City & Community

Conservation as a Territorial Ideology

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Growth machine theory has typically interpreted successful contemporary conservation efforts as rare victories of elite liberal factions to protect their own use values or, alternatively, as greenwashing for growth. By studying an elite coalition dedicated to land conservation in the South Carolina Lowcountry, I probe whether growth theory can be used to understand conservation as a territorial ideology in its own right. Intensive interviewing and qualitative content analysis reveal that the conservation coalition uses backstage networking to promote conservation as a homegrown civic virtue. Comparing newspaper coverage of conservation and development projects opposed by the coalition, I demonstrate that the conservation coalition's policing of conservation-related profiteering has occasionally put it at odds with the larger public and its own ideological framing. The conservation coalition's inversion of dominant cultural scripts of growth promotion demonstrates that growth theory can be productively applied to unusual cases.

INTRODUCTION

Growth champions writing letters to the editor of Charleston, South Carolina's *Post & Courier* have their work cut out for them. Printed letters run heavily in favor of more conservation of the marshes, barrier islands, longleaf pine forests, and swamps in the coastal Lowcountry centered around Charleston. Those letters favorable to growth that do get printed tend to make their arguments in terms of opposition to rampant, unplanned land conservation. The director of a property rights organization denies that he is strictly progrowth: "I am not promoting unbridled growth but rather well-planned growth geared towards the benefit of the entire community" (Nix, 2005). Another letter criticizing the "growth of preserved land along the coast" ends with a similar acknowledgement: "No one wants to fill in the whole coastal area, but someone needs to do some long-range thinking on the hidden costs of overprotection" (Wright, 2005).

This article argues that, through the strategic efforts of a coalition of local elites and community organizations, conservation dominates civic discourse in the Lowcountry region. This is not to say that conservation is unchallenged by progrowth interests, but that advocates of growth like those cited above must qualify their enthusiasms—and frame their claims in terms of limiting the unintended consequences associated with the pervasive spread of conservation throughout the region. While the coalition has raised a significant challenge to growth outside the urban core, I argue that their conservation advocacy in the public sphere may ultimately have succeeded so well that it has hindered

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their ability to police the motives of those seeking to benefit from conservation. My approach illustrates (1) how conservation in this case is simultaneously a rich source of identity for elites and a territorial ideology promoted to the general public, and (2) how these interrelated projects might conflict. Dismissing the conservation coalition case as elite exceptionalism or as a liberalized growth strategy prevents a true appreciation of both the challenges faced by growth opponents, and also of the robust explanatory potential of growth machine theory.

GROWTH MACHINE THEORY AS A CHALLENGE TO ECONOMIC DETERMINISM

The year 2007 brought with it numerous celebrations and tributes marking the twentieth anniversary of Logan and Molotch's award-winning text *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place* (Eastern Sociological Society, 2007; Shlay, 2007). If the 1987 publication indicated "the maturing of the critical urban-sociology paradigm" (Feagin, 1987, p. 517) begun with Molotch's 1976 article on the "City as a Growth Machine," the 2007 publication of a 20th anniversary edition signaled that *Urban Fortunes* had become a landmark of contemporary urban and community sociology. By defining an explicitly urban agenda and melding community ethnography with comparative political economy, Logan and Molotch constructed a supple model of urban politics based on local actors' struggles to control the use and exchange value of real property. Indeed, their growth machine theory explains neatly so much of what has come after—cities' headlong rush to build fad attractions like stadiums or aquariums; municipal annexation fights; smart growth and new urbanism—that it has become a standard model for understanding urban communities and the "system of places" (Logan and Molotch, 1987, p. 15) around the globe (Jonas and Wilson, 1999).

Ironically, reification of growth as the driving force in urban politics has counteracted one of the most trenchant aspects of the original theory—its attempt to break away from the "excessively deterministic" tendencies of other urban theories, whether rooted in neoclassical economic or neo-Marxian approaches (Logan and Molotch, 1987, p. vii). While claiming that the growth ethic is a pervasive historical phenomenon, Logan and Molotch are nevertheless careful to assert repeatedly in their 1987 text that social context is key: "growth machines . . . take different forms and have different impacts depending upon time and contexts" (p. 13). An emphasis on constitutive social contexts is also essential to counteracting the hegemonic consensus on growth promoted by both rentiers and academics; the authors repeatedly assert that there is not "necessarily" any inherent positive public benefit to growth or any natural market "optimization" therein (pp. 2, 34, 43).

Even more importantly for this article, the authors also contest the conflation of community organizations with progressive urbanity—arguing that organizations should be considered "urban" only if they orient their activities to contests over use and exchange values, and that urban community organizations, while usually "liberal," can also be "racist and reactionary" in terms of political orientation (p. 38).[1] As such, property associations and tenants' groups have much in common analytically. The authors even go so far as to say that strategic alliances may benefit either side:

> The success or failure of entrepreneurs in their rent competition with other places sometimes depends upon their ability to put a wide array of community units

> behind them. Similarly, the survival and prosperity of neighborhood organizations may require them to join with at least some of their potential entrepreneurial adversaries. Thus local growth machines may successfully mobilize, through the vehicle of neighborhood organization, the affectional ties of a residential community, and do so on behalf of exchange goals. Conversely, communities of sentiment may conceivably enlist the aid of a segment of land-based entrepreneurs, who may, for example, conclude that the survival of some "local color" will enhance their new development nearby. Part of the tension of the urban drama consists in this making and unmaking of coalitions among neighborhood and entrepreneurial actors. (p. 39)

Initially, then, Logan and Molotch were careful both to stress that growth opponents were no more invested with intrinsic moral virtue than growth itself, and that cultural and emotional concerns about the character of neighborhood life might drive urban politics in unpredictable directions.

The social control that civic entrepreneurs and growth champions exert over local residents is not totalizing; indeed, due to the stratification of places within the larger system, some growth elites are doomed to fail. While Logan and Molotch are concerned with an "interest-driven social construction of cities," they "wince at the determinism that excludes human volition, cultural folkways, and political activities as real factors in human affairs" (1987, p. 8). Reducing urban politics to nothing but abstract economic interests is untenable for those who assert the agency of challengers:

> In this book we have tried to show how the running trends, if left more or less on their present course, will work themselves out. But people *can* capture control over the places in which they live and critically judge the value of what they make and the community conditions under which they produce it. (Logan and Molotch, 1987, p. 296, emphasis theirs)

Nevertheless, tension within growth machine theory between a perspective that emphasizes indeterminacy produced by social context, moral ambiguity, and the agency of challengers and one that simultaneously proposes a system that regularly produces unequal results has evolved to favor the latter over the former. This preference has expressed itself in a hardening determinism regarding the moral turpitude of parochial elites and the absolute entrenchment of hegemonic growth logics. Because Logan and Molotch's demonstration of trends has proved so prescient, these trends have become, in some senses, iron laws. In contemporary formulations, the city "as" a growth machine has become the city "is" a growth machine:

> Virtually every city (and state) government is a growth machine and long has been. (Molotch, 1999, p. 249)

> An American city is first and foremost a "growth machine." (Domhoff, 2006a, p. 51)

Additionally, the attempt to define a political economy of place has brought with it a distinctively moral perspective on growth elites. Neo-Marxian structural perspectives on urban growth have identified "revengeful and reactionary viciousness" (xviii) on the part of elites in pursuit of capital (Smith, 1996). Molotch avoids terms like "revanchism," but exemplifies the "us/them" perspective common in contemporary accounts:

> The growth machine notion identifies, hopefully in a fairly humane way, who and what the "enemy" is—almost to the point of listing addresses. That enemy is made concrete, present, and not us. (1999, p. 265)

While developers are framed—often convincingly and with cause—as enemies by neighborhood challengers, the tendency among theorists themselves to categorize elites in this way has two consequences. First, it reduces our ability to analyze a range of elite motives as varied as those of the neighborhood actors they typically oppose (if challengers can be racist reactionaries, it stands to reason that elites can claim progressive identities). Second, it prevents a nuanced analysis of the unique "moral economies" through which ideologies of resource decision making are justified and obligations of distribution are negotiated (Ruppert, 2006; see also Walton, 1992). As emphasized in this analysis, growth machine theorists must be attentive to the extent to which elites themselves deploy claims about the relative morality and legitimacy of local and national political actors' interests. Finally, if growth has become an iron law, then the ability of challengers to supercede the growth hegemony—even in just a few cases—becomes a pipe dream.

