Perspectives on Land Use

Ecosystems are affected by the decisions that people make about land use. People have different values and needs, so they have different ideas about how to use the land. In this activity, you will work in a group to explore a land-use issue. Then you will role-play a roundtable discussion to reach a decision about the issue (Figure 1).

The Issue

Identify a proposal for a change in land use that will affect local ecosystems. Here are some examples to start you thinking. You should identify a proposal from your own community, or a community near you.

- logging in a forested area
- opening up new land for agriculture
• developing a new landfill site
• opening up a natural area for new housing
• developing a recreational area, such as a ski hill
• setting aside a natural area as a park
• restoring streams in urban areas
• setting aside land for city gardens
• installing a basketball court in a neighbourhood park
• widening a highway

Background to the Issue

Identify Perspectives

Work in groups of four or five. Have each group member choose a role for the role-play. For example, you could be someone who is in favour of the land-use proposal, someone who is opposed, someone who has a few concerns, or someone who is not sure what to think.

Use the following questions to help you identify the different perspectives:

• Why are people planning to change how the land is used?
• Are there people who think that the change is a good idea? How does the proposal meet their needs and values?
• Are there people who are opposed? How does the proposal affect their needs and values?
• Are there people who are not opposed but have a few concerns? What are their needs and values?
• Are there people who are undecided?
• Are there people who do not care? Why do they think the issue does not matter, or is it not important to them?

Gather Information

Research what the person you are role-playing is thinking and saying about the proposal. You may be able to get this information from news articles, the Internet, community groups, or Aboriginal Elders. Take careful notes so that you can accurately represent his or her perspective, whether or not you agree with it.

LEARNING TIP

For help with researching, see the “Researching” section in the Skills Handbook.
Identify Possible Alternatives
When all the group members are ready, set up a roundtable. The table does not have to be round, but all the members should sit so that they face one another. Decide how you will take turns presenting your perspectives.

Role-play your chosen perspective. Be sure to suggest alternatives to the planned change in land use. These alternatives should not only meet the needs and values of the person you are role-playing, but also meet the needs and values of people with different perspectives.

Identify Criteria for Evaluating Solutions
Still in role at your roundtable, discuss to what extent your suggested alternatives

- meet the needs of community members
- respect the values of community members
- maintain biodiversity in the ecosystem

Make a Decision
Try to reach a decision at your roundtable on what the best course of action would be with respect to this land-use proposal.

Communicate Your Decision
As a group, write a brief report for your school newsletter or community newspaper. Explain your decision and the process you used to arrive at it.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. Why is it important to consider different perspectives on an issue?
2. Why is it important to consider alternative solutions?
3. In what other situations might a roundtable discussion be useful?