

6. EXPLORATION OF A HORIZON SCANNING TREND: GROWING INDIGENOUS EMPOWERMENT

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Abstract.—Growing indigenous empowerment and recognition of rights with respect to natural resources was identified as an emerging trend in the USDA Forest Service-University of Houston Forest Futures Horizon Scanning system. An exploratory Implications Wheel® exercise was conducted to uncover possible future implications of this trend. The exercise was carried out with a group of University of Houston Foresight graduate students, faculty, and alumni. The exercise did not include American Indian or Alaska Native participants, and due to this limitation it should be viewed as an illustration of the usefulness of the method for exploring the implications of horizon scanning hits. A total of 175 first-, second-, and third-order implications were generated. Analysis of the implications found nine emerging themes and four scenarios. The findings reveal the wide range of significant possibilities that could result from growing indigenous empowerment and suggest the importance of monitoring this trend as it unfolds.

INTRODUCTION

“All or part of every national forest and grassland is carved out of the ancestral lands of American Indian and Alaska Native Peoples. Indigenous communities across the country still maintain strong historical and spiritual connections to the land, connections that have not been extinguished despite changes in land ownership.”

—Leslie Weldon, *National Forest System Deputy Chief, USDA Forest Service*
(quoted in: *USDA Forest Service Research and Development [2016: 4]*).

American Indian tribes and Alaska Native communities are vital partners of the USDA Forest Service (hereafter, Forest Service) and other public land management agencies. The first objective of the Forest Service Research and Development Tribal Engagement Roadmap (2016: 2) is to “[b]uild and enhance existing partnerships with tribes, indigenous and native groups, tribal colleges, tribal communities, and intertribal organizations.” This study examined possible future implications of an important emerging trend related to American Indian and Alaska Native communities: growing indigenous empowerment and recognition of rights with respect to natural resources. Growing indigenous empowerment was identified as an emerging issue in the Forest Service-University of Houston Forest Futures Horizon Scanning system. The goal of this system is to find important emerging issues and trends in the external environment of the Forest Service and forestry, and to explore possible implications of these early indicators of change for the agency and for the field of forestry in the future. We report on an exploratory Implications Wheel® exercise to examine possible implications of growing indigenous empowerment.

The following section describes the emerging issue of “growing indigenous empowerment.” This is followed by an explanation of the Implications Wheel method, and a summary of selected results of the exercise. A concluding section briefly assesses the usefulness of the method and discusses the need to monitor the issue as it develops.

GROWING INDIGENOUS EMPOWERMENT

The emerging issue examined in this study was “growing indigenous empowerment and recognition of rights regarding natural resources.” Indigenous communities in the United States and around the world are increasingly demanding and receiving a stronger voice in the management of natural resources, including forest management, energy infrastructure, dams, environmental science, and other areas. This emerging trend could shift the debate about how public lands should be managed and change the way society approaches decisionmaking about natural resource management, land use, and the environment. Examples of signals related to this trend from the Forest Futures Horizon Scanning database are:

- “From the rocky, pebbled beaches north of Seattle, where the Lummi Nation has led the fight against a proposed coal terminal, to southern Utah, where a coalition of tribes is demanding management rights over a proposed new national monument, to the tiny wooded community of Bella Bella, British Columbia, 350 miles north of the US border, Native Americans are asserting old treaty rights and using tribal traditions to protect and manage federally owned land” (Johnson 2016: A12).
- In a ruling with substantial importance for water management in the American West, a U.S. appeals court upheld a lower court’s decision that an Indian tribe in California’s Coachella Valley has a right to groundwater beneath its reservation (Walton 2017).
- The Coquille Tribe in Oregon is regaining control over 5,000 acres of ancestral forest land (KCBY 2016).
- A growing number of U.S. cities and towns, and the State of Vermont, have renamed Columbus Day as Indigenous Peoples’ Day in recent years (Evans 2016).
- A law passed on March 15, 2017 makes the Whanganui River in New Zealand a legal person, in the sense that it can own property, incur debts, and petition the courts. For New

Zealand’s indigenous Maori, the idea of the river as a person is nothing new and stems from their deep spiritual connection to the Whanganui (The Economist 2017).

- The President of Indonesia recently recognized the right of nine indigenous groups to manage the forests that they have traditionally occupied and managed (Gaol and Dahlia 2017).

