

8. COMMUNICATING HORIZON SCANNING

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Abstract.—Horizon scanning produces a significant amount of information about potential change that may be on the horizon. To be useful for the intended audiences, this large volume of information must be sorted, condensed, analyzed, interpreted, and presented in formats that fit the needs of diverse users. This paper describes the various current and planned communication outputs of the Forest Futures Horizon Scanning project, including the scanning library, blog posts about significant scanning hits or emerging themes, a periodic digest summarizing interesting scanning hits, detailed articles and technical reports, presentations to a wide range of audiences, and input to other strategic foresight projects. A possible additional output would be to offer focused scanning services on priority issues to groups within the USDA Forest Service.

INTRODUCTION

The Forest Futures Horizon Scanning system is producing a substantial amount of information about the future of forestry. The core unit of information is the scanning “hit” stored in a digital library, which currently contains over 1,200 entries. This information is being collected by small scanning teams from the USDA Forest Service (hereafter, Forest Service), Northern Research Station’s Strategic Foresight Group, the University of Houston Foresight program, and several volunteer scanners. Though it can be interesting and perhaps enlightening to browse through the large scanning library, it is unlikely that the intended audience—mainly forest planners, managers, and policymakers—will have the time or inclination to do so. Thus, from the beginning the project team has sought to develop a variety of outputs to effectively communicate insights from the scanning process.

The project team worked to clarify the intended audience of scanning, who might benefit from it, and provide insight for the communication strategy. Stakeholders for this horizon scanning system include both internal (Forest Service) and external users and partners:

- **Internal stakeholders** range from Forest Service Washington Office leadership to planners and managers on individual national forests.
- **External stakeholders** include a wide range of Forest Service partners and organizations involved with forestry and natural resource issues, such as wood industry associations, urban forestry associations, professional societies in forestry and natural resources, international forestry organizations, environmental nongovernmental organizations, State foresters, and forest academics and scientists.

The diversity of stakeholders suggests the need for a diverse set of outputs and a flexible communication strategy that can appeal to the differing levels of interest and different information needs. Currently, the following outputs are being produced or are planned:

- the horizon scanning library, which contains the unprocessed scanning hits;
- blog posts that highlight individual scanning hits or synthesize emerging themes from the scanning library;
- a bimonthly digest summarizing especially interesting or significant scanning hits;
- in-depth articles and technical reports that explore emerging issues and insights gained from scanning;
- presentations to a variety of internal and external audiences; and
- input into other strategic foresight projects.

A possible additional output would be to offer focused scanning services on priority issues to groups within the Forest Service. The following short sections elaborate on each of these scanning outputs.

SCANNING LIBRARY

The scanning library is the repository for all scanning hits (see Figure 1). The project team developed a tagging system for each scanning hit based on categories in a domain map (see Hines et al. [2018] and papers 1 and 2, this volume) and three time horizons:

- Horizon 1 (the current system, from now to 2025)
- Horizon 2 (the zone of transition, from 2025 to 2035)
- Horizon 3 (visions of a new system, from 2035 and beyond)

The tagging system provides an easy way to search for relevant scanning hits in the library,

and the scanning library can be opened to interested participants, who simply provide their email address. But exploring the large and growing library requires a level of interest and effort that is unlikely to extend much beyond the scanning team, suggesting a need to synthesize and summarize the results into more user-friendly formats.

BLOG POSTS

The first approach to synthesizing and summarizing the content was to develop a series of short blog posts (Fig. 2). Scanners were asked to identify interesting or favorite scanning hits and elaborate on them in blog posts of roughly 500 words (although many were longer). A key selection criterion for potential blog posts was novelty, given the goal of building interest in the scanning system and its outputs. The blog posts are currently being hosted on the Houston Foresight blog.

