

TO ZONE OR NOT TO ZONE

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to: 1) identify social and ecological considerations where human uses of land conflict with each other and with wildlife habitat needs; and 2) describe the importance of land-use planning.

METHOD

Students role-play a meeting of a county commission pertaining to a land-use issue.

BACKGROUND

This activity uses a role-play strategy for study of the importance of land-use planning. It emphasizes the complexities of decision-making where people of different points of view are involved.

Land use decisions affecting wildlife have become a familiar issue where housing developments are concerned. The following is an imaginary conflict that corresponds to some real life dilemmas. This information should be provided to students as background.

The major purpose of this activity is for students to understand the importance as well as some of the complexities of land-use planning and decision-making.

MATERIALS

copies of role descriptions; props optional for role play; room set up for hearing

PROCEDURE

1. Provide the students with copies of the background information concerning this hypothetical land-use dilemma.

2. Fifteen students will be assigned (or volunteer) for roles as county commissioners, local residents and business people—with each receiving a card describing his or her situation. The rest of the students will have roles as news reporters, outside experts, concerned citizens, etc. These students may ask questions of people testifying at the hearing. They can be required to write letters to the editor or one of the commissioners in support of a particular point of view; write news articles about the hearing or personal impact stories describing the potential consequences for local workers, residents, school children, etc; prepare technical reports as researchers, etc. Every student should have a role—either as one of the 15 people preparing testimony for the hearing, or as active observers who prepare written questions, reports, or news articles.

LAND USE DECISION

Pleasant Valley is a ranching-logging community on the western slope of the Snow mountains. Silverton—a town of 20,000—is the trade center of the area. Cramer Lumber Company is expanding its operations. This will provide 250 new jobs, but housing is very limited. A 200-home subdivision has been proposed for an 80-acre plot of undeveloped land on the south edge of town. This forested area is bordered by Rattlesnake Creek on the west. Rattlesnake Creek provides excellent fishing for rainbow trout. Fifty-three species

of birds have been sighted in this area, including some rare species. In the spring and fall, the area is used by migrating waterfowl and deer feed in the area. Many small watchable species such as ground squirrels and pocket gophers inhabit this land. This 80-acre plot is currently zoned for agriculture and forestry and would have to be rezoned as residential by a vote of the county commissioners. The subdivision would be on a central water system, but each home would have its own septic system.

3. To set the stage for the simulation, have each of the 15 participants read their personal data cards. The other students should select their role; they do not need personal data cards, although they may write their own. Students should then be given homework time to prepare their presentations as members of the inquiry; or questions, letters to the editor and news stories as public observers. Students should be encouraged to improvise in developing their presentations and questions.

4. The day (or days) of the hearing, the chairperson of the commission is to run the meeting. It is up to him or her to maintain order. All participants must be recognized by the chairperson before they speak. After all those presenting prepared testimony have spoken and have been questioned—the reporters, researchers and concerned citizens will be asked to read their statements (articles, reports, letters to the editor, etc.). This is an excellent way to start the final day of the simulation. After all testimony, questions and statements, the commissioners vote and give the reasons for their decisions.

5. Suggested time line for this activity:

- Day 1 Read background information and select roles (approximately 30-45 minutes)
- Homework Prepare presentations
- Day 2 Conduct hearing (approximately 30-45 minutes)
- Day 3 Continue hearing, including reading of news items and letters to the editor; vote; discuss results