These represent a sample of the scanning hits related to growing indigenous empowerment in the Forest Futures horizon scanning database, and they indicate the range of signals of change for this trend.

The Implications Wheel

The Implications Wheel is a participatory “smart group” method that uses a structured brainstorming process to identify possible first-, second-, and third-order consequences (implications) resulting from any type of change, and to score them for desirability and likelihood (Bengston 2016, Bengston et al. 2018). The structured group process of the Implications Wheel facilitates “cascade thinking,” that is, “how one event or implication leads to multiple possibilities, each of which in turn leads to additional possibilities” (Barker and Kenny 2010: 2). Cascade thinking helps planners and decisionmakers to proactively consider potential long-term, higher-order effects of change in order to prepare for these changes. The findings from Implications Wheel exercises can be used to develop strategies to increase the likelihood of positive implications, decrease the likelihood of negative implications, and identify information needs or gaps.

The word “wheel” in Implications Wheel derives from the wheel-like structure to the notes that emerges as the group process proceeds (Fig. 1). The change of interest is placed in the center—like the hub of a wheel—and then first-, second-, and third-order implications of the change are generated by participants and emanate outward from the center in concentric rings. For details on the method, see Bengston (2016).



Figure 1.—Simplified Implications Wheel structure. A complete wheel typically has about five second-order implications for each first-order implication, and five third-order implications for each second-order implication.

The Implications Wheel exercise reported on here involved 40 participants (16 women, 24 men). All participants were either current or former students, or current or former faculty members, in the University of Houston’s Foresight graduate program. This group did not include American Indian or Alaska Native participants. The Implications Wheel method requires a diverse group of participants to provide as many perspectives as possible. The participants in this exercise had the advantage of being exceptionally well versed in futures thinking and foresight methods. However, because this group lacked

American Indian perspectives, the results should be understood as possible implications from the perspective of nonindigenous people. Accordingly, the specific results should be viewed as incomplete and limited. Nonetheless, the exercise is a useful illustration of the Implications Wheel method for exploring possible implications of horizon scanning hits.

A total of 175 implications of “growing indigenous empowerment” were generated in this exercise: 7 first-order implications, 33 second-orders, and 135 third-orders. Implications were not scored for

desirability or likelihood due to a limited amount of time to conduct the exercise. We solicited ideas for first-orders from participants by email in advance. First-order implications should follow directly from the center issue, with no significant intervening events. Of the ideas submitted, the following seven first-orders were selected for exploration because they (1) follow directly from the center trend, and (2) encompass the range of issues covered in the full set of submitted first-orders:

1. An Indigenous People's political party is formed to promote interests and rights.
2. Increased indigenous rights and recognition of ownership cascade to other areas, beyond natural resources and public lands.
3. Traditional indigenous spiritual values, emphasizing that all life is interconnected and interdependent, begin to grow and spread throughout society.
4. Natural resources and environmental science majors are required to take courses in traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) at all accredited environmental programs in U.S. universities.
5. Treaty rights are broadened and Native American tribes construct resorts and tourist facilities on some public lands.
6. Hunting, fishing, and gathering activities on public lands by nonnatives are significantly restricted to allow greater harvest by Native Americans, in accordance with treaty rights.
7. Political powers and economic interests try to stop the trend of growing indigenous empowerment.

Participants were divided into seven groups of five or six people, and each group was assigned one of the seven first-order implications to identify possible second- and third-order implications.

EMERGING THEMES AND SCENARIOS

In this paper, we focus on two aspects of the results: (1) major themes identified from an analysis of the full set of implications, and (2) four broad scenarios (or scenario sketches) that emerged.

Emerging Themes

Major themes were identified through a thematic content analysis carried out on the complete set of 175 implications. These themes are not exhaustive, but they synthesize some of the most important recurring concepts uncovered in the implications. The themes are listed next, along with two specific implications identified by participants that illustrate each theme.

Regulation—In response to growing indigenous empowerment, increasing regulations affect the nature of activities on public lands.

- “Increased regulations for managing public lands”
- “Increase in taxes needed to support regulations”

Politicization—Decisionmaking related to natural resources becomes increasingly political.

- “Proliferation of single-issue based political parties”
- “Indigenous political party is formed”

Disruption—Significant alteration of governmental states of affairs occurs in response to rights claims.

