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Adaptive Capacity and Environmental Governance



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Preface and Acknowledgments

How communities, governments, and other social actors respond to environmental issues and nonlinear change is a pressing challenge. The implications for human societies and their sustainable economic development are profound. In response, a growing number of researchers and practitioners are examining governance dilemmas using the concept of adaptive capacity, defined here as an ability to learn, experiment, and foster novel solutions in complex social–ecological circumstances. With the rapidly growing interest in environmental governance, there is both a need and a tremendous opportunity to examine the concept of adaptive capacity from different perspectives, explore opportunities for conceptual development, and debate its role within an emerging scholarship on governance in complex social–ecological systems.

This volume emerged from our initial work in exploring adaptive capacity in community-based resource management contexts, and a subsequent interest in extending this analysis into the realm of governance. This is the first integrated volume we are aware of that seeks to connect the theoretical foundations of adaptive capacity with the identification of governance attributes and practices that build adaptive capacity.

The volume is a result of many valuable contributions. Foremost, we thank the contributing authors for their participation. Individually and collectively, the chapters in the volume provide a wide range of insights about adaptive capacity and governance. A striking feature of the volume is the geographic scope and varied resource contexts in which insights, ideas, and lessons are offered – from the boreal forests of Sweden, to fisheries in Brazil, and agricultural systems in South Africa. The case studies presented in this volume are offered by applied researchers who have long engagements with their respective research sites. However, the cases in this book are set alongside a number of contributions devoted to the exploration of cross-cutting themes and conceptual innovations on the frontier of research. This diversity of cases and conceptual exploration reveals the multifaceted nature of linkages between adaptive capacity and governance, and the context-specific strategies that must be employed to build governance processes that will adapt to change and steer societies towards sustainable pathways.

Each of the contributions in this volume has been peer-reviewed by at least two individuals. We are grateful for the valuable insights and constructive feedback provided by anonymous reviewers and the following individuals: Fikret Berkes, Joshua Cinner, Beatrice Crona, Alan Diduck, Frank Duerden, Georgina Cundill, Ioan Fazey, George Francis, Jennifer Fresque, Thomas Hahn, Kevin Hanna, Marco Janssen, Carina Keskitalo, Gita Laidler, Patrick McConney, Melissa Marschke, Dan McCarthy, Melanie Muro, Don Nelson, Mark Pelling, Lisen Schultz, Scott Slocombe, Robert Summers, and Sonia Wesche.

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April 2010

Derek Armitage and Ryan Plummer

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