A Twin Valley man observed a growing number of serious health problems, "In the last five or ten years there's been so many people getting cancer. You know, I never heard of that ten years ago." A woman in the discussion added, "In younger people. It's not older people." An Eagle Butte woman talked about cancer, too:

We don't understand what's causing all this cancer. We have so much cancer on the reservation it's unbelievable. So many deaths ... What's causing it? Why can't we find out?

Water quality is the context in which people think about their health concerns. "I'll tell you what I'm worried about is the water ... I don't know how to talk about it intelligently except that I am very concerned," remarked a Great Falls woman. In communities small and large, residents made similar comments about water and its connections to people's health. "People talk about health hazards. I think we've [got] a feeling it stems back to the well water," concluded a Twin Valley man. A woman in Grand Island remarked, "The water [people] are drinking isn't safe. It is a crisis." And a Wichita woman said, "I didn't think when I came here that the water would be such a concern to me, and it is." Another woman in the group added,

"That's a situation that's started to crop up in [the last] ten years. It's getting to be pretty drastic."

Participants in our discussions seriously question many land use practices — by farmers, ranchers, and home owners — that they believe may be affecting water quality and people's health. "I'm concerned about — not just [by] the farmers, it's everybody — the herbicides and pesticides that are going into the ground and into the ground water," said a La Junta woman. "People don't realize just how much pollution from chemicals goes in the water around here from what people put on their lawns," remarked a Wichita woman. A Grand Island woman, reflecting on the comments made by several others in her discussion about chemicals and water, said, "One thing does affect another thing." And in the Twin Valley discussion a man disagreed with extensive chemical use on the land:

I've been a farmer, a rancher, and a cowboy. But I do not believe in fertilization and all these chemicals. All this cancer is popping up in this country and that's from chemicals and pesticides and what have you.

Concerns for water go beyond its relationship to people's health. From North Dakota to Texas, and points in between, people talked about threats to the region's water supply. "I do get concerned thinking, you know, you're pumping millions of gallons of [water] to irrigate and are we gonna run out of water," a Lisbon woman commented. A La Junta man noted growing cities in the region as a threat to water supplies when he said, "I'm really concerned about our water here ... It appears to me that it's only going to be a short time before [the cities] make a grab on the water. That concerns me how the Valley is going to survive." A Great Falls man expressed nearly identical concerns remarking,

"Montana is seen as a source of water by southern states. As population grows in those states, we're going to be seen as the source of their water."

People believe it is time to take water conservation more seriously than they have in the past. "It may not be a crisis exactly, but if they don't do something now ... it could be a crisis pretty quickly," remarked a Pampa woman. A Grand Island man spun out his sense of the history of people's growing concern about water:

In the late '50s and early '60s, water was an unlimited commodity ... Then we had a drought about five or six years ago ... They found that our groundwater supply does have a limit. Wells in Nebraska are getting lower and lower. The water level was depleting and all of a sudden it created an awareness that, hey, water is a valuable commodity. Now we've got to conserve it.

### **A Source of People's Livelihood**

Despite people's deep concerns for their health and water supplies, people are sympathetic to those who make a living off the land.

"It's difficult to be a farmer and care about the environment in this day and age," remarked a Wichita woman whose family farms in the area. She added, her voice trembling slightly, "[We] are sensitive about the chemicals [we] use because they do hurt the environment. And [we] know that. But that's what you [have to do]. I mean, that's how we make our money. So [the farmer] always has conflicting emotions."

Those participating in our conversations believe the practices that farmers and other landowners

undertake are necessary for their economic livelihood. "I don't want [pesticides] in the water ... but they have to be allowed to use a certain amount [of chemicals] to be able to produce," observed a Pampa woman referring to farmers. A man in the group added, "That's their profession. That's how they make their money." A Grand Island man expressed similar tensions about asking landowners such as farmers to change how they do business when he remarked:

[If] there's going to be a lot more restrictions on the agriculture business, it's going to be tough. They're cracking down on the use of chemicals. They're going to cut down on insect control for crops. The weed control ... they're already cutting down on that. That's going to hurt agriculture.

People suggest that economic conditions are forcing many landowners to squeeze as much from the land as possible — at times pushing ecosystems to their limits. "I know a lot of farmers ... they can't afford to let [their land] set there idling and not producing an income," said a Pampa man. And in Twin Valley, a man expressed this view in clear terms when he said, "It comes down to competition ... we [have] got to dump stuff [on the land] to bring the yield up. It's [about] trying to make a living. If a person got paid twice as much for [his] wheat, you probably wouldn't have to put on as much chemicals."

People believe that landowners should generally be free to choose what they think is best for their own land. Thus, they are reluctant to call for significant change in how ecosystems are managed. "They paid for the land and they can do what they want," said a Pampa man. "Unless it's not good for health or whatever it is, I think [landowners] should have the right to [do what they want] with their land," asserted a Grand Island man. And a Wichita man remarked, "I think

if a person owns land he ought to have the freedom to make a profit on it, and the freedom to provide a service, like food, for people around the country, around the world."

Indeed, property rights are also seen as linked to people's ability to maintain their livelihoods. As a Great Falls man explained, "I think a person has a right to keep their property. If they do something [such as] shooting an animal that's endangered to protect their property and their livelihood and they're penalized ... [I think] that seems a little unfair."