6. After the hearing and vote, discuss questions such as the following:

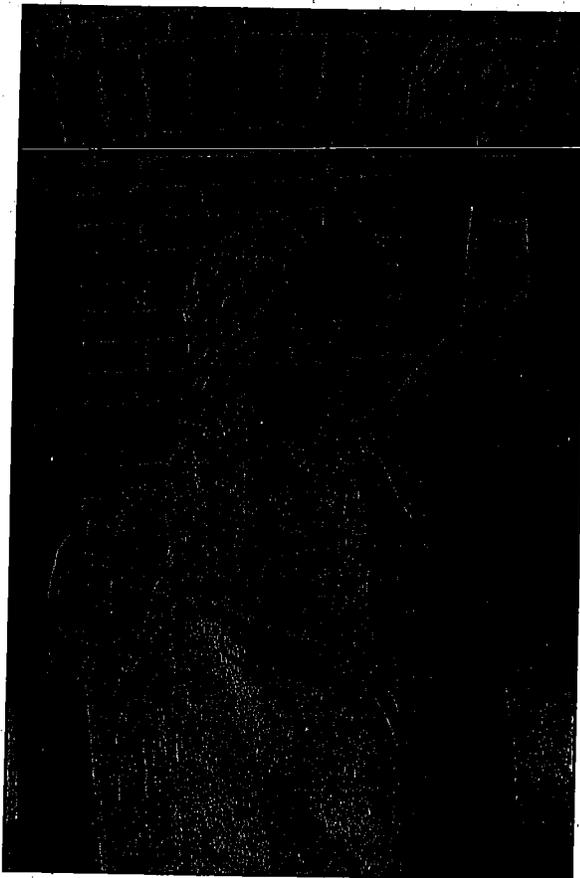
- What are some things we have learned about land-use decision making?
- What factors influence land-use decision making and planning?
- What differences and similarities were there between how decisions were made in this activity and how they happen in our community? Other areas? Other parts of the world?
- What responsibilities do we as citizens have in helping to make land-use decisions?
- Why are land-use decision making and land-use planning important for people, wildlife and the environment?

EXTENSIONS AND VARIATIONS

1. Have students identify a wildlife issue in their local area, gather data and develop their own simulation.
2. Alter the role descriptions and repeat the simulation.
3. Use copies of a topographical map as common references for everyone.
4. Bring in real expert witnesses; e.g., local people who can add their perspectives and expertise. If you do, make an effort to get a balanced range of points of view rather than hearing from only one perspective on the issues involved.
5. Adapt this activity to a debate format.
6. Attend a local zoning board meeting.

AQUATIC EXTENSION

Consider another land-use question! See the Aquatic WILD activity, "To Dam or Not To Dam."



EVALUATION

1. Describe zoning laws. Identify and describe possible effects and values of zoning laws. Consider potential positive and negative effects.
2. Find out how local zoning laws are passed. Write a short report describing how the activity "To Zone Or Not To Zone" is similar or different than what really happens.
3. Describe how citizens can get their opinions considered in land-use decision making processes.
4. Give an example of how a zoning law might be good for wildlife. Describe how citizens can get their opinions considered in land-use decision making processes.

Age: Grades 6-9

Subjects: Social Studies, Science, Environmental Problems, Language Arts, Speech

Skills: analysis, application, comparing similarities and differences, description, discussion, evaluation, generalization, public speaking, reporting, research, synthesis, writing

Duration: three 45-minute periods

Group Size: large group; depends on students assuming roles

Setting: indoors

Conceptual Framework Reference: I.D., II.A., II.B., II.C., II.C.2., II.C.3., II.D., II.D.1., II.D.2., II.D.3., II.E., II.E.1., II.E.2., II.E.3., II.F., IV.F.11., V.A.5., V.B., V.B.1., V.B.2., VI.A., VI.A.1., VI.A.2., VI.A.3., VI.A.4., VI.A.5., VI.B., VI.B.1., VI.B.2., VI.B.3., VI.B.4., VI.B.5., VI.B.6., VI.C., VI.C.1., VI.C.2., VI.C.6., VI.C.7., VI.C.12., VI.C.16., VI.D., VI.D.1., VII.A., VII.A.1., VII.A.2., VII.A.3., VII.A.4., VII.B., VII.B.1., VII.B.5., VII.B.6., VII.B.7.

Key Vocabulary: land-use planning

Appendices: Local Resources, Simulations, Monday Group

Personal Data Cards

LEN OR LINDA OLSEN, REALTOR (COUNTY COMMISSIONER)

You started your business in Silverton five years ago. Your business is doing well, but you have difficulty relating to the "old timers" like Thompson. Your real estate company is not developing this property. You have some question regarding the credibility of the developer, but you generally vote in favor of development.

DAVID OR WANDA DRESSER, MERCHANT (COUNTY COMMISSIONER)

You are 46 and own a furniture store. You would like to sell furniture to all the new home owners. You can also see the value of the 80 acres left in a natural and undeveloped condition. You are wondering if there might be another site for the development of this housing area.

