

## **Environmental History as a Framework to Inform Resilience Theory and Local Decision Making**

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Resilience theory is rooted in ecology and has been criticized for incompletely integrating social, political and economic factors and for providing a theoretical perspective with limited practical application. Environmental history provides concrete and integrated examples of linked social-ecological systems that may provide insight into social and political drivers and suggest places or times to intervene in systems. This project uses interviews and historical research to create an environmental history narrative about change in a watershed in northwestern Colorado. This approach facilitates discussion of “resilience of what” by identifying what community members wish to maintain, in this case ranching livelihoods. The environmental history of this watershed revealed patterns that could inform both local decision-making and theory. System thresholds occurred when inter-annual climate fluctuations coincided with economic and social disturbances suggesting that in linked systems, it is critical to monitor both social and ecological indicators. In addition, outside investment led to boom and bust patterns within the watershed, suggesting that systems reliant on outside inputs may be more vulnerable to sudden change. Finally, patterns identified in this history challenge the current paradigm of unlimited growth and suggest that inherent land limitations will restrict and balance growth pressures. A historical perspective links resilience theory to social, economic and political drivers and helps communities identify critical patterns of change that may inform decision-making in particular places.