The Politics of Local Water Management

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Rationalizing the Allocation of California Water Workshop
April 21, 2016
Dougherty Valley
Dougherty Valley:
Politics of Water and Land Use

• March 1991: Contra Costa County begins considering 11,000-home development
  – EBMUD refuses to expand USB
  – County names EBMUD the likely provider in EIR
Dougherty Valley: Politics of Water and Land Use

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• Environmentalists fought development through EBMUD more than through county
  – Lower campaign costs
  – Alameda County overlap
Dougherty Valley: Politics of Water and Land Use

• 1994: Pro-development coalition wins control of EBMUD board
  – Water a less salient public issue
  – Little participation from Alameda County

• EBMUD agrees to annex Dougherty Valley if no alternative provider by 2002
Dougherty Valley: Politics of Water and Land Use

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  – Needs approval from its wholesaler, Zone 7
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• 1995: Fight shifts to “shadow agency” Zone 7
“There are two very different views of what Zone 7 should be. On the one hand, some people believe it should be a utility—providing as much water as anyone wants, no matter the cost. People at the other extreme view the agency as the ultimate growth management tool. In reality it’s neither. I think we should educate people that there is a finite amount to this resource. Then there are two options: we can stop developing, or we can spend more money for more water after getting an approval from voters.”
Dougherty Valley: Politics of Water and Land Use

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“The way I explain this to people is if East Bay MUD supplies this project, we will have the increased air quality impacts, the increased traffic impacts on this hand. On this hand, we have the increased air quality impacts, traffic, and $100 million.”
Lessons on the Politics of Local Water Management

• Water linked to local community identity.

• Local officials see themselves as protectors of that community identity.

• Local elections are dominated by those with strong preferences.

• Fragmentation allows many points of entry.

• Fragmentation solidifies positions.

• Don't try to build in the Bay Area.
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How to Promote Cooperation in Groundwater Management?

**Step 1**
Form local Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA)
June 30, 2017

**Step 2**
Adopt Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP)
Jan. 31, 2022

**Step 3**
GSA achieves groundwater sustainability goal
20 years after GSP adoption
Mechanisms to Facilitate Local Cooperation

- Government formation
- Annexation / boundary change
- Self-governing institutions
- Interlocal agreements
Mechanisms to Facilitate Local Cooperation

• Where cooperation problems are severe and there is more incentive to free ride or defect, more costly mechanisms may be most efficient (Feiock and Scholz 2009).

• But must keep in mind the additional transaction costs that are introduced by representation.
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Metropolitan Planning Organizations as a Model?

• Charged with establishing a planning process that is a “cooperative, continuous, and comprehensive framework for making transportation investment decisions in metropolitan areas.”

• Responsible for allocating federal and state transportation funds.
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Factors that Promote Regional Orientation among MPOs

• Lower % elected officials as board members
• Larger staff
• Independent staff
• More state involvement in setting goals and agenda

(Gerber and Gibson 2009; Mullin, Niemeier, and Feiock n.p.)
Conclusions

- Localities find ways to coordinate activities and solve collective action problems.

- High levels of fragmentation may interfere.

- Don't ignore incentives created by representation and delegation.

- More formal local arrangements may improve ease of trade at other scales.
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Thank you

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