ADK Futures Case Study

March 30, 2015

www.ADKfutures.org and

www.ADKfutures.net

Dave Mason: dave12942@gmail.com

Kathy Hornbach: kathy@blessley.net

An illustration of Future Mapping,
a structured, participative scenario planning
process

Geography, Context, Scope

- Scope: Future of the Adirondack Park, 25 yr strategy
  - Environmental protection, economic development, community vitality, regulation, education, healthcare…all inclusive
- Geography: The Adirondack Park (est. 1890's), 6 million acres of Northern Forest in New York
  - 50:50 public:private land
  - 100+ towns and school districts
  - 130,000 residents, millions of visitors
  - <6hr drive from all the Northeast corridor cities
- Context: No existing strategy, lots of regulations and conflicts, many leaders, no one in charge
  - Highly polarized, described as "preferring to fight rather than win"

Who was Involved?

- The ADK Common Ground Alliance Core Team was our client
  - A 7yr old informal collection of area leaders of various types: elected, NGOs, regulators, foundations, concerned citizens
  - Main activity was an annual open forum
- ~150 interviews for input to the 'kit'
- 515+ participants in 14 workshops, 2 formats, 18 months
  - Effort to move around to make it easy for people to come
  - 2 day invitational, w/a "Noah's ark" group of people
  - ½ day format, some open public, some closed groups eg, college class, a youth event, NGO enviro boards
- 20+ talks and 8 specific follow-up projects with key organizations
- Dave & Jim, with help from Kathy, created and ran the workshops pro bono

Purpose, Anticipated Outcome

- Purpose: To improve the regional conversation
- Informally linked to a State-run regional economic development planning competition running at the same time
  - This effort was complementary, for a sub-region
  - The scenarios were context for the regional economic plan
- Method: Future Mapping, writing an intentionally incomplete scenario building kit and holding repetitive scenario building workshops in various formats
  - Arose from original work at AD Little in the 1970s-80s for IBM and Citibank, not rooted in Shell history
- Initial intent was to run one workshop

Actual Outcomes

- 14 workshops, surprisingly broad agreement on vision and priorities
- First pass at a roadmap to achieving the vision
- Completely changed the regional conversation
- Hundreds of aligned efforts are underway by all sorts of people – it is the de facto direction
- Task forces started on important or especially difficult topics – constitutional amendment, regional venture funding
- Major economic development grant wins
- Adapted by state government as its roadmap for the region
- Journal paper*
- None of this was planned at the outset

*Adirondack Journal of Environmental Studies (see:
http://www.ajes.org/v18/finding-consensus-the-future-of-the-adirondack-park.php)

