Columbia Basin Partnership (CBP) Task Force
DRAFT Concept Paper
Potential Application of Scenario Planning for Phase II Work
(as of 06-19-18)

Introduction:

This paper provides an overview of basic scenario planning concepts and their potential application to the work of the CBP Task Force to develop shared, long-term goals for salmon and steelhead in the Columbia Basin.

Scenario planning is a flexible and adaptive process. It has been successfully used in community/urban planning (such as Envision Utah), corporate strategic planning (by Shell Oil, for example), and to some extent by resource managers (for example, by the National Park Service in exploring climate change). Recently, several fishery management councils have used an adaptation of scenario planning, which they call management strategy evaluations (MSEs), to explore strategies for Pacific Bluefin Tuna, sardines, and other species. Aspects of MSEs are now incorporated into fishery management in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. These examples highlight that scenario planning is well-suited to incorporating multiple viewpoints to create various options for considering future states and developments.

The literature on the topic is vast, and case studies are well worth reviewing. Scenario planning incorporates elements of other planning processes such as civic ecology and design thinking. We have included a list of additional information and references at the end of this paper, and below we incorporate language from the following key sources:

- **Future Scenarios: The Art of Storytelling**, Moya K. Mason (cited below as Mason)
- **Living in the Futures**, Angela Wilkinson and Roland Kupers (cited below as Wilkinson and Kupers)
- **Scenario Planning as the Basis for an Integration of Process and Planning Perspectives**, Prof. Dr. Torsten Wulf, Philip Meissner and Dr. Stephan Stuhner (cited below as Wulf et al.)
- **Civic Ecology: A Framework for Community Resilience**, presentation by Timothy W. Smith, AIA, AICP, SERA Architects, May 2018 (cited below as Smith)
- **Management Strategy Evaluation: Realizing its full potential**, presentation by Gerard DiNardo, NOAA Fisheries, Southwest Fisheries Science Center, Pacific Bluefin Tuna MSE Workshop, May 30-31, 2018 (cited below as DiNardo)

What is Scenario Planning?

Scenario planning is a structured process by which groups can plan for the future. It involves developing a view of plausible futures in order to organize perceptions, assumptions, and complex information about how the future may evolve. The idea is that if we look creatively at what the future could look like and what the major drivers might be that shape that future, then consider the implications, we can create a series of learning themes or strategies that will be appropriate whatever the uncertainties we may face.
Scenarios have a visionary, aspirational characteristic. The planning process illuminates systemic relationships between scenarios and provides the tools to explain how a specific place can look, feel and function.

Scenario planning invites participants to describe plausible futures with a “willing suspension of disbelief”—to create a story of the future (Scenario Planning) or develop a future vision (design thinking) which does not imply nor require any contractual commitment. This invites stakeholders to leave behind their respective “positions,” and contribute wisdom from their experience and interests.

Scenario planning assumes that future developments are largely uncertain. Thus, the basic idea of scenario planning is to force managers to acknowledge this uncertainty and to translate it into thinking through multiple lenses. It enables managers to plan for multiple futures. It allows integration and alignment of external and internal perspectives to challenge existing assumptions and mindsets. For this reason, scenario planning has great potential to serve as a conceptual foundation for an integrative framework for strategy creation (Wulf et al.).

Groups use scenarios to explore unknowns, test strategies, generate new ideas, improve organizational flexibility, or inform decision-making in situations of risk, uncontrollability, complexity, and uncertainty. It is a process of anticipating, not predicting (NPS).

Scenario planning enables us to “back-cast” to the present from a range of plausible futures, instead of forecasting the future from the past and present. By collaboratively generating “desired future conditions,” scenarios inform “how we can get there.”

Scenario planning provides a platform to:
- Compare strategies to achieve predefined objectives
- Identify which strategies work and those likely not to work
- Identify core uncertainties and test the performance of strategies over the range of uncertainties (DiNardo)

**How is Scenario planning different from a NEPA/EIS process?**

Scenario planning is different from an NEPA/EIS alternatives assessment process. The NEPA assessment process is a tool used to select a preferred management action (or strategy). Scenario planning creates plausible futures informed by an array of the interplay among stakeholder interests, goals, driving forces, and assumptions. These futures, and the exercise to develop them, inform stakeholders of prospective effects and
outcomes of their individual and collective positions and actions—and establish a “future-tested” framework for selecting a management action or strategy.