### **People before Wildlife**

A sense that wildlife species are being placed ahead of people is perceived as another threat to the way of life of those who live on the Great Plains. "I'm kind of wondering when they're going to start issuing social security numbers to the wolves. It seems like [they] have almost more rights ... than people do," a Great Falls man said sarcastically. Another man in the group expanded on the notion that people should come before animals:

I don't want to seem like I'm not for animals because I am. But when you put animals before people ... you put people out of work. When it comes to people and animals, my category is people are number one and animals are number two. We've got to share this earth but people are more important than animals, period.

Similar sentiments were expressed in virtually every discussion. We asked people in each of our conversations to weigh situations in which choices must be made about wildlife species. The bottom line for most people was captured by a Wichita man who concluded, "I'm inclined to think that

people are more important than chickens, and a crop is more important than a species."

Indeed, people suggest that the loss of some species may be an unfortunate but real consequence of maintaining people's way of life. A Pampa man made this view clear when he said, "It's a nice thing [to let the land lie fallow] but if I had to have that land to survive ... I'm going to plow it up." A Great Falls man reflected on experiences with animals when he said, "I've seen sheep farmers that are starving and the doggone coyotes come and get their lambs. I think if they're taking their lambs, I'd take my gun and shoot the darned coyote. I mean, my livelihood and my children are more important than the coyote."

Other's comments were not quite so stark, but people came to the same conclusion. As a Twin Valley woman remarked, "I would like to conserve. But how can you when the [human] population is increasing? The wants and needs of the people have long surpassed [wildlife] needs."

### **Putting Off Decisions**

Ecosystem management issues have people on the Great Plains feeling perplexed. Many current land use practices increasingly seem to pose a threat to people's health and water supplies — as well as to wildlife. Yet the region's future seems to depend on these very practices. Great Plains residents seem to be struggling to find ways to work through this tension.

People in each of our eight conversations talked about these competing forces. A Great Falls man remarked, "[We] want jobs on the one hand — the state does need them — but on the other hand we don't want no industry coming in to pollute. So we're stuck." And a Wichita woman summed up similar tensions when she said:

People [need to] make their money, but at the same time, we're hurting our own community. It's a tough issue. Any time you say anything [the response is] are you trying to take my job? Well, no ... but at the same time I don't want his kid to get cancer or my kid or anybody else's.

People taking part in these conversations say it is nonsensical to think that landowners and others do not appreciate the need to protect ecosystems — in particular water quality. As a Twin Valley man remarked, "Why would we want to ruin our water ... to keep jobs? [That's] kind of defeating the purpose." People also express an openness and desire to find ways to protect wildlife species because these, too, are part of people's lives. "I think the environment here [makes] people enjoy living here. [People] really want to protect it like [it is]," a Great Falls woman observed. And a Lisbon woman remarked, "We want [the environment] to stay natural ... [so we] can be proud that we have an area like that in our state."

What is more, people believe that they must make changes in their lives if they are to continue to reap benefits from the land and ecosystems they hold dear. "I think most people don't necessarily think that everything's going in the right direction," said a Twin Valley woman. A Grand Island man struggled to pinpoint what people might do. "I can't put my finger on exactly what needs to change but we've got to start making things better," he remarked. And a Wichita man expressed a sense that people will have to do things differently when he said, "I think we're all going to have to sacrifice a little."

Yet these conversations suggest that people will resist significant change when it comes to ecosystem management issues because they are not clear on what this will mean for maintaining their way of life. A Wichita man expressed the unease of many when talking about making choices to do

things differently *or* to keep doing things as they are now: "It's difficult. How do you know if you're right?"

Indeed, working through and making choices about the paradox they face seems to be a conversation that has been put off. When we asked people in our conversations if they ever talk about these issues — with a few exceptions, typically farmers and ranchers who said they talk to other farmers and ranchers — the response we heard was similar to the Twin Valley woman who said, "Never."

### A NATIVE AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE

One of the eight conversations we held on the Great Plains was with a group of Native Americans in Eagle Butte, South Dakota.

Drawing distinct conclusions about the views of Native Americans compared to others who live on the Great Plains would require research beyond a single focus group. But even in this limited work, two contrasts of note emerged:

- ! Native Americans taking part in our discussion do not convey a strong belief in property rights. They see the land as a shared resource to be cared for by and to benefit all.
  
- ! Native Americans show a greater desire than the Great Plains residents in the other focus groups to find ways to protect wildlife species. They seem much more willing to call for changes in land use practices to achieve this goal. Yet, they — like others on the Plains — say they can understand why landowners make choices such as using chemicals to boost crop yields.

Beyond these contrasts, the themes from this conversation were similar to those we heard in the other seven conversations. Native Americans express affection for the Great Plains and the physical geography that defines the region; they want to find ways to maintain and pass on their way of life to the next generation but are concerned that forces acting on them will make this a difficult challenge.



## Section II: A Way of Life Endangered

Obstacles that may impede people from working through the ecosystem management paradox that emerged from these discussions became readily apparent as people talk about the concerns they hold for their way of life.

Great Plains residents express a common sense of anxiety about their future. Participants say they feel stretched economically and they sense that the norms of personal and community responsibility that enable people to maintain their way of life in hard times are disappearing.

What is more, people suggest that government agencies and other "outside" institutions that affect their lives make the challenges facing Plains communities more difficult — not less. Residents sense that these "outsiders" have little understanding of, or regard for, those who live on the Plains.

At a time when their way of life seems to be slipping through their fingers — and "outsiders" seem to neglect or add to their problems — ecosystem management issues seem less than urgent to people.

