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## Book Review: *Embracing Watershed Politics* By Edella Schlager and William Blomquist

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## BOOK REVIEWS

**Embracing Watershed Politics.** By Edella Schlager and William Blomquist. Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2008. xiii + 220 pp. Maps, notes, references, index. \$55.00 cloth.

Protection and management of watersheds is critical in maintaining the water quality and quantity necessary to support the economy, recreational opportunities, and public health in Great Plains communities. Using cases such as the Platte River Basin and others, Edella Schlager and William Blomquist evaluate how watershed management decisions should be made under a wide range of constraints. Participation boundaries, they argue, should not necessarily be made with the assumption that disputes are between national and local interests; rather, the issue is accommodating as many interests as possible. While the preferred decision-making rule is consensus, conflict may require that votes be taken necessitating rules that limit the influence of bare majorities and single dissenters. Accountability is most often provided by compliance of public employees and officials to laws and federal and state constitutions, although it can also be established through hierarchical organizational structure, professional norms, and electoral checks.

Comprehensive management is made difficult by additional factors. Watershed organizations must make decisions despite limited information, uncertainty, incommensurate options, and conflicting agency missions. They must also respond to demands for a variety of services that need to be delivered on different scales. For example, large water organizations that build and manage water projects produce water for a variety of smaller organizations which, in turn, provide water to smaller groups of customers. Thus, a large number of organizations typically coexist with each other, are differentiated by functions and scale, and, consequently, are able to represent a diverse array of interests. Watershed governance includes a variety of institutions that can be described as polycentric with nested and overlapping jurisdictions. Federalism provides a system in which these polycentric governments can be organized and coordinated to respond to different local situations. In such a fragmented system, coordination and turf wars can be very real problems. The authors caution, however, against assuming that

decentralized governance will necessarily inhibit cooperation to protect watersheds. Even with comprehensive governing institutions, there are bound to be different interests with competing goals that need to be coordinated. The more fragmented polycentric governance may be better at representing interests and no worse at facilitating cooperation. There is no one-size-fits-all solution; rather, different governance structures should and do emerge.

The analysis presented in each chapter is focused on concepts that are examined and applied in a case study to explain the existing system of governance. Although the concepts are not integrated into a framework, the authors' careful use of concepts provides insights into watershed decision making. Just as concepts are not integrated into a grand framework, there is no prescription for the best type of governance. This may disappoint those seeking *the* answer to watershed governance, but the book provides realistic analyses of the complex management problems of watersheds. Perhaps in the future, additional research will more definitely link governance structures to types of watershed problems, different locales, and desired environmental outcomes. For the present, however, Schlager and Blomquist have provided a thoughtful examination of watershed governance that can be read and appreciated by scholars across multiple disciplines. **Sandra K. Davis**, *Department of Political Science, Colorado State University*.