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Edward P. Weber

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In the last two decades, people in a growing number of localities in the United States have developed grassroots ecosystem management (GREM) as a means to resolve policy problems affecting their environment, economy, and communities. Ad hoc and voluntary groups of environmentalists, developers, businesspeople, federal and state resource managers, farmers, loggers, local citizens, and those representing recreation interests use deliberation and consensus to enhance public policy performance. Instead of focusing on specific issues such as air pollution, GREM emphasizes the integrated management of entire watersheds and ecosystems. But what happens to democratic accountability in these collaborative efforts? Despite concerns that they might result in special interest government, the acceleration of environmental degradation, and an end-run around national environmental protection laws, this book suggests otherwise. Bringing Society Back In establishes a theoretical framework for exploring issues of policy performance and democratic accountability raised by GREM. Through three case studies--the Applegate Partnership in Oregon, the Henry's Fork Watershed Council in Idaho, and the Willapa Alliance in Washington state--it explores the mechanisms used to determine how accountability works. The book finds that by combining traditional and formal governance structures with informal institutions, GREM can be accountable to individuals, communities, surrounding regions, and the nation. The book also identifies conditions under which GREM is most likely to achieve democratic accountability. In addition, it investigates the connection between accountability and policy performance. The evidence suggests that GREM can produce environmental policy outcomes that are supportive not only of the environment and economy, but also of environmental sustainability.

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