

Land Use Decision

Subject(s): Science

Grade Level: 7th-12th

Activity author: Sheryce Davis, Eagle Middle School

Time Required: Three 1-hour class periods.

Lesson Objectives: (1) Identify social and ecological considerations where human uses of land and trees conflict with each other and ecosystem needs. (2) Describe the importance of land-use management and planning.

Materials Needed:

Copies of background information and role descriptions, props (optional for role play), room set up for hearing

Outline of Activities

Day 1. Read background information and select roles. Day 2. Conduct hearing

Day 3. Continue hearing, including reading of news items and letters to the editor; vote; discuss results

Procedure:

Background information: This activity uses a role-play strategy for study of land-use issues. It emphasizes the complexities of decision-making where people of different viewpoints are involved. Land-use decisions have become a familiar issue in our state. The following is an imaginary conflict that could be expanded to include some real life, local dilemmas. This information should be provided and discussed as background.

Land-Use Decision: The Situation

Lodgepole Valley is a U.S. Forest area adjacent to the town of Smithville, a rural community whose main industry has been ranching and logging. The Woodlatch Lumber Corporation has requested to selectively log sections of the 2,000 acre area using state-of-the-art logging equipment and practices. Lodgepole Valley has a wide variety of trees and wildlife; however, the understory has not been cleared by fire since 1915. In some areas, trees are showing signs of insect infestations. The area has several camping sites and hiking trails. Its streams are popular fishing sites. Recently a pair of mated peregrine falcons have nested in the area. The Forest Coalition has decided to allow the County Commission to decide on the use of the area and vote on the approval of the financially lucrative Woodlatch offer.

Ten 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 a commissioner, news articles, etc. Every student should have a role – either as one of the 10 people preparing testimony for the hearing or as active observers who prepare written questions, report or news articles.

(Students should be given homework time to prepare for their roles and encouraged to improvise in developing their presentations, articles and questions.)

Learning from the Forest

The Hearing: The chairperson of the commission is to run the meeting. It is up to him/her to maintain order. All persons must be recognized by the chairperson before they speak. After all 10 of the students with prepared testimony have spoken and been questioned, the audience of concerned citizens will be asked to read their statements. After all testimony, questions and statements, the commissioners vote and give the reason for their decisions.

Extensions:

1. Expand personal data information to include more students.
2. Publish articles and letters to the editor in a classroom newspaper.
3. Trade personal data information and roles and repeat the simulation.
4. Attend a local zoning board meeting.
5. Have students identify a land-use issue in their local area, gather data and develop their own simulation.

Personal Data Cards (prepare on word processor)

County Commissioner Bob or Betty Green, Realtor - You started your business in Smithville 15 years ago. Your business does well and you like the area, but you aren't really accepted by the "natives" like Howard. You would like to be able to see some areas of Lodgepole Valley be developed as an exclusive subdivision.

County Commissioner Jonathon or Julie Coates, Merchant - You are 52 and own a farm and feed store. You would like to sell equipment to more area ranchers and think that Lodgepole Valley could be opened up for many more uses, like cattle and sheep grazing.

County Commissioner Dale or Deloris Howard, Rancher - You are the third generation to run your ranch. You have your own property for your grazing needs. You think that Lodgepole Valley area should be managed by the local citizens but you worry about whether the logging company's offer would really be best for the area.

County Commissioner Frank or Fran Farmer, Retired Forest Ranger - You are concerned about the impact the logging would have on the Lodgepole Valley ecosystem but believe that the methods that Woodlatch would use could actually be beneficial to the area. You are also concerned about who would be inspecting the operation to make sure that the approved practices are really applied.

Daniel or Daneille Mahon, Owner of Outdoor Equipment Store

Bill Silver, Native American Tribal Chief

Montana Joe, Manager of Local Sawmill

Ken Mackey, Logging Truck Driver

Brenda Maine, Wildlife Biologist

Discussion

1. What have we learned about land-use decision-making?
2. Whose input in land-use decision is important?
3. How important is money in a land-use decision?
4. Who should have the final say in these decisions?
5. Why is land-use management and planning important for people, wildlife and the environment?