TAKING GROWTH CHALLENGERS SERIOUSLY: THE MORAL ECONOMIES OF PLACE-BASED IDENTITY PROJECTS

Those studying "human volition" and "cultural folkways" in the politics of place since the 1980s have, not surprisingly, investigated cases where growth maximization is enacted in unique ways or coexists with other motivations (Gieryn, 2000). These scholars have documented ideological projects richer and more complex than simply linking growth with the public good as a way of justifying growth interests. For these scholars, ownership of place and the ability to frame and negotiate particular understandings of place are part of larger macro-scale processes like colonialism and reunification (Jordan, 2006; Smith, 2006). Because such projects inform and are informed by national, regional, local, ethnic, racial, and gender-based identity projects, they are invested with many different meanings for different audiences—not irrelevant to class interests and class formation, but by no means restricted to these. As such, many processes and institutions beyond growth machines can be consequential mechanisms in the making and remaking of places.

Even neo-Marxian structuralists like Smith have attended to the ways in which capitalists did not simply remake cities, but constructed ideologies that justified urban redevelopment and enabled the reframing of urban living for elite audiences. Smith documents how the "territorial line" (1996, p. xv) of gentrification in urban neighborhoods was accompanied by a narrative of reclaiming the urban "frontier"—a cultural script just as powerful today as in Turner's time. Similarly, Cox reviews the ideological manifestations of growth promotion over time (1999). Critics of Smith such as Caulfield have asserted that economic determinist accounts don't explain the where and why of urban gentrification, and place too little emphasis on the agency of those actually moving to and living in urban neighborhoods. Narratives of place and identity are more than just a tacked-on rationale: citing Castells, Caulfield proposes attention to the "collective social practices that are oriented to the forms, the functions, and the meanings of cities and city landscapes and are irreducible to the totalizing workings of capital or the

dynamics of class.... [These] may function as agents of critical urban change" (1994, p. 137).

Scholars investigating these meaning-centered processes have identified a number of powerful narratives accompanying place-centered politics, both within and outside of the urban core. Accounts of power that reduce its wielding to the bare-knuckled pursuit of capital ignore the other ways in which power can be deployed in service of moral economies of place—to rewrite histories, define dominant ideologies, and shape identities. The victors in these battles don't just own the land, they own the stories told over it, and fight just as aggressively to control these stories as they do to control their properties. The production of stories about growth is itself an economic project: California "grew so rapidly and self-consciously that observers could witness history being produced by commercial interests for purposes of profit" (Walton, 2001, p. xvi). Ideological constructions of places and their histories are certainly political claims, but rather than being predetermined by class position and property interests, they are rich amalgams of existing logics and narratives and the contingencies of local circumstances.

As attempts to prevent the transformation of place that inevitably transform place themselves, conservation and preservation efforts are particularly charged sites to look for these incomplete and complicated negotiations of "affectional ties," social memory, and identity. Certainly, economic interests have played a role in elite efforts to engage in place-based projects of memorialization and preservation, but other concerns—such as anxieties about shifting status and demographic changes—are as central here as particular investments in real property (Norkunas, 1993, 2002). For Bell (1994), the construction of place can be an attempt to escape social and class politics. Preserving nature is as much an identity project for British fox hunters as it is an economic one.

Buying and selling of property or intensifying its use is certainly central in these accounts, but so are extractive and recreational uses that draw on folkways, sentiment, and invented traditions. Efforts to demarcate and preserve social places are variously ways to escape political and economic changes, or to negotiate a community's collective understanding on the landscape. Growth activities are inextricably related to other activities such as hunting through the people and communities who engage in both. Not least, interests in real property coexist and often conflict with other economic, class, and community interests regarding the "right" ways to act with respect to personal property, community resources, and other community members. Conservation is not simply a static principle, but a potential repository for a wide-ranging set of cultural scripts and narratives of crisis. In Jacoby's comparative study of elite conservation in the United States, he documents the tension between "modern and antimodern impulses" in the logics of scientific rationalism and Romanticism on which the movement drew:

> These two positions did not necessarily contradict one another; it was possible to be an industrialist during the week and a sports hunter on the weekend... conservation never traveled a simple trajectory. Although its central beliefs remained remarkably consistent—an emphasis on professionalization, on governmental ownership and management of the environment, and on the inherently stable and predictable character of the natural world—conservation charted an irregular orbit around these positions. (2001, p. 16)

Cultural projects of conservation and preservation tend to focus on the authenticity of particular places, and the construction of particular threats to these ways of life, whether in the form of persons or uses. This project studies how culture and agency in the form of the practices and performances of an elite coalition might be more than convenient window-dressing, inasmuch as the content of the public and private rationales for these actions draws on some repertoires and narratives, and rejects others.

Conservation in specific historical settings cannot simply be explained in terms of the use values of elites or their desire to slip a roundabout growth mechanism past an unsuspecting public, since these explanations do not account for the peculiar construction of conservation in each context. This study requires the insights of both growth theory and cultural studies of place-based politics, in order to link economic interests to the specific ideological claims and cultural scripts (among many possible options at hand) that reinforced elite identities and resonated for public audiences in the late twentieth-century South Carolina Lowcountry. Taking elite growth challengers' framings of civic virtue seriously might seem as foolhardy as investigating why and how local capitalists have constructed their treatment of labor as the work of model citizens. But as Haydu demonstrates in his comparative study of Cincinnati and San Francisco employers, we should pay attention to such professions of principle precisely because business elites seem to believe them and Americans seem to accept them:

> It is worth asking what cultural resources and social conditions make such rhetoric plausible to speakers and their chosen audiences. And while base self-interest may always be with us, the dazzling variety of public veneers poses a sociological puzzle. Why, given the extensive rhetorical tool kit at their disposal, did employers in specific times and places adopt such different tools for denigrating—or more rarely, legitimizing—unions? (2008, p. ix)

By investigating conservation in terms of both the moral economy of Charleston's landowning elite and the claims they make in public to those with little investment in real property, we can test the extent and limits of the power narratives this particular incarnation of conservation as a territorial ideology invokes.

THE CONSERVATION COALITION: STUDYING AN "AWKWARD" CASE

How has contemporary urban sociology dealt with exceptions to the pervasive territorial ideology of growth? Over time, the study of agency and culture within the politics of particular places has become more nuanced and subtle as its topical scope has expanded to include the complex political negotiations and ideological constructions of the black middle class in Chicago (Pattillo, 2007), middle class residents of Toronto (Caulfield, 1994), and newcomers to small towns and big-city neighborhoods (Brown-Saracino, 2004). Meanwhile, within growth machine theory, cases in which politics or culture intervene to produce unexpected results are typically understood as exceptions to the inexorable path of growth. Domhoff asserts that any environmentally oriented coalitions are a rare exception most often found in left-leaning university towns like Santa Cruz: "middle-class progressive regimes are relatively infrequent, and can be explained in terms of an unusual combination of factors, such as the injection of left activists and/or

environmentalists into a city" (2006a, p. 49). Even in Santa Cruz, Gendron finds that pressure for "community" rebuilding allowed progrowth business leaders to reframe neighborhood and environmental constituencies as "special interests" (2006, p. 5). A few studies have attempted to tease out the qualities of successful progressive coalitions, notably Ferman's comparative study of Pittsburgh's neighborhood-oriented politics (1996) and DeLeon's study of progressive politics in San Francisco (1992). In the case of the progressive defeat of San Francisco's progrowth regime in 1987, DeLeon claims that leaders on the left, even in a supportive electoral environment, failed to proffer a positive alternative to growth: "What the city has now is, at best, an antiregime, a transitional political order set up defensively to block the Lazarus-like re-emergence of the old progrowth regime. Such an order cannot last" (1992, p. 8). As Hartman (2002) describes, San Francisco has seen a dramatic resurgence of growth.