### Declining Livelihoods

People say that it is increasingly difficult for those living on the Great Plains to sustain themselves economically. "I remember the time when my wife and I were working for, like, \$1 an hour and we lived better than we live now on \$5 or \$6 an hour," said a Grand Island man. A woman in the group added, "People can't make it on the main wage," referring to a family's primary income. A Twin Valley woman made a similar observation: "I think most anybody with a family has to have a

least two incomes. There's just not enough ... to support the families."

People lament the lack of good paying jobs in the region. "One of the major disadvantages around here is job opportunity. You're pretty much limited," remarked a Pampa man. "Jobs are hard to find. They're just not that many opportunities," commented a Great Falls man. "Grand Island is kind of a retail town," said a woman in that discussion, with a man jumping in to complete her thought. "And they're going to offer you \$4.25 an hour," he declared. "How are you going to live on \$4.25 an hour with a couple of kids?" A Pampa woman described her frustration when she said, "I'm an employee of the bank and I can't [get] a loan because they don't pay me enough to [get] a loan at the bank."

The challenges to sustain oneself in agriculture — as noted in the previous section — lead people to believe that jobs on farms and ranches will provide a livelihood for fewer and fewer people. "We'll never be able to go back to having the average farm like we used to," said a woman who owns land and lives just outside of Wichita. A Grand Island woman noted, "A lot of the younger people realize that it's getting harder and harder to stay in [agriculture]. I know a lot of people [whose] kids don't want to be farmers." And a Lisbon man said, "Farming ... doesn't require the amount of people that [it] used to," citing what is a common understanding among people living on the Plains.

What is more, people see few opportunities emerging on the horizon. "The job situation here is really a concern. [We need] industry to come into town so that people in our community [will] have jobs," remarked a La Junta woman. In particular, people see few opportunities for young people to stay in the area. "The kids have to go farther and

farther away [for] decent paying jobs," said the Twin Valley woman who noted the need for two income families. A Lisbon woman remarked, "If you have a college education, you almost have to leave or go on to the bigger cities, at least in North Dakota, or you can't find a job." And a Great Falls man summed up people's sense of their economic prospects this way:

Most of our children are going out of state for jobs. That kind of tells what the situation is. I think people would like to reverse that, at least be able to keep some of the children here.

### **Encroaching Social Problems**

Not only do people believe their livelihoods are endangered, but they feel that the bedrock of life on the Great Plains — their values — are too. People say that they are increasingly facing what they call "city" problems. When we asked people in Lisbon if they held any concerns, a woman said, "In the next 10 to 20 years it will become more like the big city." Asked what she meant, she responded, "more crime."

In communities large and small, people said regrettably that crime, drugs and violence, and the future of children concern them. "I've heard about gangs where I live," said a Pampa woman. In Wichita people talked about "increasing violence" in and around schools. A La Junta woman expressed similar concerns when she said, "Can we get our kids home safe [anymore]? That's what scares me." And a Wichita woman remarked about youth, "It's like they're losing their direction."

People believe these and other social problems are leading people in the region to abandon traditional values such as respect for others and hard work that are seen as the foundation of the Great Plains.

"So many people now days are disrespectful. A man's word was all we needed years ago, now people just do things that are disruptive [to others]," a Great Falls woman remarked. A Lisbon man said, "Our ancestors were used to [hard] work. Now it's a different story." A Wichita woman pointed to signs of greed in the region, "Everybody goes for money, even around here." And a man in the discussion observed:

I think we're getting away from caring so much. Fifty years ago things that really mattered to us were our property and our name and our word. We seem to [have] put the basic things behind and [now] we're always thinking about how we can improve our lifestyle and how to make the job easier. I just think over time we got away from a few basic ideas.

All of this, people suggest, chips away at the way of life those living on the Great Plains hold dear. As a Lisbon woman lamented, after reflecting on concerns people raised in the discussion, "I think we've lost something."

### **Outsider Disrespect**

In dealing with the challenges they face, people indicate that they are frustrated by "outsiders" who do not seem to comprehend what is happening on the Great Plains. They feel this frustration most keenly when it comes to their experiences with government agencies. But it does not end there. People feel that businesses, non-profit groups and people who live in other parts of the country lack respect for those who live on the Plains.

It is this sense that they are not respected or understood that Plains residents seem to resent. Indeed, as our conversations played out, it became clear that participants do not repudiate the goals

and work of government agencies or other organizations.

***Insensitive Government.*** "The government ... comes in and tells you what you can and can't do whether you like it or not," said a Pampa man. A La Junta woman echoed this sentiment saying, "I don't like the idea of government stepping in and saving us from ourselves. You know, kind of over-protecting us." People perceive many government agencies to be insensitive to people on the Great Plains and at times heavy-handed. But beyond pure venting, those taking part in our conversations enumerate a range of ways that they believe government agencies sell people on the Great Plains short.

People believe that government agencies all too often lack an understanding of the challenges facing Great Plains communities. "I think the federal government is too far away to see the needs in [this] area," asserted a Wichita woman. "[The government] has all these rules and they've never even been [here]. They have no idea what anything's about," said a Twin Valley man. And a Grand Island man expressed the feeling that it is what government agencies seem to know about the region, not their mission, that frustrates people:

I agree with what their (EPA and OSHA) purpose is. They want to control this crap that we're putting into the environment and all that sort of stuff ... and I agree with that. [But] a lot of those people don't know beans about what this rural area is all about.

