

Ecology 199 Notes, 2/2/06

Ruth Ann Grissom, speaker

Ruth Ann grew up in the area, moved away, then wanted to go back. She has both an insider and outsider perspective, so she is able to bridge these two perspectives, but feels she's not representative of either one as either community might perceive her. She's been working on conservation and land management in the area, although she isn't being paid for it; she has become a major person in conservation work in the Uwharries. Has been involved in fire management and restoration of the Piedmont Prairie (including Schweinitz' sunflower and longleaf pine), and has been working with Environmental Defense on that.

Voices of the Uwharries – Ruth Ann and Gabe worked on from 2001-2003. Includes interviews we all worked with on our coding assignment this week. This documentary was put together for the people in the Uwharries. It was based on audio interviews we did (we used the transcribed form). It has the voices of local people describing their views of the land, and what it means to them.

The community is very close-knit. People have many memories that have taken place here, so it holds lots of meaning for them.

Most people used to make a living off the land. Lots of farming, and raising of livestock for each family's own food. Work began at an early age for many. There was once lots of farms and sawmills, and now there aren't any farms or sawmills. There was also once a lot of gold mining there. (One time there were even three stills for liquor, and a dog got drunk—a very good story.)

The landscape has changed a lot during the last century. Once had so much land that people could grow timber continuously, but now the plots are so small that there's a lot of clearcutting. Also, there used to be lots of longleaf pine, but not any more. There have always been mixed pine and hardwood forests, but now, fields that were once crop fields have been planted over entirely in pines, so it looks like a corn field might (a monoculture). People who are cutting down mixed stands are replanting them in pines. The clearcutting is creating a lot of erosion, and increasing the flash flood potential of the land. A lot of people are opposed to clearcutting, but recognize that they need the lumber to build houses (they won't build them from metal or other materials). Another person mentioned that there's an overproduction of timber though.

Decline of farming has led to people moving away, which has had effects on the closeness of the community. Children have had to drive off to work; not enough farming to keep everyone farming. One person mentioned he would like his kids and grandkids to live closer, but recognizes they can't because of their education, background, and goals in life, and said that would be impossible. Another said people don't sit together and cooperate as much as they did years ago.

Hunting and land ownership - people used to hunt without paying attention to property lines. Nobody would care whose land others were hunting on.

Feelings about government land – some people like it and some don't. The streams are public, so anyone can go there; the landowners may own the land, but not the stream. There is a conflict of wanting to keep the river in as good condition as the land they own.

The future of the Uwharries – People want more industry in the area for economic growth, but they are also coming together and take action against developments they don't want in their community. (This is something we could discuss – what kinds of development would allow both economic growth as well as meeting their other concerns.) One person was worried about having more houses built along the river. Another wanted to preserve big tracts of land to supplement what's already in the national forest. Wanted more restaurants, bed and breakfasts, coffee shops, and recreation, and thought logging could fit in if it's low impact and sustainable. However, she said in her lifetime she would probably never see the forests

as they were when she was a kid, but hopefully others will in the future. Another person was against further development so things wouldn't change any more.

-end of documentary-

Ruth Ann thinks this documentary represents the views of the larger community. This documentary was presented back to the community, and met with positive, favorable responses (assuming that the people that showed up at the public meeting were representative of the community).

In the region, there is a lot of timber company presence. Jordan Lumber employs lots of people in the county, so it's very important to the local economy.

The "community" that has been mentioned in this interview is all within a 5-mile radius. Ophir is in the center. Two miles north is Eliazer (a ½ mile on the other side of the county line). Eldorado is nearby, and then the Uwharrie River runs through everything. All of this is in the Uwharrie River valley, just west of Badin Lake.

The nearest big development (Uwharrie Point) is socioeconomically removed from the Community, so this isn't affecting things too much. There are lots of people living there and commuting from there to the outside, and this area has experienced population growth. However, Ruth Ann says the area of the Community is beginning to have a larger percentage of poor and uneducated people because others have the means to move away. Crime and drugs is increasing.

Some solutions for people to earn more money here: landowners leasing the land, being hunting guides, and timber (though it needs improvement as far as sustainability). Farming will likely not come back because the land is marginal; it's better forest land than farm land (hilly and rocky).

People want more capital from surrounding regions, but don't really want to open up their area to affluent recreation types of people who may not share the same kinds of values.

Last points: Ruth Ann recommends that we should be conscious of our role as outsiders. If we say something that doesn't go over well with the local people, the first thing they will think about is our status as outsiders. In the past, they have strongly resisted changes they don't like. We should come in with a posture of learning from the community instead of teaching the community. There should be a local support for what we do.

Also, people are collecting subsidies on all the pines they have on their properties (~\$25/acre/year) to take erodible land that was once used for agriculture and plant pines on it. It would help if people could be paid to do the right thing with their land (for conservation) instead of the wrong thing.

Scott Morrow has been able to see an increase in recent years of increased flash flooding in areas where there aren't enough woody buffers compared to areas where there are lots of pines and hardwoods near the streams. If riparian areas are clearcut, then people likely won't want to canoe down there, which could lead to a vicious cycle. Urban areas have a required buffer of 100 feet from streams, but in rural areas, it's 50 feet, ridiculously.