This case study of a conservation-oriented coalition differs from the just-referenced and somewhat fragile progressive regimes in notable ways. Most obviously, the site studied—Charleston, South Carolina, and the surrounding Lowcountry in the southeastern United States—is a far cry from "left coast" cities such as San Francisco, or liberal "university towns" like Burlington and Madison. Republicans hold majorities in both the state house and senate, and the current governor is a Republican formerly involved in real estate finance in New York and Charleston (SC Gov, 2008). Despite the fact that Charleston is typically less conservative than the rest of the Lowcountry, "left activists" or environmentalists of the sort tolerated in Santa Cruz are exceedingly rare. Neither is Charleston a city where the existing political machine is in trouble or in decline; first elected in 1975, Charleston's mayor, Joseph P. Riley, is currently serving his ninth term in office. As such, this case provides an intriguing counterpoint to those who have dismissed non-growth-oriented coalitions as bourgeois leftist exceptions that prove the rule. Can a deeply conservative region with entrenched elites support conservation instead of growth? If so, we must pay careful attention to the contexts in which elites rejected growth-oriented ideologies of community betterment. But just as civil society scholarship has documented that mobilization theories apply equally well to social movement organizations with disempowering or discriminatory goals, as in the case of the Klan (Blee, 1991) and fraternal organizations (Kaufman, 2002), I do not claim that elite conservationists in the Lowcountry should be celebrated for laying claim to progressive tenets of public land ownership. By challenging assumptions regarding actor claims about interests in a particular historical case, I build directly on emerging research on "awkward movements" (Polletta, 2005) and elite and insider roles in progressive change (Binder and Skrentny, 2006).

In this study, I argue that minimizing the complexity of growth challenges—assuming that they can be explained by interest-driven accounts that neglect the complexities of cultural variation—results in a perspective that is far more impoverished than the original indeterminacy of growth machine theory allows. While growth machine theory has proven to be an excellent tool for understanding local contests over the use and exchange values of land (most often between neighborhood actors and development interests), this article focuses on the processes and practices through which contests over land are enacted: both the backstage, "largely unseen" character of land use decision making and negotiations, and the frontstage ideological work conducted to support this activity as a natural source of community betterment. Both social relations and public declarations of principle are critical parts of this account because, as Haydu asserts in his study of business ideology and class formation,

> identity work and framing operate together. On one side, drawing boundaries involves the construction of similarities (I am like them . . .) and differences (. . . and unlike them), these being the most basic features of collective identities. On the other, those similarities and differences do more than designate who is on which side of the boundary. They also pick out and highlight—frame—the characteristics, motives, and worth of us and them. (2008, pp. 12–13)

For the purposes of this study, I denote as "moral economy" the complex framework of worth and value constructed by members of the conservation coalition among themselves and in relationship to fine-grained analyses of particular land-use oriented practices. I denote as "territorial ideology" frontstage framings of conservation as a public virtue.

The research for this article is based on a multimethod case study conducted from 2001 through 2007 as part of a larger project comparing regional conservation planning in three U.S. communities (Lee, 2007). The bulk of the data for this article is based on intensive interviews with informants in Charleston, South Carolina, and the surrounding Lowcountry in 2001 and 2003.[2] I interviewed current and former members of the ACE Basin Task Force, an informal public–private conservation partnership organized in 1989 for the Ashepoo, Combahee, and Edisto River Basin, south of Charleston's rapidly expanding resort communities. In addition, I interviewed nonparticipating public officials and community players who were, nevertheless, involved in some aspect of land use decision making relating to the Lowcountry. Interviewees were identified through official membership in the Task Force (seven organizations and agencies), affiliation with the Task Force, and local development and conservation networks, both formal and informal (see Appendices A and B for a list of Task Force members and a list of local interviewees by sector and organization type).

While total saturation of the population was not reached, this sample represents a substantial majority of the population of organizations and entities involved in conservation decision making in the area. Purposive sampling of representatives of all of the stakeholding organizations involved in the Task Force (using membership lists, newspaper coverage, private and public event attendance or sponsorship, and directories) was supplemented through snowball sampling, a method that repeatedly yielded the same names throughout the interview process, even from interviewees who were wholly uninvolved in coalition activities. The dense connections of stakeholder organizations in this case mean that the local conservation network and its allies were far more well-known even to uninvolved community members than in the other research sites; nevertheless, this sampling method might be expected to exclude potential stakeholders of such low capacity (smaller neighborhood associations or informal groups) as to have little visible presence in public records, on the internet, or in other stakeholders' mental maps of the community.[3] Many organizations that were not considered by Task Force members or other local organizations to be stakeholders, and who were not referenced through snowball sampling, were interviewed, in order to check the claims of acknowledged stakeholders against those of members of the larger environmental and regulatory decision-making communities in the state, neighboring counties, and uninvolved communities.

In total, I conducted 46 interviews for this case, and performed fieldwork over the course of four months in the region at organizational meetings, public hearings, and parties attended by local elites. Content analysis of articles, letters to the editor, and online

comment forums regarding conservation and development issues in the *Post & Courier* supplement the fieldwork and stakeholder interviews, and are critical to understanding the larger context of community awareness and reception of planning efforts and conservation coordinated by the coalition. In the context of this project, newspaper coverage reflects the ideological stance of the coalition, given that the *Post & Courier* is an avowed ally. Online comment forums are unedited by the *Post & Courier*, and reflect a less filtered perspective on public opinion than letters to the editor, but caution must be taken when drawing conclusions from these comments since they generally reflect the views of a particularly vocal and engaged element of the general public.[4] For the purposes of this article, comments are used to supplement the analysis of the ideological stance of letters to the editor in particular situations when the voice of the "public" as represented in letters to the editor differs dramatically from that represented in the comment forums. Minor errors in spelling and punctuation in comments have been corrected for readability.

Document text was collected daily from the *Post & Courier*'s full content website under the broadest possible understanding of conservation- and development-related community issues (not through electronic keyword searches) and entered into an electronic database. Interview transcripts, organizational documents, and historical records were hand coded, while keyword scanning was used in the case of newspaper coverage and letters to the editor once these data had been collected and entered into a searchable full-text database. The newspaper and letters database contains over 3,000 text files collected from the *Post & Courier* from December 2003 through June 2008. Interviewees and regional NGOs are identified in the article with pseudonyms. For appropriate attribution and crediting of written sources, major public figures, national organizations, actively publicized development and conservation projects, and authors of publicly available documents are identified by name.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE CONSERVATION COALITION: INCREASING PROMINENCE AND INVOLVEMENT IN PUBLIC DECISION MAKING

Before 1978, the rural Lowcountry between Charleston to the north and Hilton Head Island 100 miles to the south in the southeastern corner of South Carolina had no distinct regional identity. This area had a central place in global trade as the hub of rice cultivation in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but by the Civil War, the rice economy had collapsed. During the war, most of the plantation properties had been abandoned by their owners or destroyed by Sherman. After Reconstruction, timber companies and rich northeasterners attracted to the rice fields for their potential as bargain hunting preserves purchased the "worthless" estates (Linder, 1995, p. xxii). Having been passed down for generations within a few wealthy planter families, rice plantations in South Carolina were turned over to national corporations and industrialists from the Northeast who would retain the land as inexpensive investments requiring little maintenance for the next 100 years. Untended by largely absent landowners interested in hunting and timber harvesting, the farm fields reverted to woodlands, concealing much of the history of 200 years of plantation agriculture (Beasley et al., 1996, p. 23).

The 1970s were a time of booming interest in the potential of new resort and recreation industries for the economically depressed southern Lowcountry. Developers began to buy sea islands on the coast nearest Beaufort and Charleston for conversion into luxurious gated golf resorts. Nevertheless, by 1978, state and federal officials were beginning

to appreciate the significance of the swath of largely undeveloped wetland habitat on the coast. U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) biologist Nora Murdock realized the importance of the three undammed blackwater rivers running through the region and coined the term "ACE Basin" for the Ashepoo, Combahee, and Edisto Rivers watershed, designating the area a "significant wildlife resource area of South Carolina" (Laurie, 1998, p. 2).

The fortunes of the ACE Basin improved with its designation as a focus area in the North American Waterfowl Management Plan in 1986 (see Map in Appendix C). The protection of the ACE Basin was a "flagship project" of the Plan's Atlantic Coast Joint Venture (Laurie, 1998). From 1986 through 1988, printing industry magnate and two-term Ducks Unlimited President Gaylord Donnelley [5] donated island properties to the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) for Bear Island Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and to the Nature Conservancy, which donated the islands for the future establishment of the ACE Basin National Estuarine Research Reserve. In 1987, Ducks Unlimited's MARSH (Matching Aid to Restore State Habitat) Program negotiated with property owners to purchase a large parcel adjacent to Bear Island, which it donated to the SCDNR, with the governor of South Carolina attending the dedication and praising the cooperation of state and private groups (Laurie, 1998). In 1988, the ACE Basin Task Force, a group of private landowners, the SCDNR, the USFWS, Ducks Unlimited and the Nature Conservancy was "organized to plan and coordinate protection efforts within the Basin" (Laurie, 1998). Media executive Ted Turner placed the first easement in the area on his ACE Basin plantation property, and 70 citizen groups endorsed the ACE Basin Task Force within the year (Laurie, 1998). In 1991, Westvaco Corporation (now MeadWestvaco), an international paper company and major ACE Basin landowner, placed 17,000 acres under protection through a memorandum of understanding, and formally endorsed the ACE Basin project.

