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**Embracing Values, Conflict and Diverse Perspective:
A Grounded Strategy for Public Involvement in Natural Resources Planning**

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It is currently desired, accepted and often mandated that public input should be considered in environmental decision-making. During the summer of 2003, Minnesota's forest industries, environmental organizations, local communities and citizens responded in mass to a call for written public comments concerning USDA Forest Service draft plans for the Chippewa and Superior National Forests. This research looks at the comments to help gain an understanding in the facilitation of communications and data that flows from the public into forest planning situations. Public insight is interpreted in an effort to address such questions as:

- What are acceptable roles for an involved public and for natural resources decision-makers?
- Does the involved public desire consensus building exercises that seek a compromise (of their convictions?)
- In order to make public involvement meaningful, should participants be held accountable?
- Is it possible or even desirable to earn the involved public's trust?

Collaborative decision-making that seeks diverse insight ultimately requires diverse input from diverse participants that reach diverse conclusions. In making a distinction between conclusions and rationale, the insights and values behind the conclusions becomes clear. By focusing on this rationale, decision-makers can start to embrace a world of complex conflicting decision criteria. As individuals, if we can take ownership of diverse perspectives, including conflicting rationale, we can internally address our own conflicting conclusions. Not by reaching a compromise of others conclusions, but by arming ourselves with diverse rationale. As decision-makers, we are able to make better decisions. And more importantly, are better able to address the often troubling consequences of those decisions.

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