

THE STRONG MOUNTAIN PROBLEM

A Rolling Drama for Mediators and Facilitators



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THE PLACE

7,650' Strong Mountain is situated 20-miles east of Glennville, a town of 30,000. The mountain is a thickly forested watershed area, a well known recreation area for outdoor enthusiasts from the Glennville region, and a critical habitat for a dozen rare plants and birds. But for a few privately-owned ranches, the mountain is public wilderness land. The area is a haven for feral pigs which attain a weight of 250 lbs and are prized by hunters and despised by environmentalists

THE PROBLEM

For the past several years **World Bio-Action** and **Mountain Conservancy** have been pressuring **Forestry Department** to remove the feral pigs which are damaging the forest. **Strong Mountain Boar Hunting Association** and **Native People's Organization** oppose removal. **Strong Mountain Community Association** and **Strong Mountain Chamber of Commerce** have not yet taken positions. Three months ago, under threat of litigation from World Bio-Action and Mountain Conservancy, Forestry Department began construction of an 8-mile pig-proof fence encircling Strong Mountain at the 2,500-foot level. Their intent was to create an ex-closure and begin eradicating all pigs above that point. The partially erected fence was recently cut in five places and various hunting associations and groups of native peoples have taken the first steps towards filing lawsuits and seeking legislative political action.

THE PROTAGONISTS

Forestry Department has a twin mandate: (1) preserve and protect the area's natural resources and (2) manage the area for multiple uses. Representatives are *Walter Grolier, Chief Forester and Emily Barker, Wildlife Biologist.*

World Bio-Action is an aggressive international environmental organization with offices in Europe, Asia, Australia, and the United States. Representatives are *Angel Bembry, Regional VP and Larry Moyne, Local Director.*

Mountain Conservancy is a small, well funded and well organized conservation stewardship group. It has 50 members who maintain trails and re-plant endangered species. Representatives are *Rosalyn Carter, President and Roger Hirokawa, member.*















Strong Mountain Boar Hunting Association is made up of 250 recreational bow and rifle hunters who regularly use the mountain on weekends and holidays. Representatives are *Leon Chong, President and Willy Williamson.*

Members of ***Native People's Organization*** have historic and cultural ties to the mountain. Many of the men hunt on the mountain in a traditional manner -- dog, spear, knife. Some rely on the meat for subsistence and most hold the mountain sacred and revere the pig as a mythic ancestor. *Martha Kaubane, Spokeswoman, Sam Gong, and Alice Datu.*

Strong Mountain Chamber of Commerce is made up of local ranchers and businessmen, some of whom hope to acquire some long term mining and logging rights on Strong Mountain, others of whom hope to start eco-tourism businesses. Representatives are *B.J. Angeles, President* and *Bobby Derek, Vice President.*

Strong Mountain Community Association is comprised of elected citizens. The Association is primarily interested in keeping property values reasonable and ensuring good neighborly relations. Representatives are *James Burke, Ed Dawson, Snyder Miller, Margery Greenspan, and Chad Whitherspoon.*

SOME OF THE ISSUES IN A SERIES OF “SCENES”

-  Personal “Fit”
-  Entry
-  Problem Framing
-  Conflict Assessment
-  Process Design
-  Rules of Engagement
-  First Meeting
-  Raw Emotion
-  Others Not Present
-  Technical Information
-  Neutrality
-  Expert Wars
-  Stalemate
-  Aftermath

Scene 1
PERSONAL “FIT”

This dispute has been simmering for a while. Now, various political leaders have quietly suggested that some kind of consensus-seeking resolution process may be appropriate to avoid further acrimony or potentially protracted litigation. In fact, you may soon be approached to get involved in the dispute as a mediator/facilitator. Government would be prepared to pay your fees.



Scene 2
ENTRY

Marlene Leary, a local public official who is on reasonably good terms with all of the parties (at least for the moment) approaches you to help. Left unchecked, she says, the pig hunting and fence problems will break up the community, create ill will, and lead to an uncertain outcome. She wants to set up a multiparty problem-solving process and is able to secure funds for a consultant. She has heard good things about you and is potentially interested in hiring you. She also has no real idea how to get the process started or move forward.



Scene 3

PROBLEM FRAMING

Articles in the local media about Strong Mountain describe the situation as “increasingly fractious,” “factually complex,” “emotionally difficult,” and “legally snarled.”



Scene 4

CONFLICT ASSESSMENT

You have agreed to be the facilitator for the Strong Mountain problem. Marlene Leary has written a letter to all parties introducing you and urging them to come to the table. She has also made some personal calls. However, your understanding of the situation is still somewhat sketchy. You now have the challenge of pulling a process together and getting started.



Scene 5
PROCESS DESIGN

You now have a much better idea of the conflict, the various issues involved for different parties and their intensity, and the positions and interests the parties are likely to assert once the facilitation gets underway.