The Nature Conservancy and Ducks Unlimited continued to assist the SCDNR and USFWS in acquiring lands for WMAs, the National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR), and a National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). In 1992, the ACE Basin NERR and the ACE Basin NWR received formal designation—the same year that ACE Basin protected acreage topped 50,000 (Laurie, 1998). U.S. Senators Fritz Hollings and Strom Thurmond, as well as John Sawhill, the President and CEO of the Nature Conservancy, attended celebratory events for various acquisition projects. By 1998, 10 years after the Task Force began, protected acreage in the ACE had reached 128,000 acres, nearly 40 percent of which was publicly owned and managed. Twenty-eight large plantation tracts under easement accounted for 60 percent of the land conserved in private hands (Laurie, 1998).

The mission of the ACE Basin Task Force since its formation was clearly directed toward conservation of "traditional" uses and "rural character":

> While encouraging traditional land uses such as agriculture, timber production, hunting and fishing, the ACE Basin project seeks to maintain the area's ambiance while restricting the industrial and resort development characteristic of much of the state's coastal zone in the past 30 years. (Laurie, 1998)

Despite the role of federal resource agencies in supporting the early work of the Task Force, the SCDNR and NOAA Coastal Services Center officially began an ecological characterization of the ACE Basin "to synthesize existing information of the condition of

natural resources and the sustainable human use of these resources" only in 1997. This was nearly 9 years after the Task Force had begun its acquisition work, and demonstrates the extent to which the Task Force had been able to promote conservation uses not as an ecological imperative but as a cultural one. Given the relatively large unfragmented parcels in the ACE, and the extent to which land purchases were only a small element of Task Force work, the group could afford not to narrow down its priorities within the 350,000-acre focus area. The Task Force had been extraordinarily successful at convincing large landowners and corporations to donate development rights voluntarily.

The solid groundwork of private and public connections established through the formation of the Task Force, and the cooperation of powerful actors committed to Lowcountry conservation, led to the development of a full-fledged conservation coalition in the region. I call the Task Force and its unofficial partners in the region a conservation coalition because it includes an alliance of private entities and public officials with cross-cutting ties and, despite the history of its formation, has no "official" status as a government entity and is run by a private landowner. The role of local, state, and federal political actors is relatively marginal, as compared to that in other collaborative public-private partnerships, a result of the deliberate choice to design an informal structure for the partnership that would accord with the mistrust of government typical of public opinion in the state (Lee, 2007). Agency officials' roles are limited to that of "partner" and "stakeholder." They do not serve as "leaders" or "facilitators," as can be the case in other partnerships of the same kind (Wondolleck and Ryan, 2007). Nevertheless, as is indicated by the support of Senators Hollings and Thurmond mentioned above and the conservation bank described below, the Task Force also works behind the scenes in local and national politics to cultivate ties with sympathetic state and national representatives, who have supported Task Force activities both through legislation and appropriations (Lee, 2007). Despite its unofficial status, the Task Force has managed to control the fate of the land under its purview (and much of the land outside of its purview) to a relatively astonishing degree when considering the extent of the growth pressures facing the region.

The Task Force meets for a half-day on a quarterly basis. Inasmuch as the Task Force has no official capacity to conserve land, meetings involve coordination of groups' and agencies' own conservation activities, in addition to discussion of how best to mobilize landowners to conserve their properties, whether through policy-making, personal contact, public meetings, or promotion in the local press.[6] Members of the Task Force are in regular communication with each other in the periods between meetings. Current Task Force members include representatives of Donnelley's private conservation foundation, MeadWestvaco, a regional land trust, and local representatives of the Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, the National Wildlife Refuge, and the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources. Private landowners are listed as members, but attend the quarterly meetings only as the situation warrants or in their capacity as Task Force Chair. Downstate Conservancy, the regional land trust, was organized in 1986, but was only added to the Task Force after it had gained a record of success in the community.[7] Smaller local land trusts are not welcome as members, but can observe meetings if they choose.[8] Real estate development companies are not welcome as members. Sea Island Defenders (SID), the coastal region's large, high-capacity environmental advocacy organization,[9] is not an official member since it is not oriented toward land conservation itself, but is highly involved in fighting development in the region, and works with the Task Force regularly on an unofficial basis.

Individual attendees have multiple affiliations and cross-cutting ties with the organizational members within the Task Force, through changing affiliations over the course of their career or crossover from public to private organizations. Conservation decision makers admit that their closeness is practically incestuous, and emphasize the collective goals of conservation as an allegiance that supercedes group affiliation or competition. Former chair Will Reidel sees the compatibility of groups in South Carolina as coming from their acceptance of each other's place in the landscape and their appreciation for each other's "traditional" activities:

> The thing in South Carolina that's unique and it's evolved from this is that you don't have sort of a sportsmen's group, an environmental group, and a forestry group and an agricultural group. They all are in bed together. . . . All these things, it's going to happen on the same piece of land, it's going to happen on the same landscape . . . and there's a compatibility with all those uses. We don't have the Sierra Club out there stopping hunting, and fighting this and that kind of thing. . . . All the groups hunt. (Interview with author, August 2001)

Task Force Chair Phillip Rhodes describes the Task Force as a vehicle for getting the tight-knit conservation community working in concert: "In Charleston, the conservation community is in fact fairly small. You get a lot of overlap in boards, a lot of overlap different people have in where they're putting their conservation energies" (Interview with author, October 2001).

Supporters of the conservation coalition and the Task Force go beyond conservation interest groups, and include entities that are typically associated with growth machines because of the ways in which they profit from growth, including Chambers of Commerce (Rhodes is a member of the Charleston Chamber), Charleston's mayor, real estate developers and graders (all represented as private landowners or Task Force chairs), real estate agents and lawyers, and, most influentially, the local newspaper, the *Post & Courier*. The coalition has created a stable regional network supporting conservation that extends far beyond solidarity among environmental interest groups. As Anne Deane of Sea Island Defenders notes, the coalition very effectively plays the "old boys network" game of South Carolina politics:

> The other thing that happens is the Chair of County Council gets to know you, the staff, the county attorney, the head of the Chamber gets to know you, and one person at a time you build up the community trust, and even when he's no longer head of the Chamber anymore, he still knows all of the people on the Chamber and he'll say, "Anne Deane is reasonable, you can deal with her." And that one on one relationship I think is the other hallmark of conservation in South Carolina and that is the faces working in conservation today are the faces that I saw working in it twenty-five years ago. (Interview with author, October 2003)

Growth pressures in the region have increased substantially since the Task Force used personal connections to assemble rapidly as much land as possible in the ACE Basin. The three-county area around Charleston doubled in population between 1960 and 2000. One hundred thirty-five thousand new housing units were in the planning stage in 2007 (Peirce and Johnson, 2007). Task Force members have recognized increasing

development in the greater Lowcountry region as a threat to their overall mission, despite the fact that the ACE region is now essentially off-limits to developers. Will Reidel, the original chair of the Task Force, has subsequently chaired the statewide conservation bank (legislation created by a state senator from the Charleston region in company with the coalition) in order to focus attention on conservation projects outside the ACE. The Sea Island Defenders and the Nature Conservancy have also spearheaded an initiative to replicate the Task Force model in four additional "focus areas" that together cover the entire coastal region. The groups leveraged their cooperation to develop a statewide landscape mapping project in order to support the work of the conservation bank, enabling strategic conservation purchases of the highest ecological value and greatest public need. Regionally, the coalition was able to convince voters to support a half-cent sales tax measure for conservation purchases that would create a greenbelt around the Charleston metropolitan area. As they moved toward institutionalizing conservation policy at the statewide and regional level, members of the Task Force promoted conservation as a virtuous local imperative not simply to the landowners they were used to courting, but to the public at large.