JACK OR JANET THOMPSON, RANCHER (COUNTY COMMISSIONER)

You are the third generation to run the "Rolling T" Cattle Company. You are proud to tell people that your grandfather was one of the first to settle in this valley. Your spread covers 800 acres and you have grazing rights to surrounding U.S. Forest Service land. You resent the increase in population of the area and, although you are involved in community affairs, you resent individuals moving into the area who do not share your values. Last winter, snowmobiles cut your fences three times and in one case your cattle wandered onto the highway and caused a traffic accident.

BOB OR BETSY HENDERSON, FARMER (COUNTY COMMISSIONER)

You own and operate a large farm near the south edge of town and adjacent to the 80-acre plot in question. You have been interested in the possibility of buying the land to add to your family's agricultural operations. You've a keen interest in the environment, making efforts to employ agricultural practices that benefit wildlife and minimize damage to other natural resources. Since you are an adjacent landholder, you may need to disqualify yourself from participation as a Commissioner in this meeting.

ELMER OR BERTHA WILLAS, RESIDENT

You are a 68-year old "old timer" living on the land proposed for the subdivision. You have lived on Cornwall's land for 45 years, built a home there with Cornwall's permission, and have raised seven children. You raise bees and chickens out back and your garden covers one-half acre. You are settled in the middle of the area proposed for the housing development and there is no question that you will have to be evicted and your house torn down. You have no legal claim to any of the land, but have nowhere else to go.

JAMES OR ERMA "FROSTY" WHITE, SNOWMOBILER

You are 30 years old and have just been elected president of the "Rattlers," the local snowmobile club, and you feel that you should defend their interests in the area. The cost of gas is high, and your club doesn't want to have to drive long distances to ride snowmobiles. You would like to open a snowmobile repair shop, but you might get a job at the new lumber mill.

TOM OR MARY BENNETT, PRESIDENT OF CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

This is your tenth year as president of the Chamber of Commerce. You own a grocery store in the middle of town. Your greatest concern is the weak business climate in your community. The Chamber recently hired Smith & Wittgen, a business consulting firm, to evaluate the retain potential of Pleasant Valley. Their findings indicate that the business community has overbuilt. Your profits and those of your fellow merchants have been steadily declining. You see this new lumber mill as the salvation of your business. You also have wondered about possible ways to improve the economy through increased tourism.

OSCAR OR JAN SPARROW, LOCAL AUDUBON PRESIDENT

You represent over 300 active Audubon members, and are director of the annual bird count competition. You have a list of 15 rare bird species found in the Rattlesnake Creek area. You are 37 years old and work at the lumber mill.

GEORGE OR ALICE LONG WINGS, NATIVE AMERICAN INDIAN LEADER

You have an interest in the sanctity of the area in question as it is an ancient ceremonial site for your tribespeople.

CHARLIE OR CHARLOTTE JACKSON, HUNTER

You are a 53-year old "old timer" and an avid hunter and fisher. You have four boys and hunting has always been an important family activity. You are an influential member of Ducks Unlimited, and the 80 acres proposed for development contains one of the prime duck hunting areas close to town.

WALLACE OR WILMA CRAMER, LUMBER MILL OWNER

You own the nearby lumber mill. Operations have expanded and you need inexpensive housing for new employees coming to the area. The wood milled is used locally and transported throughout the state. It provides an important source of income to the town.

MARTIN OR ETHEL HIGGINS, DEVELOPER

You are the largest developer in the area and can afford to buy the land outright. You will make a substantial profit if the housing that is needed for the lumber mill employees is built. You are successful and fairly competent, but you have been criticized more than once for a lack of attention to landscape detail and design.

HAROLD OR CORNELIA CORNWALL, LAND OWNER

You are a 63-year old retired business person. You want to sell your land, move to Palm Springs, and live happily ever after under sunny skies. You want cash but your asking price is very reasonable. You own the 80 acres of prime wild land south of town.

FRANK OR FRANCES STUDY, COLLEGE PROFESSOR

You teach at a nearby community college. You are an active member of several animal welfare organizations and are vocal in your opposition to hunting.

HARVEY OR GLADYS CROW, BANKER (COUNTY COMMISSIONER)

You are 50 years old, and, as a banker, are willing to finance new home loans. You are an art collector and former president of the local chamber of commerce. You also love birdwatching and fishing. You think the whole area south of town has economically valuable recreational potential but are concerned about protecting environmental quality.