- “Power of current political parties changes”
- “Direct military intervention on behalf of powers opposing indigenous empowerment”

Spirituality—Greater emphasis is placed on the reality and importance of a spiritual dimension to all of life.

- “Integration of ‘whole person’ perspective”
- “Reconceptualization of religious structures”

Academicism—The value of TEK is acknowledged in the academic world.

- “More indigenous students, greater ethnic diversity”
- “More research into indigenous knowledge—new PhD programs”

Commercialization—Tribes seek financial gain from treaty rights.

- “Many tribes begin planning resorts for public lands”
- “Online gaming and virtual-reality gaming businesses are developed”

Conflict—Significant opposition to indigenous values and empowerment is expressed.

- “Legal and logistical barriers created to squash human rights and ecological groups”
- “Suppression of indigenous tribal history and culture”

Justice—Concerns arise over the actualization of fair and equitable treatment.

- “Social injustice increases due to less revenue available for projects supporting equity”
- “United Nations talks to define rights of indigenous”

Identity—Opinions regarding conceptions of self increasingly diverge.

- “Pan-indigenous identity develops and becomes widespread”
- “Future generations of indigenous tribes lose their cultural identity”

Emerging Scenario Sketches

In addition to the nine focused themes, much broader themes or scenario sketches also emerged from analysis of the 175 implications. These mini-scenarios point to broad directions in which the future could unfold in response to a trend of growing indigenous empowerment. The four scenario sketches were titled: Growing Tension and Conflict, Backlash and Declining Empowerment, Indigenous “Ecotopia,” and Indigenous “Disneyfication.”

The *Growing Tension and Conflict* scenario is characterized by increased social tensions precipitated by restrictions on the use of public land by nonnative people. This tension leads to a cascade of effects, including escalating conflict related to the harvest of game and other natural resources. Issues become more political and red tape increases as new governmental institutions are

created to transfer management responsibilities to indigenous groups and adjudicate disputes. Levels of racism and conflict surrounding indigenous groups increase steadily, even as indigenous empowerment continues to grow.

Backlash and Declining Empowerment begins with the formation of an indigenous people’s political party to promote interests and rights. The hope is that this effort will attract and galvanize support for indigenous issues, but a backlash quickly develops as entrenched nonindigenous interest groups are threatened by an erosion of power. Loss of congressional allies leads to elimination of Bureau of Indian Affairs appropriations, and tribal lands begin to be seized by way of eminent domain. Tribal sovereignty is slowly worn down.

Indigenous “Ecotopia” is initially prompted by widespread gains in understanding and appreciation of native cultures and worldviews. This leads to large-scale questioning of predominantly Western societal values and structures and land management decisions. Universities add TEK requirements to curricula in many fields, including natural resources. Ecological and human rights groups align closely with indigenous groups. Eventually, stronger international bonds are formed between indigenous peoples across the globe. Treaties are universally honored and indigenous groups increasingly take over the stewardship of natural resources in many contexts.

Indigenous “Disneyfication” is characterized by a shift away from indigenous relationships to nature and toward a commercial relationship. Construction of resorts, theme parks, casinos, and other tourist facilities on public lands skyrockets, and many tribal investment groups are created. There is an upsurge in media attention to indigenous themes, with little emphasis on the accuracy or validity of the knowledge being portrayed. The rapid expansion of indigenous tourist facilities creates transportation bottlenecks, leading to an increase in road-building on public lands and stress on regional airports.

These four mini-scenarios portray different possible futures based on the implications and themes that emerged. The scenarios could be fully developed and used in participatory planning or foresight activities with tribes, public land management agencies, and other stakeholders. The use of emerging issues that were uncovered in horizon scanning (such as growing indigenous empowerment) in other foresight methods (such as Implications Wheels and scenario planning) suggests the importance of horizon scanning as the essential “feedstock” for many foresight activities (Schultz 2006).

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This exploratory Implications Wheel exercise revealed the wide range of positive and negative changes that could emerge from growing indigenous empowerment. Due to the lack of American Indian and Alaska Native participants, however, the exercise should be viewed as an illustration of the usefulness of the Implications Wheel method for exploring possible implications of trends and issues identified through horizon scanning. A follow-up study with indigenous participants is needed to provide a complete exploration of this issue and its possible future implications. This study also revealed the ways in which horizon scanning can feed into other futures methods and analyses.

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