Residents believe many laws and regulations ignore the unique circumstances of communities and the capacities of people to act on the challenges they face. "Sometimes the regulations that they make apply more to larger areas. It is really different [here]. Laws are made that ... apply to everyone and yet they're probably not as

crucial to some of the smaller areas," stated a Lisbon woman. Another woman in the group added in exasperation, "Every place is different." A Wichita woman noted the debilitating effects of regulations. "I just think when you have so many regulations you take away the opportunity for people to show their own initiative because there's always a rule," she remarked. And a Pampa man said, "There's so much [people] can do before the government steps in."

Compounding frustrations that government does not seem to understand the challenges facing communities in the region, people feel that there is little room for them to have any meaningful input in the decision making process. "When you start leaving it to the bureaucracy to try and run it, then you've suddenly lost touch with the folk around the table," remarked a Great Falls man. And when people are asked to participate by government agencies, they often feel it is after decisions have been made. "All of a sudden they include us," exclaimed a Pampa woman. "It's not fair."

***Retreating Businesses, Intruding Non-Profit Groups.*** The irritation people feel toward institutions goes beyond just their feelings about government. They believe other institutions such as businesses are stealing decision making authority from the region. A Pampa woman noted similarities between her perceptions of business and government when she said, "Big companies have gotten that way [too]. A [company's area] supervisor used to have a lot of control and now ... some guy in Houston tells everybody here what they can and can't do. I think that's pretty stupid."

People are also uneasy about conservation organizations that are seeking to purchase land on the Great Plains. For the most part people are unclear about what these organizations do. As a Grand Island man asked, "What are they trying to accomplish?" Lacking clarity, people worry that these types of organizations pose a threat to the livelihoods of those who live on the Plains.

"They're taking ag land away from people that need it to survive. So they're pitting themselves against the farmer," remarked another Grand Island man. A woman in the Twin Valley discussion concluded, "If a farmer sells [his land] to that [organization] ... as a community, our long-term opportunities are going to disappear."

**Coastal Snobs.** Discussion participants also resent people from the Coasts who stridently call for more stringent efforts to protect ecosystems on the Great Plains. "They want to preserve those things because they lost it in the East. But are they willing to pay for it? No. They just want it," a Lisbon man exclaimed. A Great Falls man expressed similar frustration:

The people out on the East Coast [who] don't live out in these open spaces, you know [the people who say], 'save the wolves.' This is our way of life. We have farm animals out there to get killed. And when we protest we look like the bad people up here ... the hicks from Montana. People on the East Coast, California, the big cities, don't understand this and they ought to keep their noses out of it.

Residents believe that those who live on the Coasts hold little respect for or understanding of the challenges facing those who live on the Great Plains. "They don't know what we're doing," said a Pampa woman. A Lisbon man pointed to tourists — mainly sportsmen — who mistreat land when they come to the region, "I wish the out-of-state sportsmen never showed up. They have no respect."

The lack of respect that people sense from outsiders seems to have created what amounts to a reflex response from Great Plains residents: they immediately say, "butt out." As a Grand Island

man remarked, "[Outsiders should] keep out of our business when they don't know what our business is."

### WHO PEOPLE TRUST TO TAKE ACTION ON ECOSYSTEMS

Our conversations suggest that when it comes to working with government agencies, non-profit organizations and other groups, people have a clear test: As a Twin Valley woman put it, "[You trust] people you know."

Participants generally expressed a greater sense of trust for organizations that are locally based over those that are at the state level, and for state organizations over regional and national groups. Yet when people were asked about specific organizations, this frame of reference did not hold up. Rather, people expressed trust for organizations with which they have a relationship — whether the group is the local chapter of the Farm Bureau or the U.S. Forest Service. Typically these organizations have representatives living in communities. The trust comes about because, as a Lisbon woman said, "[The representatives are] a part of our community. We know they care [about us]."

All of this raises an interesting challenge for institutions and organizations that seek to work on Great Plains ecosystems. How can the organization strike relationships with people and communities at a time of shrinking public resources — at a time when it is not possible to have a representative in "every" community?

Some insights emerge from how people talked about groups that they encounter when it comes to ecosystem issues. A Grand Island man quoted elsewhere in this report said, "I agree with what their (EPA's and OSHA's) purpose is. They want to control this crap that we're putting into the environment and ... I agree with that. [But] a lot of those people don't know beans about what this rural area is all about." Indeed, in every conversation, the concern people raise is that those who work for government agencies, non-profit groups, and other organizations neither understand nor respect the people and communities on the Great Plains.

What people seem to be looking for from groups that make ecosystem management decisions is *not* necessarily to locate a representative in their communities — they recognize that this is unrealistic at a time of limited budgets. Rather, they seek understanding and respect. Under these conditions people say they would be much more receptive to working with "outsiders." Two Pampa women explained: "I think there's knowledgeable people that can come in from the outside and do a good job if they have their heart in the right place," said one. The other added, "If they're willing to learn, willing to know what's going on [here]."



## Section III: A Framework for the Future

People taking part in these conversations believe that the only way they can maintain their way of life is if they have more say in making decisions about ecosystem management issues. They are in search of a framework that will enable them to have more leeway in deciding what is best for themselves and their communities.

This is not a nostalgic quest, particularly in relationship to ecosystem issues; people in these discussions suggest that they must adopt new attitudes and ask new questions when it comes to these issues. Nor is the search for more say in decision making an effort to avoid responsibilities to others or to disavow the role of government on these issues. People strongly believe in a sense of obligation to manage their resources for the common good. And they believe that legislatures and government agencies must set parameters for how the land is used.