COMMUNITY RESISTANCE TO GROWTH: CONSERVATION AS A TERRITORIAL IDEOLOGY

Because of conservation coalition activities, conservation rather than growth has been naturalized as "a background assumption of civic life" (Molotch, 1999, p. 249) in the community. This has been accomplished both through backstage work to cultivate allies and gain favorable coverage in the local press, and through promotion in these venues of particular narratives of conservation as a public good. The Task Force members, the Downstate Conservancy, and the Sea Island Defenders have made active use of the local press, and have developed ties with the editorial board similar to those cultivated in growth coalitions. Conservationists like Anne Deane of SID see the press as a valuable ally:

> People in this state are interested in what happens to the land. There are times when we're in the newspaper three times in one day; sometimes we'll be in three times in one week. We are in the newspaper quoted, one of us is being quoted or managing an issue or doing something, whether it's the *State* [Columbia, SC, newspaper] or the *Post & Courier* or Myrtle Beach, we are all over the media. (Interview with author, October 2003)

Whereas critics of growth machines claim that newspapers support growth coalitions because their activities contribute to advertising revenue, the *Post & Courier* is strongly in favor of conservation. The publisher of the newspaper, now deceased, supported the regional conservation organizations through his own donations and those of the *Post & Courier* Foundation, and his wife served on the board of the Downstate Conservancy (Annual Report, 2004). The editors of the *Post & Courier* directly link widespread public support for land conservation to the work of the ACE Basin Task Force:

> The success of the ACE Basin in limiting development has encouraged broad public sentiment on behalf of strong protections for rural lands throughout the coastal

> region. In Charleston County, for example, local residents have surely been encouraged in their demands that a countywide land-use plan now in preparation protect rural lands from inappropriate development. (Laurie, 1999)

Support of conservation in the news media affords unique opportunities for the conservation coalition to control the terms of debate on land use planning in the community.

Not only are groups like the Sea Island Defenders routinely contacted for comment on any environmental issue, but they also craft editorial language and are regularly credited in editorials for conservation "victories." Anne Deane reports on their unusually close relationship with the media, developed over years of cultivating relationships with longtime reporters:

> That's why I was late. I was on with a reporter. That goes back to that continuity thing, staff sticking around a long time. The reporters all know us and we know them. If we don't think they're covering us properly, we're not shy. We'll call them up and tell them we've got a good story and we want them to cover it. And we're not shy about proposing editorials and drafting editorials for them and doing op-eds. We're very aggressive with the media. (Interview with author, October 2003)

Why is land conservation able to get such prominent support from the local newspaper? No doubt, the fact that the paper is privately held by a family that also owns property in the ACE Basin has been a boon to the cause of the ACE Basin, in particular. On the other hand, the reason why conservation in general has gotten so much press is the same as the reason Reidel gave for the proportionately high number of conserved properties in the state: "it just sort of fits the mindset of South Carolinians, and it's because we promoted it . . . because we asked for the business" (Interview with author, August 2001). The conservation community in the Lowcountry has developed growth-machine-style relationships with reporters, editors, and publishers, which have afforded the coalition opportunities to pursue aggressive strategies for story sourcing and copy creation that are practically unheard of in areas with growth-oriented local elites.[10]

Once in the public eye, the coalition must promote ideological framings that resonate with local audiences. Making conservation "fit the mindset of South Carolinians" is not simply a matter of saying that conservation is a public good. Portraying environmental values as a match with local values requires some careful massaging of organization activities such that they are made to seem appealing to conservative locals. Just as Smith describes the use of the "frontier" as a powerful tool for urban gentrification, the conservation coalition in South Carolina also provides a powerful symbolic narrative for why conservation is beneficial to the community. The coalition actively depicts conservation as local property owners' civic duty, a tradition that is under threat from outsiders. They portray their opponents in the national real estate development industry not as investing in the community (the standard rationale for growth coalitions), but as taking their profits to faraway places with little consideration for local self-determination.

Even as they have adopted land acquisition strategies directed at maximizing ecological values such as habitat quality, conservation groups working in the South Carolina Lowcountry scrupulously avoid the stigma of conservation as an "environmental" practice conducted for ecological benefit. Instead, conservation groups have attempted to

cultivate those strains of Southern traditionalism that make conservation a palatable—and even passionate—issue for conservative southerners who treasure their closeness to the outdoors and their sense of independence from state oversight and liberal meddlers. Watson Hill (see Map), a proposed development that became embroiled in an ongoing, extremely contentious municipal annexation fight over the scale of the project, is a representative case in which the conservation coalition managed to define the terms of the debate over a development project in the *Post & Courier*.

In this framing, the Watson Hill imbroglio was caused by greedy, two-faced outside investors who were unwilling to play by the civil local rules "native" developers and conservationists have mastered. Vincent Stegall of the Sea Island Defenders frames the Watson Hill issue as one that could have been solved with transparency of the sort advocated by Molotch:

> 'The developers of Watson Hill live in New York and Kansas. . . . They have no ties to South Carolina. At no point did they attempt to discuss their plans with the community. Instead, they have consistently delayed and postponed public hearings, attempted to manipulate municipal boundaries to their own advantage, and sent unidentified agents to covertly purchase property on their behalf.' (Zwiker, 2005)

This outsider/insider frame has served to generate a substantial undercurrent of public support in a politically conservative region tending to favor private property rights.

Watson Hill prompted a high-profile backlash from local residents. Letters to the editor in the *Post & Courier* frequently invoke the tropes laid out by Stegall. In response to a subpoena from a development company, a landowner wrote:

> Is it any wonder that my family and our neighbors, many of whose families have lived on their lands along the Ashley River for decades and even centuries, do not welcome the owners and would-be developers of Watson Hill with open arms? These bullying tactics in pursuit of a quick buck to be spent in New York or Kansas City do not encourage us to roll out the welcome mat. (Carter, 2005)

Other letters to the editor continually reference that the developers are "from off," another local colloquialism for outsiders:

> Why does a developer want to build another Kiawah in the Ashley River Plantation District? . . . The Lowcountry is under tremendous development pressure, and mostly by folks "from off." (Clark, 2005)
>
> The people who want to develop Watson Hill don't live here, do not care about the scenic Ashley River corridor, don't care that the developers have caused stress, tension and anger. (Ebel, 2005)
>
> The Watson Hill development is just wrong, wrong, wrong. . . . It's just wrong for people "from off" to be the ones making decisions on our future. (Schaber, 2005)
>
> Developers who have no love or respect for the natural, historic and scenic areas of Dorchester County should not determine the destiny of our part of South Carolina. (Tomayko, 2005)

> I implore the County Council to do everything in its power to ensure that this treasured Ashley River area is not destroyed by mega-millionaires who live in Kansas and New York and simply want more millions. (Hartley, 2005)

Conservationists working in the Lowcountry have had to frame their activities not as ecologically beneficial, but in literally homey terms. Tropes of defense of property from hostile outsiders and of mannerly "nonaggression" are deeply resonant for white southern conservatives for whom the confederate flag is still a powerful symbol. Recent critics—most prominently, Shellenberger and Nordhaus (2004)—claim that mainstream environmental groups have failed to reach the public because of their technocratic, shrill rhetoric. Drawing on George Lakoff's emphasis on the importance of framing progressive politics (2004), these critics argue that environmentalists must embrace the nuances of "nurturant" language with broad-based appeal. That conservationists in South Carolina have portrayed themselves as supporters and caretakers of traditional southern values, homes, and families directly taps into the "creative worlds of myth-making" and religion that Shellenberger and Nordhaus think are critical for reclaiming public support for environmental causes (2004, p. 34).

Since growth machines have traditionally been structured to benefit local growth interests by attracting outside investment, it's not surprising that the Lowcountry conservation coalition, with its contrary orientation, opposes outside real estate development as an unnecessary intrusion into the regional détente. Outside developers are much harder to control, more used to confronting conventional environmental adversaries, and less concerned with long-term dealings in the community. But the "success" of the coalition in adapting outsider/insider tropes to their own territorial ideology of conservation deserves further analysis—both in terms of the alternative narratives (and audiences) such tropes exclude, and in terms of the ways in which progressive claims for greater "transparency" can be linked to the moral economy of southeastern conservatism in the Lowcountry. As Haydu points out with respect to capitalists,

> At any historical moment, some ways of classifying enemies and characterizing "people like us" are readily available . . . the repertoire is extensive and forces the question of why actors adopt the particular identities and frames that they do, or why they choose some lines along which to draw social boundaries, and not others. (2008, p. 13)

If we investigate the rhetorical framing of conservation in this particular case, we can see that the conservation coalition has selectively chosen particular cultural scripts from the repertoire of potentially meaningful framings of social boundaries related to land use and control.

