What Is Scenario Planning and When Might I Use It?

Module Outline

1. Scenarios-what are they
2. Scenario planning (SP) history & definition
3. Introduce the process
4. An example
5. Purposes and outcomes of an SP process
Module Objectives

By the end of the session, you should be able to:

- Differentiate between scenarios and predictions/forecasts
- Describe how scenario planning approaches problems
- Articulate what parts of the process distinguish scenario planning from other methods
- Begin to understand the kinds of uncertainties that SP is suited to address
- Explain the potential uses of scenario planning in a planning/decision context

Where did scenario planning come from?

- Military
- Business
- Disaster planning
What are scenarios?

Colloquial uses

“A scenario is a coherent, internally consistent and plausible description of a possible future state of the world. It is not a forecast; rather, each scenario is one alternative image of how the future can unfold.”—IPCC 2007
What are scenarios?

Adapted from Zurek and Henrichs, 2007

My Maine vacation
What is scenario planning?

...Considering multiple, plausible futures in planning and decision making.

"irreducible uncertainty"
Much in common with current planning….

Considering multiple futures…
Scenario planning is largely focused on answering three questions:
(1) What could happen?
(2) What would be the impact on our strategies, plans and budgets?
(3) How should we respond?


Considering multiple futures…

“What would we do differently (or the same) if the context is, in fact, changing?”

Alternative Futures for Fire Management: An Example

What should we be doing with fire/fuel management to meet future resource goals under such rapidly changing, uncertain conditions?
What is scenario planning?

Phase 1: Preparation

- Scoping issue/question
  - Experts and/or stakeholders
- Define outcomes
- Key drivers
- Spatial and temporal scales
- Planning/decision cycles
- Scenarios narratives

Phase 1 Outcomes:
- Improved understanding of problem or issues
- Conceptual model of system
- Synthesis of information
- Work plan or scoping document
- Budget
Phase 2: Scenario Building

Phase 3: Using Scenarios

Phase 3. Steps
1. Evaluate the potential impacts and implications of the scenarios
2. Identify potential strategies or action options
3. Prioritizing options and selecting near-term strategies and actions
4. Structuring monitoring and research around planning and decision-making

Phase 3. Outcomes
• Summary of scenario impacts on resources and implications for management
• List of research needs, knowledge gaps
• Tactical plan, including:
  • Actions to take now
  • Timeline for future decisions and contingencies
• Indicators and monitoring plan
How is scenario planning being used?  
...in climate change adaptation

Kinds of resource management situations:

- **Exploring (Understanding)**  
  Better understanding the issue

- **Planning**  
  Considering what to do now and at some point in the future

- **Management focused (Acting)**  
  Making decisions & taking action
How is scenario planning being used?

Building understanding, learning

Understanding
- Identifying decision opportunities
- Problem/decision framing
- Defining goals or objectives
- Research, vulnerability or impact assessment
Considering alternatives

Planning
- Examining current actions
- Developing additional options
- Evaluating consequences of alternatives

Making decisions and taking action

Managing (Acting)
- Evaluating tradeoffs
- Taking actions
- Identifying future decisions and triggers
Stages of decision-making

- Start considering a question or issue.
- Make decision between alternatives.

Purpose of SP efforts

- MA: Forest Change
- CA: Rangelands
- SFB: Prioritize Restoration
- FL: Keys Mgt
- C4SP: Options & Objectives
- AK: NPS Units
- UT: Bear River Basin
- CA: Fire Futures
- AZ: Adaptive Mgt
- Monitoring
SP approaches: no two are the same

- Continuum of uncertainty
- Flexible method
- Early stages of application in natural resources

Scenario planning as a decision support method---complementary
Wrap up…

**What scenario planning can do:**

- Enable participants to view the system differently & offer new insights (expose assumptions)
- Broaden perspectives on outcomes of future conditions
- Foster creativity & the consideration of possibly controversial options
- Identify options that continue to make sense
- Develop triggers that align with particular scenarios for quick recognition of a specific trajectory and recommended actions

Wrap up…

**What it cannot do:** Make a decision

..."scenarios steer us on a middle course between a misguided reliance on prediction and the despairing belief that we can do nothing to envision our future..."---- Morrison & Wilson 1997
Module 1-Take Home

- Scenarios are not predictions—plausible futures and the events that might lead to them
- SP broadens thinking around an issue by examining actions from the perspective of multiple futures
- SP can inform different stages of a decision making process:
  - Understanding and decision/problem framing
  - Identifying alternative actions & assessing consequences
  - Identifying triggers for future decisions
  - Developing monitoring programs
- SP can be complementary with many decision frameworks and other DSMs

Next up-Problem Framing....