We Write Scenario Building Kits

6 Endstates

F. ADK State Forest

E. Post Big-Gov't

D. ADK County

C. Sustainable

B. A Usable Park

A. Wild Park
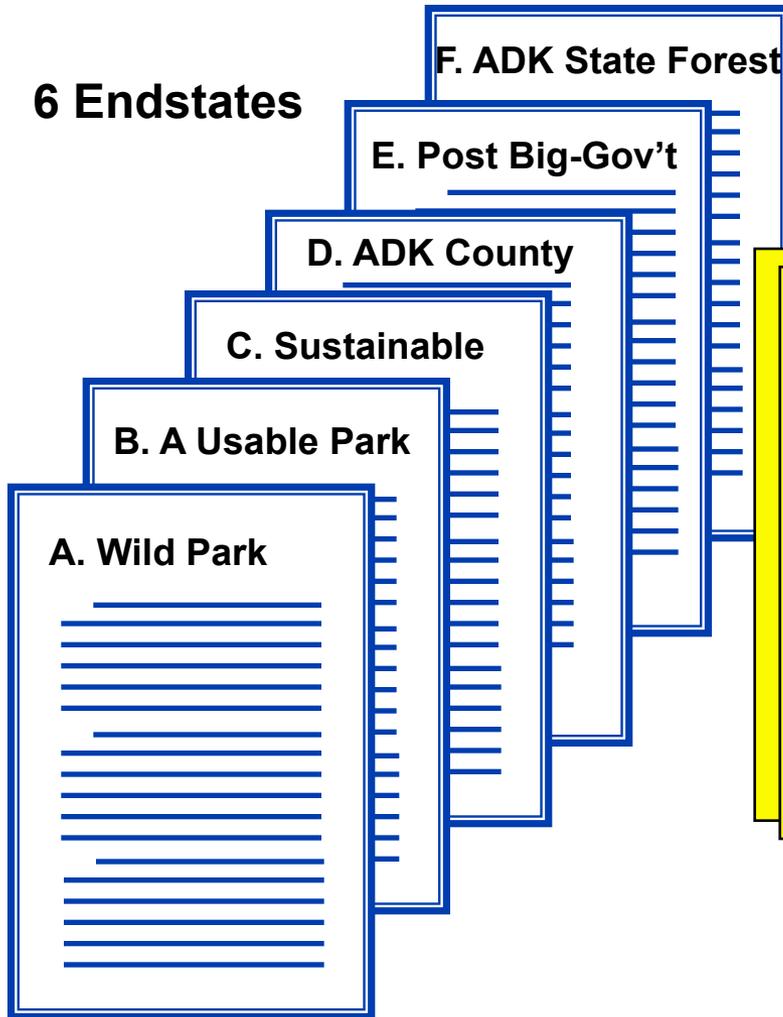
Based on 150 Interviews plus various books, articles and research

Park Loses Battle to 3 Key Invasive Species

Emerald ash borer, Asian Long Horn Beetle, and Wooly Algelid are establish in the central Adirondacks. The result is large areas with many dead trees which presents a serious fire risk but also offers a potential source of biomass. A debate is on about whether to clear the deadwood in the Forest Preserve area.

2020 +
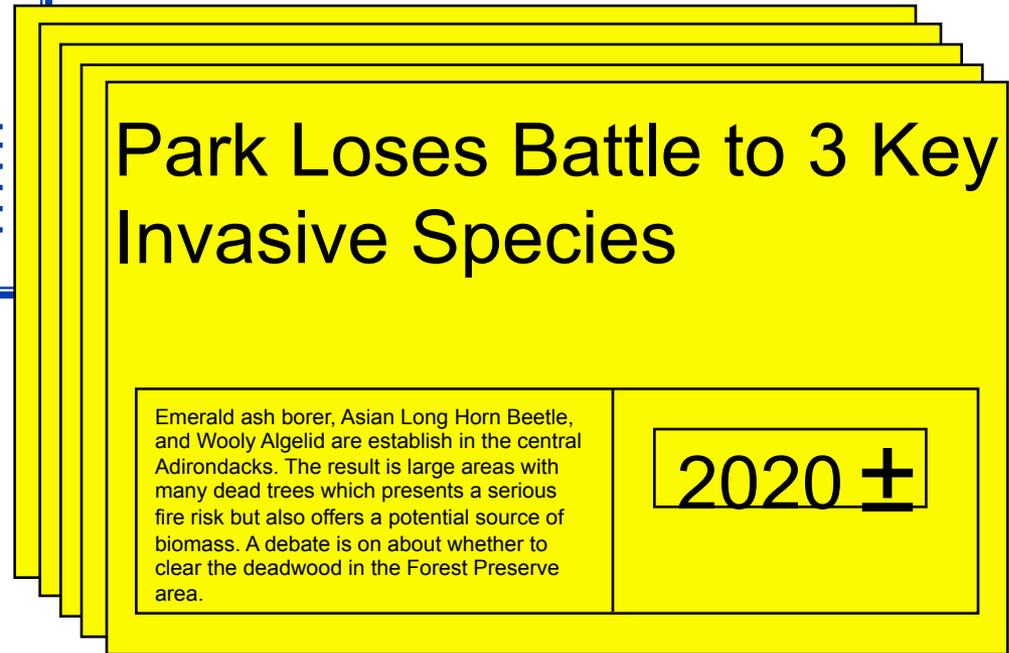
120 Events

Workshop Task 1: Capturing Current Expectations (mental models)

- **Goals**: Become familiar with the event set
  Understand the group's current expectations
  Discover how your thinking aligns with others
- On each event, vote whether you *personally* think the event is highly likely, highly unlikely or uncertain
- **Process**: read the event, agree on the central idea, then vote using hand signals, record the vote
- Don't try to convince your teammates but offer context or knowledge that you have – teachable moments
  - You have an average of one minute per event
- Result presented to the group at the end of the day
  - Typically makes a group uncomfortable with how they think as a group. Individuals privately calibrate their ideas versus the group.
  - Reveals the need to learn, allows for unlearning, letting go of previously successful ideas, making room for new concepts