Painting outsider developers as the villain of uncontrolled growth is convenient, but this tactic obscures the fact that local county councils and planning departments wield considerable control over zoning and approval. It also neglects other sources of growth, which is driven by demand from newcomers (also outsiders) and locals moving within the region, and the role of willing sellers—in particular, timber companies like Mead-Westvaco, the ACE Basin Task Force member that has been profitably divesting itself of timber holdings in the Lowcountry region, including the Watson Hill tract. Not least, it

proposes a version of South Carolina's history of land use that emphasizes civil cooperation among locals with the best interest of future generations at heart—a narrative that ignores the racial dimensions of land politics in the region, in which African Americans were systematically isolated on economically marginal lands until such property became valuable, at which point new transportation infrastructure, skyrocketing property values, and displacement were the order of the day. That such processes have occasioned bitter contests between white developers and landowners and African-American slave descendants does not fit comfortably into the narrative of civility and defense of property seen in cases like the Watson Hill debate.[11]

The conservation coalition has chosen a frame that denotes national real estate investors as illegitimate outsiders. But competing frames denoting different social groups as targets for exclusion—for instance, second-home owners, white resort-goers, working-class tourists, carpetbaggers, city-bred plantation owners, weekend hunters, big business, politicians (to name just a few resonant with specific local audiences)—are excluded in this choice. Conservationists in South Carolina have adopted a territorial ideology that retains some aspects of a progressive agenda, but have left out issues of racial and economic justice and demographics of local growth and development patterns that they discuss behind closed doors (Lee, 2007). This has allowed them to promote conservation as a palatable and consistent value proposition for the white conservative locals they are interested in cultivating. Even for growth theorists who write off conservation, new urbanism, smart growth, and other trends as simply growth through alternative means, it is worth investigating the sophisticated and evolving rhetorical framings of both growth and conservation, in order to understand the contexts in which conventional growth ideologies fail and reframings are needed.

POLICING ELITE MOTIVES AND PREVENTING PROFITEERING FROM CONSERVATION

Despite public support for conservation policy at the regional scale, a key part of the conservation coalition's success has also been its ability to employ backstage networks in order to police the motives of those who seek to benefit financially from conservation as a roundabout growth strategy. That conservation proponents are merely greenwashing growth is a claim made by many growth scholars skeptical of elite enthusiasm for conservation (and validated in the proliferation of "conservation areas" with little habitat value in new housing developments across the country), but this coalition shares that suspicion and actively works to prevent greenwashing. Backstage networking among coalition members and allies is key to preventing this form of cooptation. Working together, the Task Force and other members of the coalition forestall competition among members by coordinating their activities, which reduces the ability of outsiders to leverage weaker member organizations' need for conservation acreage and projects. Conservation chair of SID Anne Deane credits the longtime commitments of members of the conservation community to their lack of territoriality:

> And there's another thing that goes on that you wouldn't see unless you worked in this business for a long time and that is the lack of territoriality amongst the conservation people. The desire that what you want is for South Carolina to have a good environment and protected land and the way people will flip things to each

> other, contact donors with each other, the sharing of the information and the web, the membership, the tips and the insider knowledge which started a long time ago. (Interview with author, October 2003)

Coalition members work behind the scenes within the real estate community itself to promote conservation and prevent development, often by collecting information regarding potential buyers from brokers friendly to the cause. A realtor and the founder of a real estate brokerage firm hold two spots on the loan advisory committee of the local fund for conservation loans run by the regional community foundation—not surprising given that this fund is engaged in revolving loans for real estate purchase, so their expertise is clearly useful. The website of the real estate brokerage company, which is also a timber management firm, echoes Rhodes' language of discretion and appropriateness:

> The company has built its reputation by working behind the scenes, quietly matching the right property with the right owner, respecting and working within the confidentiality of its clients. Its unique background in forest management and real estate brokerage allows the company not only to assist clients in the procurement of investment properties, but to provide for the land's long-term management as well. (Wise Batten, Inc. 2005)

The involvement of the real estate brokerage community in finding the "right" buyers, and even assisting in administering loans to conservation groups, amounts to backstage control over buyers interested in speculation and development.

Deane describes how her organization can "make trouble" for developers: "The other thing [the success rate] does for making us an effective conservation organization is there's a lot of entities and individuals out there who recognize that if they want to do something, they don't want [us] to cross 'em." The Task Force and the larger conservation coalition may claim friendliness with the local development community, but this is largely because their record speaks for itself as a pre-emptive threat:

> The Task Force at this point has an ability to cause a humongous amount of trouble for somebody. . . . I mean if you were Sun City, you wouldn't want to mess with the ACE unless you really had a lot of time and patience, you know, because you just, it just would be easier to go forty miles up the coast where there isn't the ACE and do it right there, I think. (Interview with author, October 2003)

As such, the conservation community in South Carolina is not a likely candidate for cooptation—and the lack of corporate Task Force members despite their extensive philanthropy toward the local conservation organizations is prime evidence of this.[12] Ultimately, coalition members interpret conservation versus development as a zero-sum game that must be "squeaky clean" (Interview with author, November 2003) because the stakes are so high. Phillip Rhodes describes the stakes involved: "The population as a whole loses if they consume all of their land; they lose something very valuable and irreplaceable, utterly irreplaceable. There is no going back. It's a one-way trip" (Interview with author, October 2003).

As described in this section, a key factor in the success of the conservation coalition has been their backstage policing of the motives of investors through their connections in the real estate community, in concert with their frontstage advocacy for conservation as an authentic local folkway. Nevertheless, when they have failed in protecting conservation from profit-seeking investors behind the scenes, their ideological framing of conservation as an unmitigated public benefit has harmed their ability to make a case against conservation-related profiteering in the public sphere.

THE CHALLENGE FACING GROWTH CHALLENGERS: LIMITATIONS OF CONSERVATION AS A TERRITORIAL IDEOLOGY

As it turns out, the success of the conservation coalition in terms of managing public attitudes toward the "right" kind of conservation is partial and limited. This is not a surprise in terms of the paradoxes of conservation and preservation projects described earlier. Nevertheless, it has not occurred in the way that growth theorists might predict—either as a result of the secret growth interests of its proponents, or as a result of its political weaknesses. In fact, the undoing of the conservation coalition's near-total dominance over conservation activities in the region has been accomplished through speculators and developers taking advantage of the coalition's ideological success in convincing the public of the benefits of conservation. A good example of the downside of their success in constructing conservation as a territorial ideology is a contest over a conservation purchase that the coalition opposed, the Harmony Hall project.

Harmony Hall is a large property located between the ACE Basin and downtown Charleston (see Map) that the Charleston City Council approved for purchase with half-cent sales tax funds over the objections of the conservation coalition. SID and the local newspaper both vocally disapproved of the project, because its location violated criteria for half-cent sales tax appropriations to target land close to areas underserved by green space and within areas under severe development pressure. Harmony Hall is close to the ACE Basin, in an area with substantial pre-existing public conservation holdings—a concern which, while not predominant in the early days of the Task Force, has become more and more salient as the conservation coalition tries to rationalize and strategically manage a growing portfolio that is more fairly distributed among the Lowcountry's inland and northern coastal regions, all of which are now facing growth pressures.

Not least, opposition to Harmony Hall was based on the fact that the seller of the property was an outside investor who purchased the approximately 600-acre property for $9.6 million in February 2007 and promptly sold two-thirds of the property to the county in July 2007 for $10 million (Waldo, 2007). The property owner planned to develop the remaining third of the property as luxury homesites. This actual financing of growth through conservation trades, and the greenwashing that accompanied it, violated the most cherished precepts of the conservation coalition—that conservation was a local imperative of responsible and selfless citizenship and long-term curatorial interest, not a backdoor money-making or development scheme from outsiders with short-term interests in profit.

Conservation coalition opposition was reflected in a published letter to the editor, which claimed that the deal did not reflect the "spirit" of preserving rural character and

neglected the superior negotiation skills of groups working for conservation in the region:

> The recently announced Harmony Hall land acquisition deal by the PRC is an example of an incomplete negotiation, which missed part of the purpose of the spirit of the half-cent sales tax. That funding source was created to preserve green space, and equally important, to help shape and reduce development of our defining rural character. The PRC has negotiated the purchase of two-thirds of the acreage the seller had under option, but failed to negotiate retention of two-thirds of the sewer/development rights. . . . I appreciate that the majority of the property is preserved from development. However, in the spirit of the new funding bill, the residual parcel should only include one-third of the sewer/development rights. Let's include other groups in future negotiation of additional acquisitions. There are several conservation groups out there that can help get it done and for a better value. (Sass, 2007)

Reflecting their support of conservation coalition framings, *Post & Courier* reporters dismissively referred to the owner's actions as "Flip that Plantation" in an article on the deal (Bartelme and Waldo, 2007).