People are in search of ways to solve the paradox they are in — they want to find ways to maintain the land they cherish and continue to tap its resources so to maintain their way of life. They suggest that the answers may lie within a new framework for thinking about success, the roles of people and institutions, and land use practices.

### New Ways to Define Success

"We need to look closer than just the obvious — the [endangered animal] against man wanting to make some money," said a La Junta woman when discussing an ecosystem situation we asked her group to consider. She added, "That's pretty simplistic and it may not be that simple."

People taking part in these discussions — as they worked through various ecosystem situations — began to suggest that conventional questions about

these issues may no longer suffice. A Wichita woman suggested, "The question might be, what is success? Is it the man who saves the grassland ... or is he a success because he provides for his child to go to school." Indeed, some people said that the region's measures of progress may be out of whack. As a Twin Valley woman noted, "We have in fact lost a lot of things that were precious. And, still, [we] call that progress." And recall the Grand Island man who remarked, "I can't put my finger on exactly what needs to change but we've got to start making things better."

Great Plains residents say that they must find ways to do what is important for sustaining ecosystems *and* address the needs and concerns of people. "You have to have financial responsibility. You have to have environmental responsibility. I think you have to have a balance there because you have to be able to do both," a La Junta man asserted. All of this, people say, may require some who live on the Great Plains to change their attitudes. "There's gonna have to be some areas set aside for preserving and other areas where you can [use the land]. That's the direction you have to go ... you have to learn to compromise," concluded a Lisbon woman. And a Grand Island remarked, "There's a lot that needs to be done ... [we've] got to learn."

People convey a belief that making strides to manage ecosystems is necessary and will require an ongoing commitment on everyone's part. As a La Junta woman remarked at the end of her group's conversation, "There's so much room for improvement ... One person's not going to do it. Everybody's got to do their part."

## Rights and Responsibilities

As noted earlier, people in these conversations believe that landowners should be free to do what they see fit with their land. "I think, on the whole, a person that owns land ought to be free to make a profit — to make as much as he wants to work," said a Wichita man. A La Junta man expressed his view about the rights of landowners speaking from the point of view of someone purchasing land: "It's my money. I bought it. I can do whatever I want with it." Few people make distinctions between various types of landowners. When asked if the group would feel differently about property rights if it was a corporation in question, a Pampa man asserted, "They paid for the land and they can do what they want."

But most people *do not* believe owning property gives landowners the right to do anything. They suggest that landowners have an obligation to manage their resources responsibly. "The right to own property is one thing," said a Great Falls woman. "But I think there's a responsibility to manage the property well." Another woman in the group added, "You've got to think of what is best for the welfare of all rather than just your own self." An Eagle Butte woman suggested that landowners must reflect on how their actions affect others when she said, "You have to really look at who are you affecting. Whose quality of life are you affecting? And do you have the right ... to diminish the quality of life someone has?" And the La Junta man who asserted, "I bought it. I can do whatever I want with it," concluded his comments by saying:

One other thing, do [your actions] injure your neighbor? You've got to think about that. Somewhere along there you've got to sort of take care of your neighbor as yourself.

Others with whom we talked focused on the rights of non-landowners — both living and those of future generations — in explaining limits to an individual's property rights. "[A landowner's] freedom's got to stop where it impacts [people's] safety," said a Wichita man. And an Eagle Butte man tied this notion to the future when he remarked, "[Landowners] have to be reminded to think of the future generations. If they're not, then we need to look at [their] decisions closer."

Indeed, people are quick to point out that some safeguards are needed to deal with people who *do* neglect their responsibilities to the common good. "You need a safety net because there are some extreme abuses out there," a La Junta man noted. When asked whether landowners would act in responsible ways to manage ecosystems, an Eagle Butte man remarked, "A lot of them would." Yet he continued, "But there's going to be some that do whatever it takes to make more money, to have a better crop." And a Wichita woman said, "As the population grows, I think people left [on] their own would not do what is best for the common good."

## "Flexible" Parameters

A La Junta man cautioned, "It's hard to just put one regulation over everybody and say this is what you can't do and this is what you can do." People taking part in these discussions say they want flexible standards or parameters set by government to guide landowners and others, not micro-management. "I think what I hear everybody saying is that they agree that we need controls but the government doesn't need to control every single thing that we do in life," said a Wichita woman reflecting on several comments made in her discussion. "We want enough [standards and regulations] to protect

everybody and, you know, the whole population in general, but we don't want any more than we have to have," said a Pampa woman. And in the Grand Island discussion, a group of participants spun out what they are looking for in this way:

Woman: I think what we're saying at this table is we want [government involved but] we want it smaller, something that will work.

Man: Any human being — myself [included] — doesn't like to be told you have to do this, but if it could be suggested ...

Second Man: Yeah, if they could say here are some parameters ...

Third Man: You know, does this work for you or does this?

Discussion participants suggest that parameters are necessary to balance the sometimes competing needs of various groups of people. "I think the government should regulate things that are going to interfere with others' well-being or health and welfare, such as water," a Pampa man commented. As long as the parameters are not overly burdensome, discussion participants assert, the rules will be willingly embraced. As a La Junta woman observed, "If they're logical and fair, most people aren't going to buck that."

Some people indicate that in setting parameters, they want government to set standards and then get out of the way. "You've got to have the government give you direction and guidance, then I think they have to turn the states loose and let the states do what's best for the state," explained a Wichita man. And a Pampa man suggested a similar process in reverse when he said, "After we make a decision they can okay it," referring to state government.

