

Collaborating With Power: Extractive Industry Involvement in Collaborative Water Governance in Canada



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The Changing Face of Water Governance



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- Increasing use of “new” governance approaches that often rest uncomfortably in existing socioeconomic and political structures
- Expectations that new actors will be able to meaningfully shape processes and outcomes

Key Question

How are collaborative water governance processes and outcomes affected by the presence and participation of major natural resource industries?



Conceptual Foundations: Collaborative Water Governance, Power, and Environmental Politics

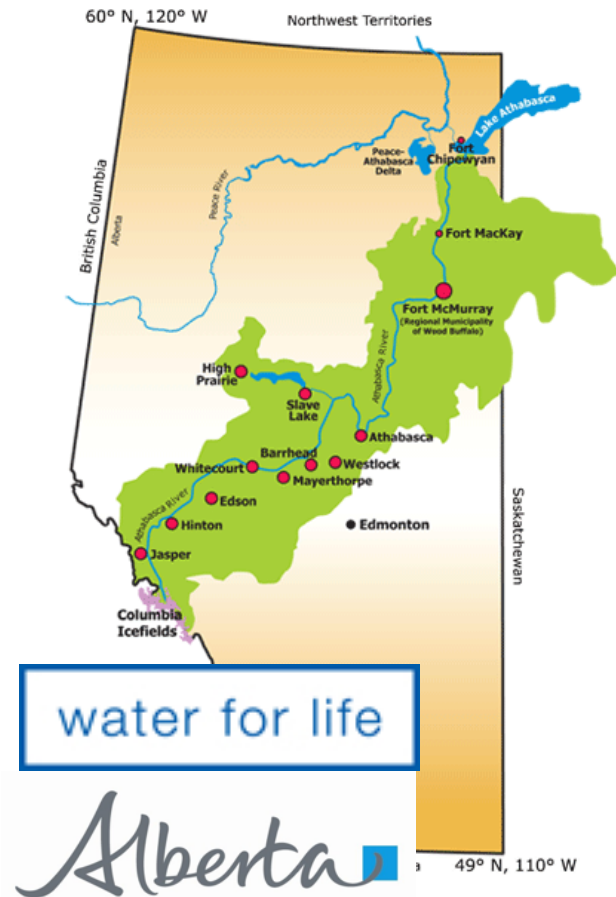


- Collaboration is characterized by inclusion, sharing and emergence
- Power as conceptualized in instrumental, structural and discursive dimensions
- Industry is usually a privileged actor in environmental policy making

Case Study Analysis in the Athabasca River Watershed



The Athabasca Watershed Council



Access to Decision Makers

- Strong working relationships between government and industry
 - Limited access for other groups
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“They just go the back door, straight through the cocktail party shmooze circuit and they talk to all the decision makers at [that] level. They don't need to function down here with us, the great unwashed. There's always been this open door policy to corporate power.”
(Staff 1)





Technical, Financial and Institutional Capacities

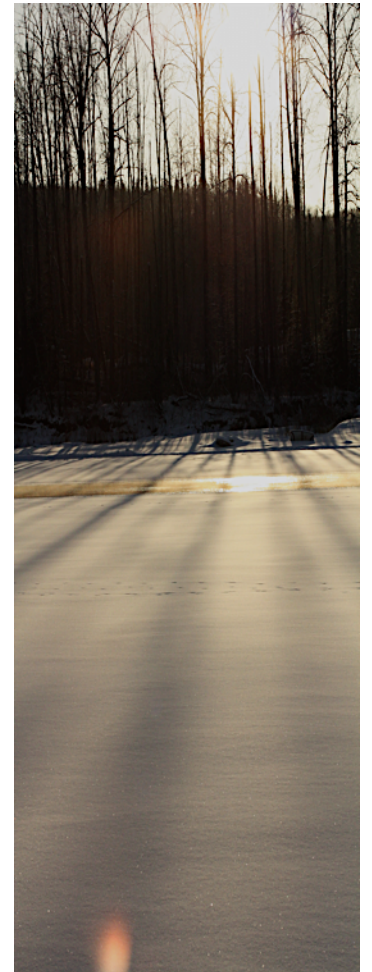
- Few efforts to level imbalances within the process
- Significant imbalances in capacity
 - Self-censoring of under-resourced actors
 - Explicit contestation of knowledge and information

*“They’ll hear the science and right away think, well, I’m not a scientist and I didn’t go to college or university so I’m not going to participate in this part of the conversation.”
(Industry 2)*

Industry Motivations for Participation

- Defense of business interests
 - Social license and legitimacy
 - Opportunity to influence knowledge
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*“For those with a limited technical capacity, you're teaching them – teaching is a strong word, that's not even the right word – but you're helping them to understand the basis for whatever the issue is.”
(Industry 1)*



Industry Impact and Commitment

- Impact was a function of problem framing and government commitment
- Industry did not send representatives with any influence

*"It might be a public relations matter of, 'Send Bill because Bill can manage these people and make them go away.' The CAO may never know that the corporations bought into this collaborative governing structure and that there's a public expectation."
(Government 6)*



Findings: Power and Ability to Influence

- In situations where major resource industries can operate beyond local processes, collaboration is unlikely to effectively address important issues
- Efforts at the local scale cannot correct for larger resource and power imbalances
- An absence of visible contestation on some issues may mask power that has been exerted behind the scenes



Implications

- Collaboration in such situations can offer industry an opportunity to entrench the status quo, potentially disempowering civil actors
- Attention to power must extend beyond the process scale to include all stages of the policy cycle
- Collaboration is not appropriate in all situations





Research Funding

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de Loë, R.C., (Principle Investigator). 2010-2014. Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Standard Research Grant 410-2011-2294

de Loë, R.C., (Principle Investigator). 2010-2014. Canadian Water Network NCE-4000-2010

Relevant Publications

Brisbois, M. C., & de Loë, R. C. (2016). Power in collaborative approaches to governance for water: A systematic review. *Society & Natural Resources*, 29(7), 775-790.

Brisbois, M. C., & de Loë, R. C. (2016). State roles and motivations in collaborative approaches to water governance: A power theory-based analysis. *Geoforum*, 74, 202-212.

Brisbois, M. C., & de Loë, R. C. (2016). Natural resource industry involvement in collaboration for water governance: influence on processes and outcomes in Canada. *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, 1-18.