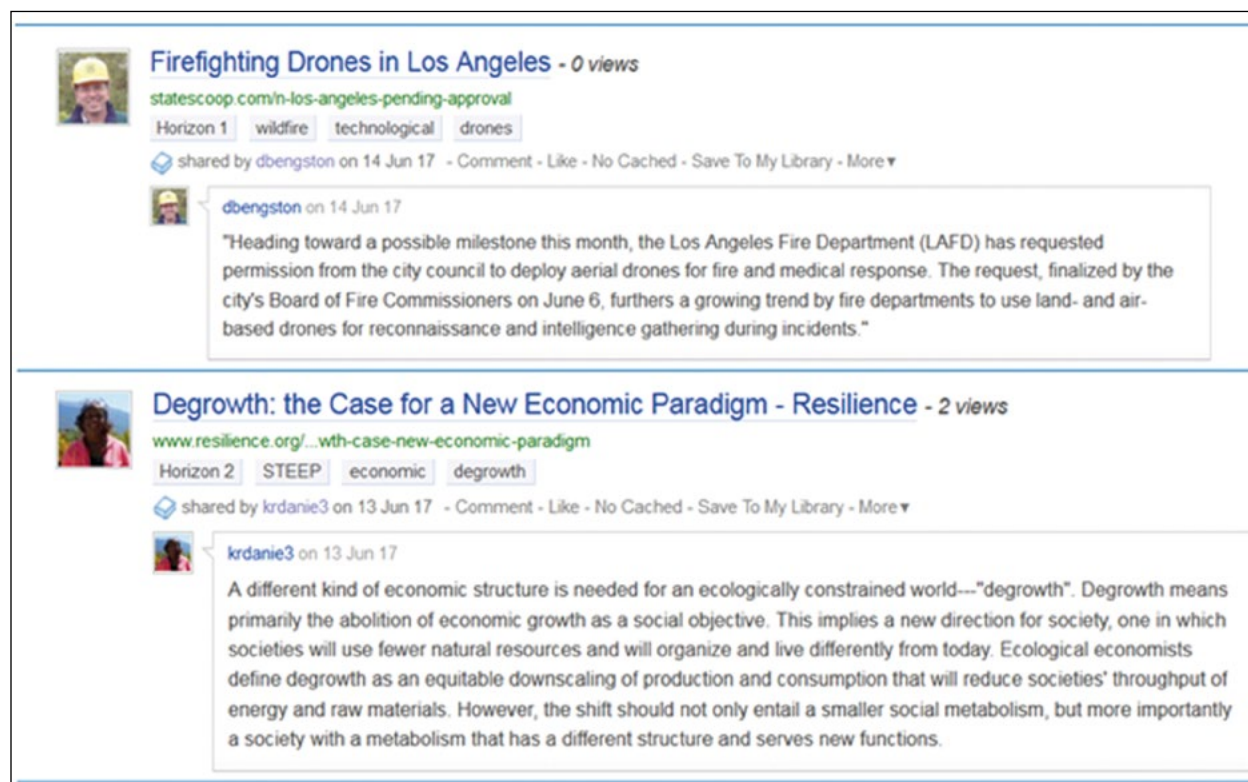


Figure 1.—Screenshot of horizon scanning library.

Forest Futures

The Vertical Forest

Posted by **Andy** on November 28, 2017 at 8:49 pm

First we had vertical farms, and now....vertical forests! The Forest Futures scanning team found the following scanning hit: Forest in the sky: Residential tower blocks covered in 800 trees and 15,000 plants help combat global warming in Milan. The Boeri Studio in Milan Italy designed the project to help combat global warming and pollution. The [...]

The Coming Age of ... Wood?!

Posted by **Andy** on November 19, 2017 at 7:11 pm

On my bookshelf, surrounded by scores of futures books, is a 1949 volume published by Simon and Schuster and authored by Egon Glesinger. The book is titled The Coming Age of Wood. Glesinger was Chief of the Forest Products Branch of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and was decades ahead of [...]

Apple in the Forest

Posted by **Kimberly Daniels** on August 20, 2017 at 6:33 pm

Figure 2.—Screenshot of Forest Futures blog (<https://www.houstonforesight.org/?cat=1216>).