## More Local Decision Making

People are clear that they also want more leeway to make decisions about ecosystems at the local level. "Let the people decide what they want," said a Pampa man when asked how he and others think decisions about ecosystems should be made. "We want to take care of ourselves and our family and our own micro-environment," asserted a Great Falls man.

Those who took part in our conversations suggest that local decision making would be more responsive to each community's unique needs. "[We] know what's going on here but someone from the outside ... [doesn't] know what goes on here," remarked an Eagle Butte woman. After expressing concern that decision makers such as elected officials don't always have the best interests of communities at heart, a Wichita woman asserted, "People in the local area can say, this isn't right, and can do something about it a lot faster."

Indeed, in each of our conversations people suggested that local decision making would lead to greater accountability — not less. As a Pampa woman observed, "They have to live with their decision," explaining that local decision makers must live and work with those who are affected by their decisions.

People sense that most communities would make reasonable decisions when it comes to managing ecosystems. "There's a lot of responsible people out there ... I think we tend to forget that," remarked a La Junta man. In the Wichita discussion a man said, "I think there's still enough good in people that they can realize, 'hey, we're destroying this area. We're destroying this through our neglect.'" He continued, indicating that he thinks people would take responsible action.

Yet, as with property rights, people suggest a need for limits to local decision making. A La Junta man said that limits on local decision making are necessary to balance the interests of others:

It's beautiful to say you want local control, and we want all we can have. But we ought to be smart enough to know that we're not going to be allowed to screw up somebody else.

The bottom line for most people is not complete control for decision making at the local level; rather, in the words of this Pampa man, "[We want to be] included in the decisions that are made."

### Alternative Practices

"I think the only way to [change what people do] is to be persistent ... and spread as much knowledge as you can to as many people as you can," said a Great Falls woman. This woman and others suggest that long term change on ecosystem management will come about as people who live on the Great Plains discover alternative practices that enable them to hold on to what they value about their way of life. They suggest that any framework for the future should emphasize showing people what these alternatives might be.

People believe that landowners and others will be more likely to manage ecosystems in effective ways if they understand how. "We tend to categorize [people] at the lowest common denominator ... like, all farmers would be bad guys. If the situation was presented to them, they're going to do the right thing," asserted a La Junta woman. A Grand Island landowner's comments reinforce this point: "If I could have somebody suggest better ways to manage my property, I think I would be open-minded enough to do so."

People point to changes in their own behavior and evolving land use practices as evidence that highlighting alternatives for managing ecosystems is an effective way to bring about change. "I think we've educated the public a little bit ... I don't treat grubs [in my yard] until I see evidence that they're there ... because I'm concerned about [chemicals]," said a woman in the La Junta conversation. A Wichita man describe changes in his own personal behavior too, "I used to change the oil in vehicles and I'd take that old oil and dump it on a hedge or something that I wanted to kill. ... It's going to go right into my water. So now I bottle that stuff up and I've got containers of it waiting to go to the recycle center." And a woman in the Wichita discussion talked about how she and other landowners now do things differently than in the past:

Right after World War II, in the '40s, when the soldiers were coming back ... a lot of grassland was plowed up in eastern Colorado and western Kansas. We're (my family) guilty of it because we did some of that ourselves ... All of a sudden you've got storms and rain and it changes the entire country ... [Now] we're a little more careful about killing that grassland.

Residents suggest that educating people about alternatives must occur on many fronts — ranging from conversation with trusted friends to more formal programs by various institutions. A La Junta man explained that he thinks people will change practices if there is "more education from farmers coming out and [talking about] considering the land more and considering the animals more and considering their own well-being more." A Grand Island man suggested that agriculture companies have become important educators when he said, "With all the companies trying to educate the users better now, [we're] doing a lot better job

than ... ten years ago." And a Twin Valley man said he thinks differently about managing ecosystems through conversations with people he knows who work on ecosystem management issues:

I'll be the first one to say that I see no reason to do nothing ... but, I tell you what, there's someone down at the prairie lakes that will argue and make me believe if I talk to him for ten minutes.

Finally, participants suggest that targeting young people is an essential step toward long term change — a consistent link to people's desire to maintain a way of life that will enable future generations to flourish. "It needs to begin in the schools. [Young people] have got to be prepared for these problems," asserted a Grand Island woman. A Great Falls woman was equally as adamant when she said, "It's got to start with the kids. They are the ones that are [going] to make the difference."

### **Fair Compensation**

Great Plains residents expressed mixed feelings about efforts to take land out of production — whether by voluntary programs or through mandates — to protect ecosystems. If it comes to the point that taking land out of production seems necessary, participants agree that fair compensation to those whose incomes may be reduced is essential. "If the government stepped in and said you can't plow that land, they ... should in some way make some kind of restitutions to this person," said a La Junta woman when discussing ways to manage ecosystems. "I want to protect that land but [the landowner] needs to be compensated," said a Pampa woman at a similar point in her conversation. A Great Falls man was adamant when he said, "If the government doesn't want me to use my property, then there should be

some compensation for me to not use my property."

Some people suggest that fair compensation is an important way for everyone to share the responsibility of protecting ecosystems and wildlife. When asked what should happen if land is taken out of production to protect an endangered species a Pampa man said, "Then buy the land from [the landowner] so that the [animal] can live there at everybody's expense, not just his." A Wichita man echoed this view when he said, "As a taxpayer I kind of wince at [compensation] but, you know, I don't see any other way to do it ... That's how [the landowner] puts dinner on the table." And others believe that compensation — including incentive programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) — have been proven as effective ways to protect ecosystems. As a woman in Lisbon observed, "[CRP] is what has helped [slow down] wind and water [erosion]."