Despite this, public sentiment as expressed in the *Post & Courier*'s unedited comment forums ran heavily in favor of the Harmony Hall conservation purchase, with the interests of the sellers in maximizing the value of their investment seen as an unfortunate, but unavoidable, reality. For these members of the public, conservation that benefited individuals was acceptable, as long as the public benefited over the long term:

> Can't blame the [landowners] for being good business people. If they are willing to protect the other 160 acres by selling it to the town of Meggett, they are donating a lot for the public good. They could've made much more money by developing the property themselves. (meggettcitizen, July 2007)

> It sounds like the [landowners] took out an option at the right time. They may or may not have known the PRC was interested in the land, but common sense suggests they must have caught wind of it. It really is a shame the PRC couldn't have gotten there first. At least it does sound like it will be a beautiful park when it's all said and done. Just don't name it for the [landowners]. They certainly didn't donate anything for the public good . . . (Native˙Ink, July 2007)

Local commenters explicitly rejected the moral economy of conservation coalition members in favor of the more broadly reductive territorial ideology of conservation:

> An unasked question is "Why would [Sea Island Defenders, i.e. Vincent Stegall] oppose conservation of a wonderful resource such as this unique tract?" As seen by this article [the landowner] is even willing to protect the remaining 160 acres from development. Let's move on, the decision has already been made for the benefit of generations to come. Do not cheat our children out of this resource due to the love of controversy in the media. (Bohicket, July 2007)

> I doubt they'll lose any money on the land. As someone who grew up in the Lowcountry I appreciate the fact that they are putting these type of properties in public trust. As things are, most people will never be able to afford to live on deep water lots. But the county parks insure everyone the ability to access those areas regardless of wealth. I think the county is thinking ahead and the price will probably seem minimal 50 years from now. (guido72, July 2007)

Whereas conservation coalition leaders thought of deals like Harmony Hall as inadequately negotiated within the proper channels and as undeserving of public monies against other comparable properties in the right places, public commenters on the *Post & Courier* forums saw conservation as simply the right thing to do, even accusing conservation groups and their leaders of distasteful self-interest, short-term thinking, and worst of all—in terms of the framings of civic virtue promoted by the coalition itself—unnecessary stirring up of controversy.

As described earlier in the article, in the case of public opposition to the Watson Hill developers, the territorial ideology of conservation selectively drew on a place-based cultural script of us/them to reinforce the illegitimacy of growth actors as uncivil outsiders disrespecting tradition in pursuit of capital. The public support of the Harmony Hall conservation purchase, on the other hand, reveals both the extent to which the framing of conservation as a territorial ideology has succeeded, and the ways in which the ideology fails to draw on the complex moral economy that conservation actors use in their own social relations. Not only is the territorial ideology of conservation as a civic virtue readily employed in public comment forums, it is employed to question the interests of conservation actors themselves.

CONCLUSION

The claim by a growth proponent cited in the introduction of this article that someone in the South Carolina Lowcountry needed to do some thinking about the unintended consequences of "overprotection" was prophetic. While the conservation coalition certainly did not endorse conservation at all costs, as progrowth proponents claimed, its construction of conservation as a territorial ideology did not encompass such subtleties. The promotion of a selective, reductive framing of conservation as a public good on the order of the white southern equivalents of motherhood and apple pie preempted the more nuanced moral economy their tight coalition had adopted. The public agreed that conservation was a virtue because of its role in protecting local traditions and rural character, but rejected the idea that such protection could only come at the hands of vetted locals with appropriate motives. When speculators smelled money and invited themselves to the conservation party, public sentiment supported conservation at the hands of outsiders as enthusiastically as it had supported conservation on the part of locals. Competing outsider/insider frames abounded, and public enmity for national developers was relatively superficial as compared to other popular scapegoats for the decline of "traditional" southern culture, heritage, and land use practices.

Growth theorists might point out that conservation did, in fact, protect the use values of elite landowners outside the urban fringe. Even despite the careful attempts of the

conservation coalition to police the use of conservation as an alternative growth strategy, growth theorists might also point out that the Harmony Hall case demonstrates how easily conservation can be coopted for explicitly growth-oriented goals. But the partial success of the conservation coalition in assembling public support for land protection in an extremely hostile climate for environmental regulation and property rights restrictions deserves attention as more than simply confirmation of the limits of growth challenges.

The fate of both projects studied here[13] demonstrates once again the potential for unlikely alliances and unusual outcomes that Molotch and Logan were careful to document in noting the indeterminacy of growth theory. Growth may be a central force in urban politics in Santa Cruz and Charleston, but it is not the only force—and the content of growth opposition can vary wildly from place to place depending on the preoccupations of local residents. Conservation is not merely the province of environmentalists and student activists, or just a corporate mandate for national developers. In fact, at least in the South Carolina Lowcountry, it has become a territorial ideology, with all the rhetorical obfuscation that entails. Not least, local publics and the territorial ideologies to which they subscribe may take on lives of their own in unpredictable ways, independent of the elites who fastidiously try to manage their reception.

Sociologists and anthropologists investigating the politics of place have extensively documented the intersection of identity work and framing in particular places, and the social anxieties encoded in preservation and conservation projects as elites and everyday people work to shape the places they inhabit (Walton, 2001; Norkunas, 2002). Norkunas discusses this in terms of the symbolic weight and changing significance of particular landmarks and community monuments, while Walton discusses struggles over:

> a broad narrative woven of threads fashioned in commercial development, environmental politics, and heritage preservation. . . . Old stories are retired or disassembled and new ones are constructed in the practical action of groups that make it their job to build, improve, honor, and live in a place. (2001, 270)

This project contributes to the continued study of the relationship of cultures of place to growth politics by attempting to describe how "sentimental" place attachments are not simply obstacles to growth or valuable advertising copy, but are vital resources in the ideological work through which land use politics, including conservation politics, is enacted. If developers have appropriated environmental protection as a "self-conscious strategy" (Walton, 2001), the work of conservationists to control the authenticity of conservation efforts is no less self-conscious. In these accounts, both sociological perspectives can comfortably coexist and inform each other, not least because they were linked in the original iteration of growth theory proposed by Logan and Molotch.

Are the members of the conservation coalition heroes whose efforts should be celebrated as a rare case of progressive elites sticking their necks out to support the public interest in the south? The answer, I hope, is no. But not because conservation coalition members are the villains of the story, or because scholars must avoid critiquing the substantial economic, ecological, and social consequences of elite-dominated growth

politics. Scholars should exhibit caution when proposing their own moral script for growth, because this prevents attending to the ways in which actors in growth and conservation conflicts construct complex moral claims of their own, sometimes unsuccessfully, but often with a deft hand for resonant cultural framings that will fit their particular circumstances and local contexts. Instead, sociological studies of the contingencies of particular places and their uniquely path-dependent moral economies of land use can provide valuable insights that enrich our understandings of the nuances growth machine theory allows.

What can growth challengers themselves learn from this case? Certainly, the local media has the potential to be a valuable ally with the right connections. But also, the success of developers in promoting growth as conservation means that conservationists might find it profitable to reframe conservation as growth. Evidence from the *Post & Courier* suggests that members of the conservation coalition in South Carolina are already shifting their tactics and subtly reframing their "insider/outsider" paradigm:

> Some of our elected leaders often perceive a distinction between business interests and conservation interests. In 21st century South Carolina, that view is a mistaken one. The reality is that tens of thousands of jobs in South Carolina, mostly from smaller, family-owned businesses, are dependent on the clean and healthy South Carolina conservationists seek to protect. So the next time you hear a conservation group being concerned about an issue, remember that tens of thousands of South Carolina jobs and thousands of small businesses rely on their efforts. (Knapp and Gregg, 2008)

Finally, instead of lamenting that environmentalists have failed to frame their politics in ways that resonate emotionally with the public, critics like Nordhaus and Shellenberger and Lakoff would be well advised to study those exceptional, awkward cases where environmentalists have succeeded in developing powerful counterframes—and also to pay attention to the consequences of that success.