There are now more than 20 Forest Futures blog posts hosted on the site:

- [The Vertical Forest](#)
- [The Coming Age of ... Wood?!](#)
- [Apple in the Forest](#)
- [Forest Futures: Economic Growth or Degrowth?](#)
- [Visualizing Forest Futures: Linking Traditional Knowledge with Modeling and Visualization](#)
- [Mimicking Mother Nature: Nudging Forests Toward Old Growth Conditions](#)
- [AI, the Forest, and Artisans](#)
- [Before We Let Robots Reclaim the Sahara...](#)
- [A Bionic Leaf: An Unsuspecting Hero?](#)
- [Coming Home to the Forest](#)
- [Catch 'Em While They're Small](#)
- [Flash Towns in the Forest?](#)
- [Increasing Resiliency](#)
- [From Christmas Tree to Coffee Table: Pine Needles are Full of Potential](#)
- [Knowing Each Tree in the Forest](#)
- [Promising Technologies in Forest Monitoring](#)
- [Wood Skyscrapers](#)
- [Concentrated Cities amongst Wilderness](#)
- [Hotdogs Made of Trees?](#)

- [Facetime the Woods](#)
- [May I Camp on You? The Future of Autonomous Ecosystems](#)
- [Forests as Therapy](#)
- [3D Printing with Wood](#)
- [Forest Recreation in the Age of Social Media](#)

DIGEST

A newsletter or digest of scanning hits is a planned output, but it has not yet been implemented.

As envisioned, the digest would cover many categories included in our scanning database, such as industry, institutions, stewardship, ecosystems, climate, and the general categories of STEEP (social, technological, economic, environmental, and political) forces. An interesting scanning hit (or two) for most categories would be included in each issue, with a catchy title, short summary, and link to the original source article. A blog post would be featured in each issue as well.

The digest would be kept brief and easy to quickly read, enabling the reader to rapidly decide which hits to follow up on. The logic is to entice less interested readers with items that may raise their level of interest in a quick and user-friendly way.

ARTICLES AND TECHNICAL REPORTS

The horizon scanning team is producing a series of articles and technical reports, which have appeal to several stakeholder groups. These publications are expected to be of particular interest to the academic and research community as well as forest planners, managers, and policymakers motivated to pursue foresight activities. The first article, “Setting Up a Horizon Scanning System: A U.S. Federal Agency Example,” has been published in *World Futures Review* (Hines et al. 2018). It outlines the process of setting up the system. Analyses of the possible direct and indirect implications of emerging issues and themes using the Implications Wheel® method have been carried out (see papers 5 and 6, this volume). This General Technical Report is another output, and a series of annual articles highlighting emerging issues, trends, and signals of change is planned.

PRESENTATIONS

The material produced by the project will also be used as the basis of agency and conference presentations. The first such presentation, “Forest Futures: Strategic Foresight and Horizon Scanning to Support Decision Making,” was made July 24, 2017 to an audience at the Forest Service headquarters in Washington, DC.

INPUT TO STRATEGIC FORESIGHT PROJECTS

The results of horizon scanning can also be communicated indirectly as inputs to a variety of strategic foresight projects. Strategic foresight work based on the output of horizon scanning include:

- Implications Wheel analyses of scanning hits and trends (Bengston 2016),
- Scenario planning exercises in which horizon scanning informs the conception and design of alternative futures (Schwartz 1996), and
- Gaming methods (Milojević 2017) in which emerging issues identified through scanning are used in foresight card decks, board games, immersive role-playing experiences, and other gaming approaches.

The Forest Service’s Strategic Foresight Group is an ongoing research unit that will draw on the output of the Forest Futures Horizon Scanning system as an important input to many foresight projects in the years ahead.

FOCUSED SCANNING SERVICE

Finally, a possible additional output of the Forest Futures Horizon Scanning system is to provide focused scans on priority issues upon request. To date, the effort has been limited to broad scanning of the entire external environment for forestry and the Forest Service, but it would be possible to offer focused scanning services on priority issues to groups within the agency. Horizon scanning sometimes focuses on a particular topic or domain considered to be most important, such as an emerging technology, a specific social or cultural trend, or an important issue.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The strategic approach to communicating the output of horizon scanning is to produce a variety of outputs—from the library of “raw,” unprocessed scanning hits to highly synthesized products—that appeal to varying levels of interest. The true test, of course, will be in the marketplace. As the products are rolled out, the team will have a better idea of what is working and what is not, and can make the appropriate adjustments.

LITERATURE CITED

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