Why is Scenario planning well suited to CBP Provisional Goals?

Scenario planning provides an excellent tool for further exploring the provisional qualitative and stock-specific quantitative goals for salmon and steelhead in the Columbia Basin. Next steps in refining provisional goals would include integration of goals for all stocks across the basin, enabling the development of aspirational goals basin-wide. The CBP Task Force has also discussed a desire to further explore the feasibility of these aspirational goals, given constraints and limiting factors. Scenario planning provides a tool to mix and match provisional goals while testing them against key assumptions and drivers.

More specifically, scenario planning can help the CBP Task Force explore important questions raised in our discussion thus far:

- What do we envision for the future of salmon and steelhead in the Columbia Basin?
- How do we distribute the recovery burden among all-H limiting factor sectors?
- Do we have the right balance in natural production, harvest and fishing, and hatchery goals?

The beauty of scenario thinking is that it allows us to tell each other stories about how the world might work. The key element is not whether we are "right" or "wrong," but rather, that we dig deep down to understand that it is our assumptions and perceptions that underpin the imaginations in each scenario and evaluate their plausibility (Mason).

Storytelling is key to making this process work. A story is not a position, so no one has to be for or against it. If it’s sufficiently vivid and memorable, it allows stakeholders to discuss difficult issues without having to revisit arguments connected with them. The stories we most commonly tell about the future simply extrapolate from the present. Perhaps the greatest power of scenarios, as distinct from forecasts, is that they consciously break this habit. They introduce discontinuities so that conversations about strategy—which lie at the heart of any organization’s capacity to adapt—can encompass something different from the present (Mason).

Scenario planning provides a compelling and potent means for CBP Task Force members to “willingly suspend disbelief,” to express interests in lieu of positions and fixed ideas, and to boldly and collectively develop plausible stories of a future that challenge conventional wisdom, provide fresh perspectives, and create the possibility of a genuine transformation.

More about scenarios

Scenarios could reflect provisional qualitative goals, incorporate provisional quantitative goals for multiple species, and include key assumptions and drivers that would need to be described. Scenarios would have a storyline, such as the concepts proposed by the Integration Team: e.g., enhancing run-timing and species diversity, habitat-based zoning, weak-stock management, etc. Assumptions and drivers could include important factors such as habitat carrying capacity, climate change, etc.

Initially many scenarios may be proposed but should be refined down to two to five that will be more fully explored. This refinement step would further explore the various social, cultural, economic, and ecological implications.
What could be next steps to further develop the application of these concepts to the work of the CBP Task Force?

CBP Integration Team could be tasked with developing these concepts further, then present findings at the October CBP meeting. The October discussion would generate more ideas about how to develop and use scenarios as well as what tools or models would be useful in evaluating the scenarios. Next steps would then include securing the necessary capacity to launch CBP scenario planning.

Additional information on scenario planning

Southwest Fisheries Science Center workshop on Management Strategy Evaluations

Using Scenarios to Explore Climate Change: A Handbook for Practitioners.


Notes from Envision Utah http://www.envisionutah.org

Like many regions, Utah faces serious challenges with rapid growth and infrastructure deficits. According to Robert Grow, the premise of the Envision Utah project was that the public has the right to choose its future, and that officials should serve that vision. However, growth issues have natural boundaries that are not aligned with existing political boundaries, Grow said. Since the Envision Utah group believed that the public would make good choices if presented with real options, they introduced a format to involve the public and to bridge the disconnect between those that control land use—local governments and the private sector—and those that control transportation planning—state and Federal governments and metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs).

According to Grow, it was important that no public or private stakeholder group control the partnership, whether in appearance or reality. At the same time, the project had to include all stakeholders that could affect, or would be affected by the outcome. The partnership had to be trustworthy, transparent, and inclusive, representing a broad scope of community interests, Grow explained. It was also important that funding come from multiple sources, including a balance of public and private funds.