Mapping the Scenarios

Events

Today State

- Build paths of events to each endstate
- The most interesting events are:
  - forks in the road or
  - common to many or
  - unique to one
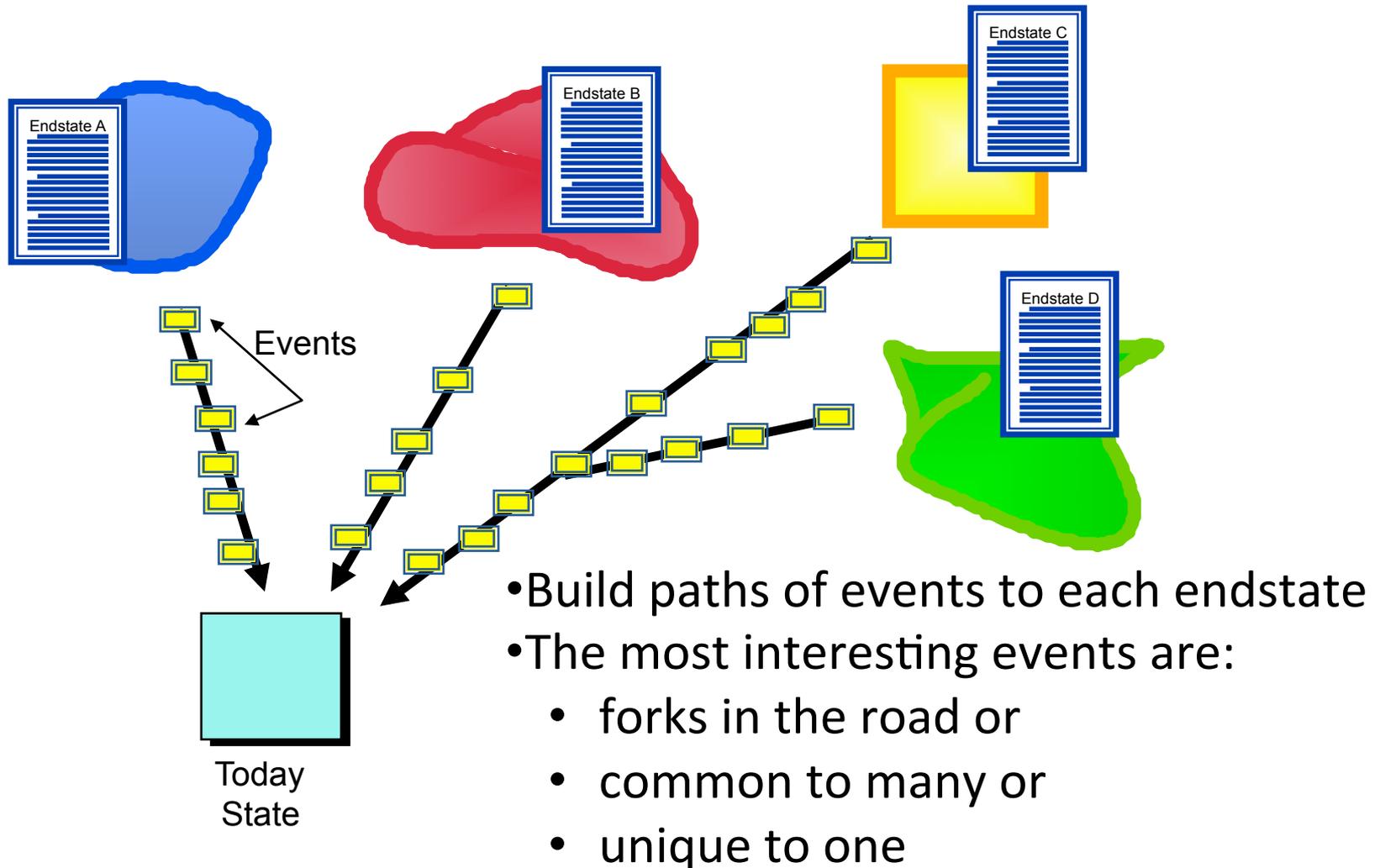
Synthesis Task: ADK Futures Implementation Over Time