APPENDIX A

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACE Basin: Ashepoo, Combahee, and Edisto Rivers Basin
EPA: Environmental Protection Agency
MARSH: Matching Aid to Restore State Habitat Program
NERR: National Estuarine Research Reserve
NGO: non-governmental organization
NOAA: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
PRC: Charleston County Parks and Recreation Commission
SCDNR: South Carolina Department of Natural Resources
SID: Sea Island Defenders
USFWS: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

LIST OF OFFICIAL TASK FORCE MEMBERS

(At least one representative of each group was formally interviewed)
The Nature Conservancy
Ducks Unlimited
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
S.C. Department of Natural Resources
Downstate Conservancy
Nemours Wildlife Foundation
MeadWestvaco Corporation
Private Landowners
Affiliated nonmember: ACE Basin National Estuarine Research Reserve

APPENDIX B

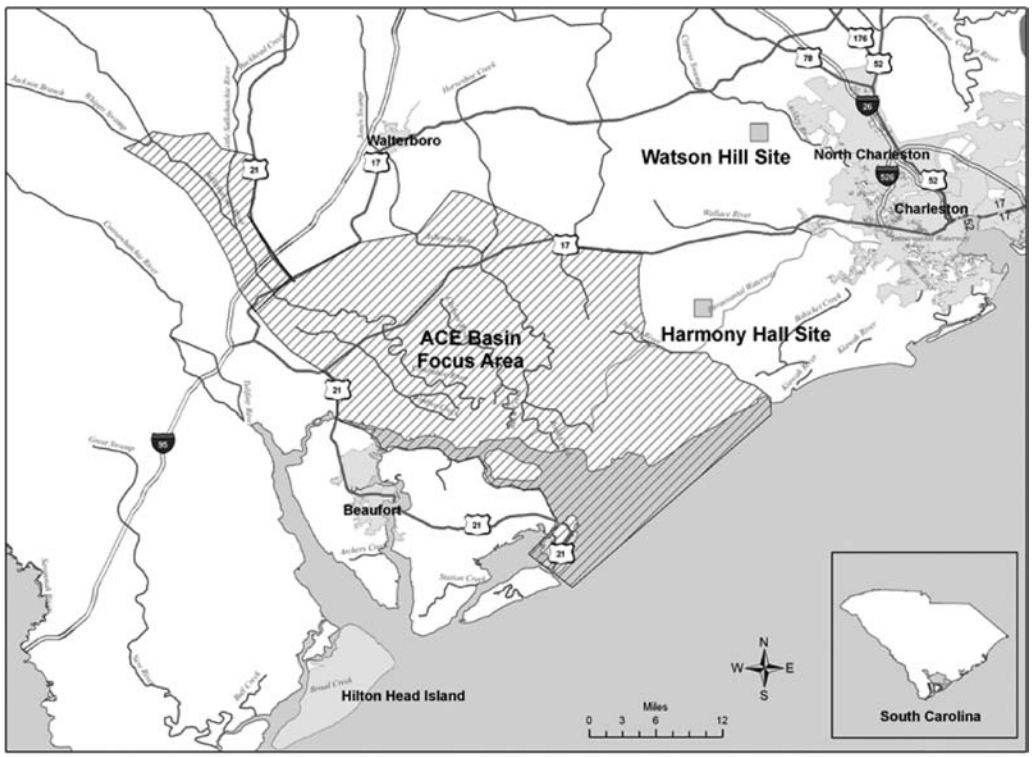
Lowcountry Interviewees by Sector and Organization Type*

Affiliation Category	Primary Affiliation	Number of Interviewees
Public sector	Partnership director	3
	State natural resource agency	3
	State and county parks and recreation	3
	State heritage program	1
	Federal agency official: EPA, USFWS, Sea Grant	4
	County planner	1
Third sector	Local/regional land trust	5
	State conservation/smart growth technical assistance assn	2
	The Nature Conservancy	3
	Ducks Unlimited	1
	Audubon Society	1
	Sierra Club	1
	National Wildlife/Wild Turkey Federation (hunting)	2
	Trust for Public Land	1
	Native plant society	1
	River/reserve friends group	2
	Coastal and rivers protection, clean water	2
Private sector	Consultant	1
	Funder	2
	Corporation	2

*Five additional interviewees from the public and third sector were based at the national or regional level.

APPENDIX C

Map of the South Carolina Lowcountry showing ACE Basin Focus Area, Watson Hill and Harmony Hall Sites, and Charleston Metropolitan Region



ACE Basin Focus Area

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Notes

[1] Similarly, Domhoff notes that "environmentalists, university students, and left-wing activists usually line up with the neighborhoods, even though *there is nothing inherently progressive about neighborhood protection*" (Domhoff, 2006b, p. 9).

[2] Additional interviews took place in Columbia, South Carolina, the state capital; Durham, North Carolina; and the Washington, DC, metropolitan area.

[3] For more information regarding methodology in the larger study, see Lee (2007). For a comparative analysis of the network ties of the conservation coalition to that of another coalition based on the same legislation, see Lee (2009).

[4] Another reason for caution in using anonymous forums is that commenters may be highly invested in the project under review, but do not have to reveal their affiliations. The *Post & Courier* does not promise confidentiality, and has publicly outed one public employee who made anonymous comments favorable to his boss on the forums (Smith, 2007). Analysis of user profiles of commenters who supported Harmony Hall reveals that some were frequent posters on multiple issues and others posted multiple times, but only on Harmony Hall, increasing the likelihood that these posters were vested in the Harmony Hall project in particular. As a result, only comments of those who posted frequently or had posted on an unrelated issue are included in the analysis here.

[5] As with politicians and public figures, I have used the Donnelleys real names due to their historical importance and public service with Ducks Unlimited and as founders of the Dorothy and Gaylord Donnelley Foundation. As a corporate executive and a Chicagoan with a Lowcountry plantation retreat, Donnelley's conservation philanthropy is in the tradition of the industrialist sportsmen described by Jacoby (2001) in his history of American conservation.

[6] Lee (2007) includes an extensive discussion and comparison of the strategic activities of Task Force members and their work to secure political legitimacy. Readers curious about political strategies of the Task Force are encouraged to consult that article, inasmuch as this article focuses on how the Task Force works to promote and legitimate conservation.

[7] As of 2005, the land trust conserved 159 properties totaling 40,400 acres in the Lowcountry, almost 40 percent of which were in the ACE Basin (2004 Annual Report). Almost 60 percent of its 2004 operating budget was provided by foundations at the local, state, and national level, including the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and other major conservation funders.

[8] The Task Force has a strict policy of not allowing groups or organizations to become members who seek to join in order to build their own capacity. See Lee (2007) for a detailed analysis of this policy.

[9] SID has an annual budget of over a million dollars and over 4,000 members, and is oriented toward conservation and broader environmental issues such as climate change and hydroelectric dams in the entire coastal region. Though not a member of the Task Force, it is a critical component of the coalition, and the original Chair of the Task Force was a board member of SID for many years. For more information on the role of SID in promoting public awareness of environmental issues and in advertising the political legitimacy of Task Force methods, see Lee (2007).

[10] This use of the advocacy organization to craft supportive statements on conservation even extends to the governor, who used the group's copy in his inauguration speech (Deane, interview with author 2003).

[11] Analogies to gentrification are not out of place here given that white abandonment and reinvestment occurred similarly, if over a much longer time period—although the particularities of this case deserve treatment in a separate venue (Lee, 2002). Turner himself was embroiled in a battle with African-American heirs' property owners, a complex arrangement of collective property ownership that has made African-American property owners in the region vulnerable to speculators preying on distantly related family members with small shares in a region in which they may have little personal investment. The conservation coalition has quietly supported legal aid programs and a nonprofit center supported by local and national foundations to protect heirs' property owners, but this has not been advertised publicly in the manner of the conservation projects described here. See Lee (2007) for analysis of the use of discretion in Task Force activities.

[12] MeadWestvaco has "earned" a place at the table because of substantial land donations, but Georgia Pacific, another company heavily invested in the region, is not a player.

[13] At the time of publication, the ultimate fate of development of both properties was still in question. Both Watson Hill and the portion of the Harmony Hall property reserved for development were in foreclosure proceedings, leaving open the potential for sale of the properties by the mortgage holders to conservation buyers. An opinion piece on Watson Hill in the *Post & Courier* by the editor emeritus of the paper warned, "It should now be obvious to any prospective buyer that only a purchaser with [the Defenders'] blessing will

have a chance of developing the property in the foreseeable future . . . there's good reason to believe the [Sea Island Defenders] now would be willing to drop the prolonged, expensive litigation provided it has concrete assurance that the new Watson Hill owners are conservation minded" (Williams, 2009). The collapse of real estate financing in the wake of the financial crisis has provided opportunities for the conservation coalition to regain "lost" ground.

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