But many others believe that all too often landowners take advantage of programs that compensate them for taking land out of production — at considerable expense to taxpayers. A Great Falls man expressed this concern when he said, "I think the sad thing is that sometimes [payments are given to landowners] and then it's abused. They [say], 'leave me alone and let me do what I want to do or pay me the money.'" A woman whose family farms just outside of Wichita remarked, "A lot of times those payments go to people who live in the cities. They're not even the ones who live on the farms." A La Junta man noted concerns about the cost of such programs when he said, "It would be nice if [land] stayed in grass and so forth, but [that] is very expensive." A Pampa man was more adamant when he commented, "I don't think we should be spending money for somebody to grow native grass."

What people seem to seek when it comes to programs that would compensate those who are

financially threatened by changes in land use practices ties back to the ethic of rights and responsibilities. As a Great Falls man explained, "I guess I'm in favor of helping that person get it done but still hold them accountable for it." Indeed, people suggest that if there are greater expectations for people to take responsibility to manage their land in effective ways, fewer efforts to compensate those who make changes would be needed. A Lisbon woman conveyed this conclusion when she remarked, "If we each took care of our own ... use what we have and [use it] properly, there'll be something [left]."

### PEOPLE'S LANGUAGE FOR ECOSYSTEMS

In each of our eight conversations we explored the language people use and words that resonate with them when it comes to ecosystem management issues. The words and phrases that we explored ranged from ecosystems to community based environmental management to pollution to stewardship. Here is what we learned:

- ! ***Ecosystems*** does not resonate with people. There were one or two people in each group who could define the word but generally people do not use it easily and they do not think it captures the challenges they are wrestling with when it comes to these issues.
- ! ***Pollution*** is a word people in these conversations equate with garbage, landfills, and water quality. Only as they talk about ecosystem management issues do they use pollution to refer to other elements such as air.
- ! ***Community based environmental management, generationally sustainable futures***, and similar phrases were typically met with a shrug of the shoulders. People said that they agree with the ideas behind these types of phrases but that the phrases themselves are not language they would use. As a La Junta man said, "I get lost with things like that. . . use people's language."
- ! ***Preserve, conserve, and sustain*** are words that many people use on their own to talk about ecosystems and ecosystem management issues. These words, along with their derivatives, seem to describe the land use practices that people believe will enable them to maintain their way of life.
- ! ***Stewardship*** is a word that strongly resonated with participants in each of our eight conversations. People said that this word — more than any other — represents the values they believe must guide action on ecosystem management. It embodies what people value about their way of life and the relationship they feel to the land they live on. When people describe what stewardship means to them they talk about taking responsibility for one's actions, working with others for the common good, providing for their family, and maintaining and passing on what they have to the next generation.



## Section IV: Implications

This research and other recent work by The Harwood Group suggests that engaging people to find effective and sustainable actions on ecosystem management will be no easy task.

People who live on the Great Plains are struggling to find ways to maintain their way of life, and yet much of what they hear being discussed around ecosystems — such as taking land out of production in order to protect wildlife species — seems to place their way of life at even greater risk. These conversations suggest that people who live on the Great Plains do want to find ways to act — so long as it is done with respect for their way of life and their communities.

Great Plains residents are wrestling with deeply-felt, yet competing, values when it comes to ecosystem management. They articulate what amounts to a paradox: On the one hand, they feel dependent on land use practices that push ecosystems to their limits; on the other hand they believe some land use practices are compromising their water, health, and future. People recognize that their views are at times contradictory, but they clearly have not had the opportunity to work through these inherent tensions.

### Conditions for Engaging Great Plains Citizens

New conditions are needed to effectively engage people on issues such as those relating to ecosystem management. These conversations and past experience of The Harwood Group suggest what some of the conditions might be and offer important insights and cautions to those who seek to take action on ecosystems in the Great Plains.

#### #1 Tap people's aspirations to be stewards of the land.

People living on the Great Plains want to pass on the land they have come to love to their children and grandchildren, they want to be good neighbors, and they want to care for their families. Our conversations suggest that if people are engaged in ways that tap these aspirations they will be eager partners in finding more effective ways to manage ecosystems.

#### #2 Use people's icons for ecosystems.

When people who live on the Great Plains discuss ecosystems, they do not begin by talking about wildlife or land management. Instead, there is a set of words that serve as icons for people — much like in Windows computer software. In thinking about ecosystems, these icons are concerns for "health" and "water quality" and "stewardship." Once people "click on" these icons, a much broader range of concerns unfolds, from land use practices to protecting wildlife to measures of success. These icons are the key entry points for fully engaging people on ecosystem management issues.

#### #3 Do not begin efforts to engage people around protecting wildlife species.

These conversations suggest that talking about wildlife species is an *obstacle* to engaging people on ecosystem management issues. Great Plains residents resist strident calls to protect wildlife because such efforts seem to ignore the challenges that people face in maintaining

their way of life. Engaging the public on ecosystem issues should begin with talk about people and their communities and then move to implications for wildlife species.