C: will have ups and downs due to need for behavior changes

B: starts high, improves, then tapers off

A: Forest Preserve is Solid

E: slow fade as we act more regionally

D: will grow slowly early, then take hold

100%

0%

Today

TIME

2037

C

B

A

D

E
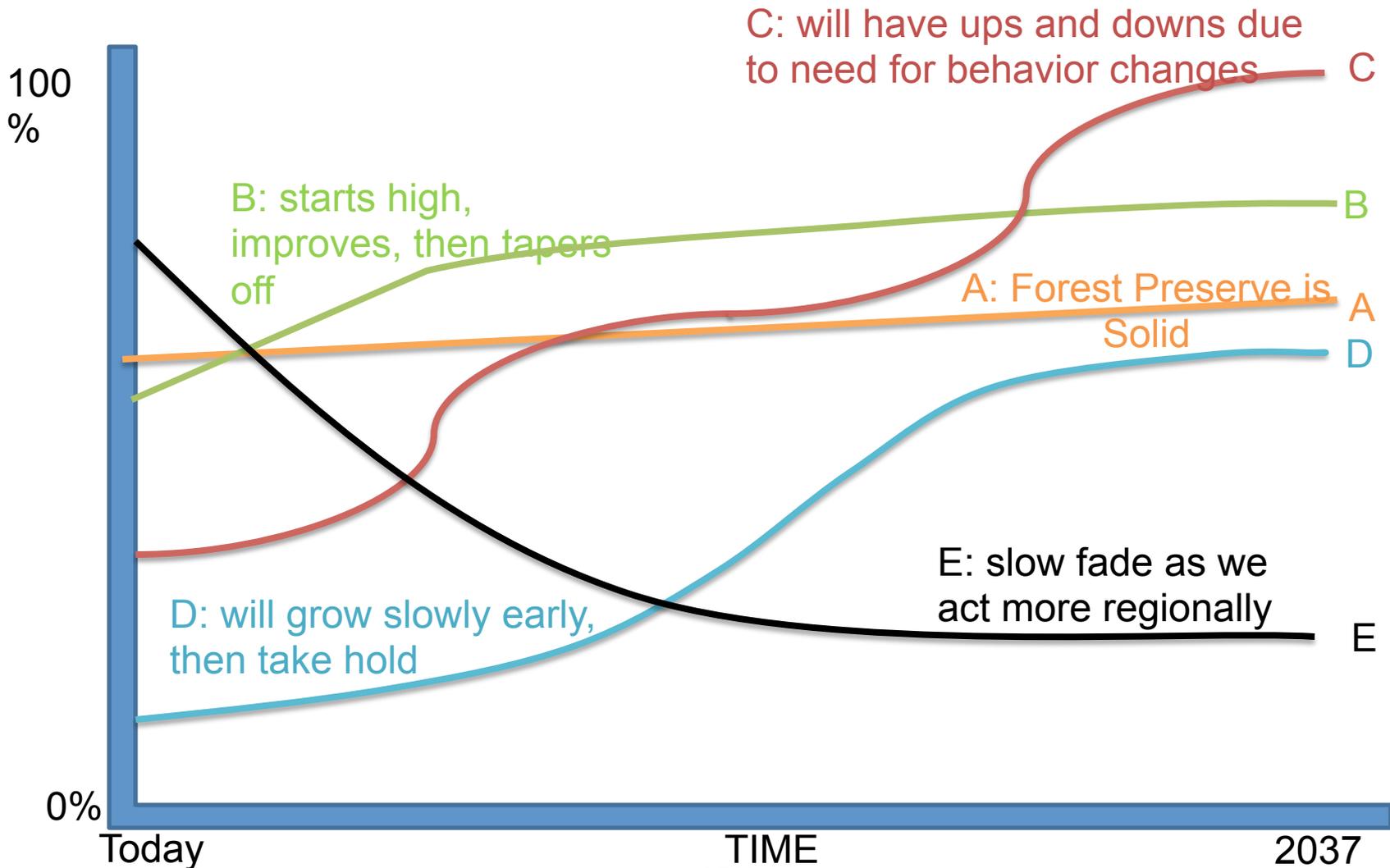
Work Behind the Scenes

- What was more or less effective and why, innovations, surprises?
  - Surprise was that 'most desirable' was also 'most attainable' …..never seen this before
  - ½ day sessions enabled many more people and groups to participate
  - Intentionally incomplete kits made people think more holistically
- Observations related to mental models
  - Deriving 'mental models' built from expectations about events makes it an object of discussion and reflection
    - Enable individuals to privately observe their 'fit' with their group
  - Events allow people to see how their effort fits a bigger pattern, is connected to a bigger effort
  - Groups want to know how they compare to other groups
- In addition to writing and running the workshops and presenting results …
  - 5 follow up strategy projects with key groups
  - We picked up 2 difficult follow up projects
  - Wrote software to (1)author the event set and (2)handle ranking data and (3)track which (meeting w/real time voting) events get associated with which endstates (4) compare results across workshops and (5)show how real news tracks to the events.

Lessons Learned

- A lot can be accomplished with a holistic, shared vision/mental model – even if you don't control any of the resources. Alignment across groups brings comfort to politicians.
- Interview widely to write the kit
  - Keep going until you hear nothing new…..
    - Leaders, heretics, laggards, people who work at intersections
  - If in doubt, keep interviewing
- Endstates must connect to how people think, as revealed in the interviews
  - Often vectors that do not fit a 2x2 matrix model
- Encourage workshop attendees to edit, add, and delete events, but reuse the endstate framework as often as possible
  - Enable groups to see how they compare to others