Scene 6
RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

Knowing how complex this problem is going to be, you think it is important to have some procedural understandings in place before you dive into substantive discussions.



Scene 7

FIRST MEETING

Small successes breed larger successes. You want to make sure the process gets underway in an engaging, productive, and disciplined way. If it is successful, you stand a good chance of setting the tone for future meetings.



Scene 8

RAW EMOTION

Others have spoken and now Martha Kauhane for Native People's Organization makes an opening statement. Her comment is directed at the representatives from Forestry, World Bio-Action, and Mountain Conservancy. She is very upset that her people may not be able to hunt pigs on Strong Mountain and she is angry about how outsiders have treated the forest in the past. She asks why it is that non-native people get to decide which animals and plants are precious. As she speaks, she starts to shake, becomes redder and redder, and uses profanity. She is pointing at Walter Grolier from Forestry and says, "You bastards, I hate you... why don't all you white people go back where you came from." Grolier has turned pale. Kauhane continues in this vein.



Scene 9

OTHERS NOT PRESENT

At the first meeting, it turns out that there are other potential stakeholder groups who weren't asked to participate in the roundtable. They are: (1) a religious group called The Bajur Sect which has a 25-year lease on a small parcel at the 2,750-foot level and which they use for spiritual meditation retreat; (2) a group called Earth Fist which has stated that they will begin laying out pig poison if Forestry Department doesn't fence off the mountain; and (3) a group called the Wa Kele Warriors who have said they will resort to physical resistance to protect their ancient hunting rights. Three interested citizens from the Strong Mountain community have also asked to be involved and want to join the process.



Scene 10

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

At the second meeting, World Bio-Action, Mountain Conservancy, and Forestry Department present the substance of their arguments. They believe that the wild pigs are doing extensive damage to critical parts of the forest that are home to 23 highly endangered plants and animals. They bring stacks of photos showing uprooted underbrush and the remains of pig wallows. They cite various federal laws that are on their side. Strong Mountain Boar Hunting Association and the Wa Kele People's say that the pigs are getting "bad press," that they are not the source of the problem, and that they actually contribute to the forest's health with their rooting. They bring their own pictures of sows with piglets in the midst of healthy and undamaged forest and cite various state and federal laws which guarantee recreational opportunities and traditional and customary gathering rights for native peoples.



Scene 11
NEUTRALITY

In a private caucus, Leon Chong and Willy Williamson from the Strong Mountain Boar Hunting Association tell you that one of their group members, Frankie “Mad Dog” Lomax, was the one who destroyed the five separate sections of fence. They say that Mad Dog, a former Vietnam veteran, has had recurring manic-depressive bouts for many years. They are pretty sure that more vandalism is coming in the next few weeks. In an entirely different caucus, Rosalyn Carter from Mountain Conservancy asks to meet with you alone. She tells you that she and Walter Grolier had a brief love affair a year ago and she is pretty sure from things he said that his boss at Forestry Department is receiving bribes from certain mining and logging groups. She knows of at least one, all-expense-paid trip to Hawaii.



Scene 12
EXPERT WARS

As the facilitation process unfolds and moves into a series of information exchange sessions, Emily Barker from Forestry Department and Roger Hirokawa from Mountain Conservancy produce very sophisticated maps and overlays. They also bring in an outside expert who produces satellite photos showing changes in Strong Mountain’s forest and reports that establish correlations between high pig densities and low productivity of native vegetation. Native People Association and Strong Mountain Boar Hunting Association bring in an anthropologist, two respected native language speakers and cultural practitioners, and a biology graduate student. These experts argue that the pigs have always co-existed in the forest with native plants and that the current problems never occurred until Forestry Department started “managing things”. The opponents of fencing don’t really have the dollars needed to hire stronger experts. You also have a strong background in this area and are convinced in your own mind that the pigs are causing serious damage to some areas of the ecosystem.



Scene 13
STALEMATE

The roundtable has made considerable progress and each of the parties have made concessions in one area or another. They have reached eight substantial areas of agreement and are working on a ninth: how to jointly monitor the upper third of Strong Mountain. In caucus, World Bio-Action commends you for doing an outstanding job. However, after acknowledging the progress, Angel Brembry and Larry Moyne reminds you that “reasonable people can disagree”. They then tell you that they are still considering taking their case against Forestry Department to court, even though they know there are costs and risks.



Scene 14
AFTERMATH

The group has reached a substantial set of agreements. In the days following the close of the process, there are a few matters which are arising. A national magazine wants to do a major interview with you for their Sunday edition. You have also learned that Marlene Leary, who helped set the process in motion, is feeling like she has gotten no recognition or credit. More importantly, you are getting a sense in the afterglow of the project that one important issue was neglected and it could unravel the agreements.

