Governor Dan Evans: A Legacy of Environmental Public Leadership in the Northwest

Environmental leadership can be among the most complex and frustrating areas of public management in the United States. Divergent issues, a wide array of stakeholders with opposing interests and scientific uncertainty associated with the implementation and maintenance of environmental legislation make strategic management essential yet difficult.

In the Pacific Northwest, environmental issues are often considered to have more inherent public value in comparison to other regions of the United States. Iconic symbols of our natural environment inhabit the Northwest, such as salmon and bald eagles (both endangered species), and famous landscapes, such as Mount Rainer and the Columbia River Valley, generate western frontier idealism. Modern environmental challenges in Washington such as dam removal; the repeal of the roadless rule; Seattle transportation improvements; urban sprawl and population growth; and air/water quality issues must be addressed effectively. However, a majority of industry in the Northwest is reliant on natural resources, such as timber and fisheries, often creating conflict between achieving economic growth and sustaining a healthy environmental ecosystem base. Additionally, historical tribal rights and treaties, involving controversies like the Makah Tribe whaling offshore the Olympic Peninsula, create another important facet to be considered.

Therefore, environmental leadership must develop innovative approaches to conquer these fragmentations by seeking common ground and accounting for public input. Effective environmental leadership must have adaptive foresight, innovative structure and collaborative management construction to uphold the public value framework of the Pacific Northwest’s natural environment. During his tenure as Washington Governor, Daniel J. Evans exhibited these three characteristics which remain fundamental to current environmental leadership.
Adaptive Foresight

Governor Evans applied adaptive foresight to develop a concrete public structure that managed the region’s unique natural resources. Integrating a personal commitment and passion for the environment with growing public consensus for a government entity to resolve environmental disputes, Governor Evans used strategic leadership and moral clarity to adopt policy objectives. To address the public demand for environmental protection, Governor Evans worked in coordination with non-government organizations (particularly the Washington Environmental Council) and convened a special legislative session in 1970. Consequently, Governor Evans succeeded as a public manager that collaboratively explored with stakeholders to discover, define and produce the public value of the environment.\(^1\) The Washington State Department of Ecology was formed to cohesively manage the state’s environmental resources in a special legislative session that lasted just 32 days. As a result of Governor Evan’s foresight, “Washington was the first state to create a Department of Ecology and preceded the establishment of the federal Environmental Protection Agency. As the department built its reputation it became the model used by many other states. [They] were asked by the national administration and many governors how to develop a good environmental department.”\(^2\) By employing an adaptive vision, Evans utilized the momentum of the environmental movement and public pressure to create a lasting government body that remains recognized as a leader among environmental state agencies.

Innovative Structure

The structure applied to environmental management must be comprehensive to satisfy the needs of diverse constituents, “in which a shifting set of change advocates work in multiple forums, arenas and courts to remedy a public problem.”\(^3\) Washington’s geography and climate create distinctive environmental challenges. For example, agricultural areas in Eastern Washington must confront water rights issues while Western Washington must face dilemmas involving population growth and land use. As a result, visionary public sector environmental leadership must have influential citizen partnership and civic engagement to attain shared values.
that meet diverse interests to create effective policy. This leadership mechanism is beyond-term, meaning the structure should be enduring for future generations. While this innovative structure is perhaps best revealed in the Alternatives for Washington initiative, Governor Evan’s environmental leadership also provided inclusive citizen participation to address the state’s future direction. By using a transparent leadership style that truly accounted for public interest and not solely governmental policy objectives, Governor Evans formulated a process for the redefinition of the Governor’s Office authorizing environment. This achievement is represented by the expedited passage of five out of the six priority environmental bills during the 1970 special legislative session, with the sixth priority, the shorelines bill, passed one year later.

**Collaborative Management Construction**

In developing a valuable environmental management structure for Washington’s natural resources, Governor Evans mobilized citizen support and exercised negotiation skills to convene diverse stakeholders; ranging from business managers, tribal leaders and local government officials. This collaboration proved successful in designing a strategic mission for the state’s environmental management to suit constituent needs and attain citizen support. Similar to the creation of the Washington community college system and the Evergreen State College, Governor Evans used collective input to factor demographics, capacity and public value to produce a durable environmental agency. Additionally, Governor Evans blended a sense of realistic urgency with moral responsibility to address the incremental environmental effects that had not been a priority. As stated during his speech to the Washington Environmental Council in 1969, “the problem, of course, with a deteriorating environment is that we never see it as a day to day priority… one minor increment of pollution in our air or one more lake lost among hundreds, one more acre of scenic view property removed from public access – these are small losses in a time marked by some pretty major problems.” Although the late 1960s experienced massive and disruptive political movements in which the environment often failed to be a predominant concern, Governor Evans prioritized the public value of the environment to draw effective
transformation in its management. By assessing stakeholder positions and using citizenship inclusion, the Washington Department of Ecology was collaboratively established and accepted, despite the increasing responsibility it placed upon citizens, industry, tribes and government agencies.

Conclusion

Utilizing an adaptive vision, innovative structure and inclusive management construction, Governor Evans achieved national leadership for Washington’s role in the complex issues of environmental protection and management. Governor Evans environmental leadership should be recognized as visionary, political and ethical in its achievements; as Crosby and Bryson state, “visionary leadership shapes the meaning of public problems and inspires commitment to proposed solutions. Political leadership achieves adoption and implementation of policies, programs and projects incorporating the solutions. Ethical leadership helps settle disputes of those policies, programs and projects…” By recognizing the environment as a public good, Evans shaped and defined its value through the incorporation of these three complementary leadership approaches. Thus Governor Evans transcended environmental challenges, by promoting the citizens of Washington to reconcile opposing environmental interests among themselves individually and their communities, specifically “the group whose well-being is most crucial, the content of the common good, and means of achieving it.” As a result, Governor Evans created a legacy that remains idealistic and effective for the Pacific Northwest to preserve its precious environment and cultural public value.

5 Crosby, Barbara C. and John M. Bryson. Leadership for the Common Good. 108.
6 Crosby, Barbara C. and John M. Bryson. Leadership for the Common Good. 193.