**#4 Engage people in thinking about their community, state, and region.**

The Harwood Group's experience suggests that another obstacle that often stops people from working through tough issues is that they are asked to participate only as stakeholders — people who hold narrow views that relate to their individual interests. When it comes to ecosystems, these stakeholders often divide into landowners and environmental activists. These conversations reinforce The Harwood Group's experience that when people are engaged as citizens — people who have responsibilities to their communities and society, as well as to themselves and their families — they begin to look for new ways to act that take into account a broad range of views and interests.

**#5 Create safe opportunities for people to explore the paradox they face.**

People in these discussions make it clear that they seldom talk openly about the implications of many land use practices — including those they feel may be compromising their health. These conversations suggest that residents need opportunities to work through such issues and discover possibilities for action that do not push them into a corner — feeling as though they must "protect" themselves, their families, their neighbors and other people they may know, like farmers and ranchers. They need room to explore land

use practices and the implications for their way of life.

**#6 Help people define new measures of success.**

As people talked about ecosystem management issues in our conversations, they began to look for new ways to define success — ways that will enable them to maintain what they value about their way of life and sustain ecosystems. Residents were unclear on what these measures might be but expressed a sense that new ways of thinking are a key to unlock the paradox they face.

**#7 Draw on the notion of rights and responsibilities.**

People taking part in these conversations make it clear that they want more leeway to decide for themselves how to act on issues relating to ecosystems. But they do not believe that government is unimportant — or that land use regulations should be scrapped. Rather people are looking for a system of checks and balances that enable people to do what is best for themselves and their families *and* holds them accountable to manage their resources in responsible ways. These conversations suggest that people will be more willing to engage in finding ways to act on ecosystems if strategies are built around rights and responsibilities.

**#8 Find catalysts to engage people in thinking about change.**

People taking part in these conversations express a desire to find ways to effectively manage ecosystems. But they will resist working with organizations that they perceive to lack understanding or regard

for the challenges they face in maintaining what they value about their way of life. These conversations reinforce the experience of The Harwood Group that people are spurred to discuss and act on public concerns by individuals in their daily lives — neighbors, community leaders, business associates. Those who seek to engage people on ecosystem issues should find and tap these catalysts in people's lives as a way to reach those who live on the Plains.

### **Moving Ahead**

These conversations suggest that if Plains residents sense that those seeking to work on ecosystem issues understand the challenges people face and work *with* communities to address those challenges, they will engage on efforts to find new ways to act. Sometimes this engagement will not be easy. But as the Lisbon woman who was quoted earlier in this report remarked, "We want [the environment] to stay natural ... [so we] can be proud that we have an area like that in our state."

Creating conditions to engage people on ecosystem issues will require ongoing effort by institutions and organizations that seek to work on the Great Plains. The conditions that emerge from these conversations hinge on institutions holding a deep understanding of people's hopes, concerns, and values — which will require that they build a deep and ongoing relationship with the communities where they work.



## Appendix A: Methodology

The Harwood Group used focus groups — or group discussions — to conduct this study. Focus groups are an ideal research method for this type of endeavor. They provide citizens with the opportunity to think about various issues and topics over the course of a discussion, to talk about their views and feelings in their own words, and to describe the underlying assumptions behind their views. Moreover, this research technique helps to identify the language that citizens use to talk about specific topics; and focus groups allow citizens to react to new information and proposals during the course of a discussion. Such interaction is difficult — often impossible — to obtain through public opinion surveys.

There are, of course, limitations to group discussions. The research is qualitative. Thus the observations detailed in this report should not be mistaken for findings from a random sample survey. They are, technically speaking, hypotheses, or insights, that would need to be validated by reliable quantitative methods before being considered definitive. Still, insights are suggestive of how citizens approach the issue of ecosystems and the concerns they may have.

Each of the group discussions conducted for this study was comprised of approximately 12 men and women, representing a cross-section of age, education and income. Each group had at least three landowners.

The Harwood Group conducted one focus group on an Indian reservation (in Eagle Butte, South Dakota), where the group was comprised of men and women of Native American descent, representing a cross-section of age, education and income. From this group discussion we took away themes that were relevant and similar to those developed in the other seven focus groups on the Great Plains. However, insofar as Native Americans living on the Great Plains hold distinct

concerns, the limited scope of our research prevents us from saying more about this group in particular.

To ensure geographic diversity in this study, eight focus groups were conducted across the Great Plains, each recruited by a professional public opinion research firm. Each group meeting lasted about two hours and was led by a trained moderator and audio-taped. Participants were promised that their names would not appear in this report, in order to respect their privacy.

Focus group discussions were held in the following communities.

<u>Location/Population</u>	<u>Date</u>
Grand Island, Nebraska pop. 39,386	Dec. 20, 1994
Lisbon, North Dakota pop. 2,177	Dec. 20, 1994
Twin Valley, Minnesota pop. 837	Dec. 21, 1994
Great Falls, Montana pop. 55,097	Jan. 12, 1995
Wichita, Kansas pop. 304,011	July 17, 1995
La Junta, Colorado pop. 7,896	July 22, 1995
Pampa, Texas pop. 19,959	July 23, 1995
Eagle Butte, South Dakota pop. 3,000	Nov. 1, 1995



## **Appendix B: Great Plains Partnership Members**

Western Governors' Association

The Nature Conservancy

International Association of Fish and  
Wildlife Agencies

Province of Manitoba

State of Minnesota

Mni Sose Intertribal Water Rights Coalition

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

U.S. Department of Agriculture

U.S. Department of Interior

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Farm Bureau

Groundwater Foundation

National Association of Conservation Districts

National Cattlemen's Association

University of Nebraska

Western Regional Council

Local partnerships