Whereas a typical approach to planning involves one forecast and one solution, Grow said, it was better to develop a range of scenarios. Envision Utah organized initial hands-on public workshops that allowed people to explore the options. Informed by the workshop results, participants developed four scenarios for future growth in Utah, and offered evaluation criteria with which to assess each scenario (such as total land consumption and average daily vehicle miles traveled).

A major public outreach survey then had Utahans vote for a scenario. Including the media early in the process helped the public outreach effort, Grow noted. Another helpful strategy was to stick to a
lexicon of words that the public had already selected to describe their values—Envision Utah used the same vocabulary to describe the attributes of the different options under consideration. Based on the scenario chosen, Envision Utah then generated a vision document, supported with 42 specific strategies.

**Transformative Scenario Planning: Working Together to Change the Future**

The following is an excerpt from chapter two of the book, “A New Way to Work with the Future.” Adam Kahane

**When to Use Transformative Scenario Planning**

The South African context that gave birth to the Mont Fleur Scenario Exercise turns out to have been a particular example of a general type of situation. Transformative scenario planning can be useful to people who find themselves in a situation that has the following three characteristics.

First, these people see the situation they are in as unacceptable, unstable, or unsustainable. Their situation may have been this way for some time, or it may be becoming this way now, or it may possibly become this way in the future. They may feel frightened or excited or confused. In any event, these people cannot or are not willing to carry on as before, or to adapt to or flee from what is happening. They think that they have no choice but to try to transform their situation. The participants in the Mont Fleur project, for example, viewed apartheid as unacceptable, unstable, and unsustainable, and saw the just-opened political negotiations as offering them an opportunity to contribute to changing it. Another, hypothetical, example might be people in a community who think that the conditions in their schools are unacceptable and want to change them.

Second, these people cannot transform their situation on their own or by working only with their friends and colleagues. Even if they want to, they are unable to impose or force through a transformation. The larger social-political-economic system (the sector or community or country) within which they and their situation are embedded is too complex—it has too many actors, too many interdependencies, too much unpredictability—to be grasped or shifted by any one person or organization or sector, even one with lots of ideas and resources and authority. These people therefore need to find some way to work together with actors from across the whole system. South Africans who wanted to transform the apartheid situation had been trying for decades to force this transformation, through mass protests, international sanctions, and armed resistance. But these efforts had not succeeded. Mont Fleur and the other multistakeholder processes of the early 1990s (which the previous forceful efforts had precipitated) provided South Africans with a new way to work with other actors from across the system. In the community example, changing the conditions in the schools might require the involvement not just of concerned citizens and school administrators but also of teachers, parents, students, and others.

Third, these people cannot transform their situation directly. The actors who need to work together to make the transformation are too polarized to be able to approach this work head-on. They agree neither on what the solution is nor even on what the problem is. At best, they agree that they face a situation they all find problematic, although in different respects and for different reasons. Any attempt to implement a solution directly would therefore only increase resistance and rigidity. So the transformation must be approached indirectly, through first building shared understandings, relationships, and intentions.

The actors who came together in Mont Fleur all agreed that apartheid was irretrievably problematic and needed to be dismantled, but they came in with deep differences in their diagnoses of the ways in which it was problematic and their prescriptions for how it should be transformed. The scenario process enabled them to create common ground. In the community example, the administrators,
teachers, parents, and students might have a long history of unproductive disagreements that means they cannot simply sit down and start to work together.

Transformative scenario planning is, then, a way for people to work with complex problematic situations that they want to transform but cannot transform unilaterally or directly. This way of working with the future can be used to deal with such situations at all scales: local, sectoral, regional, national, or global (the stories in this book are all national because this is the scale at which I have done most of my work and that I know best). Transformative scenario planning is not a way for actors to adapt to a situation or to force its transformation or to implement an already-formulated proposal or to negotiate between several already-formulated proposals. It is a way for actors to work cooperatively and creatively to get unstuck and to move forward.