

Sitka Center for Art and Ecology Think Tank
Place and Location: Sitka Center and Its Environment
Feb. 9, 2007

SUMMARY NOTES

The mission of the Sitka Center for Art and Ecology is to expand the relationships between art, nature and humanity through workshops, presentations, and individual research projects, and to maintain a facility appropriate to its needs that is in harmony with the inspirational coastal environment of Cascade Head.

Think Tank Process

As part of the Sitka Center 2020 Planning Process, the Sitka Center convened a series of five generative conversations in February 2007 to gain insights into promising practices and opportunities for the future. The *Place and Location: Sitka Center and Its Environment* think tank brought together a group of individuals with diverse knowledge and perspectives to think together about (1) the distinctive qualities, characteristics and practices of the Sitka Center that make it a place-based center, (2) the larger forces or trends that will influence the Sitka Center's development, and (3) which opportunities and practices hold particular promise for the Sitka Center in its evolution as a place-based center devoted to expanding the relationships among art, nature and humanity. Findings from all five think tanks will be synthesized to feed into a future focused vision and plan for the Sitka Center, to be completed in the spring of 2007.

Attendees

- Sarah Greene (Convener), Sitka Center Board Vice President, and Forest Ecologist, U.S. Forest Service
- Jane Boyden, Musician and Sitka Center Co-Founder
- Ryan Burns, Artist and Spring 2007 Sitka Center Artist-in-Residence
- Charles Goodrich, Writer and SpringCreek Director
- Randy Gragg, Critic, The Oregonian
- Anne Hall, Director, North Lincoln County Historical Museum
- Randall Koch, Neskowin Valley School, Former Sitka Center Executive Director
- Missy Vaux Hall, Cascade Head Ranch Board, Sitka Center Board
- Fred Swanson, Research Geologist, U.S. Forest Service and Oregon State University
- Charles Walker, Chairman, Oregon Cultural Trust and Former President, Linfield College
- Ann Werner, Cascade Head Ranch Board Member
- Douglas Beauchamp, Sitka Center Executive Director
- Laura Young, Sitka Center Program Manager
- Paula Manley, Facilitator

Reflections on the Sitka Center as Place

In response to the question, “*What characteristics, qualities or practices make the Sitka Center a place?*” participants discussed the following ideas:

The Sitka Center is...

- **A place where ideas blossom.** When people spend time at the Sitka Center, their ideas unfold through engagement with the place. The Sitka Center *becomes* a place through these interactions. An “improvisatory nature” is at the heart of the Sitka Center, where creative acts take shape in nature, through human intention, and through the interplay of creative people and their surroundings. An artist-in-residence may arrive at the Sitka Center with a specific idea for their work, but the shape of their work changes as they engage with the place. The natural beauty surrounding the Sitka Center is a source of inspiration that brings us close to the muse: “The place grabs you.”
- **An edge place.** The powerful forces of water and mountain interact to create and recreate this environment, which is constant yet ever-changing. The edge is a place of possibility, change and interconnection. Diverse environments are concentrated and converge in the Cascade Head area.
- **A place of stories.** Stories and histories of people and nature interacting have shaped this place. Many artists have spent time at the Sitka Center and created here; the walls are still warm with their presence. The landscape itself was restored through human intervention. Although we think of the Cascade Head area as a pristine environment, it was the establishment of Pixieland (a theme park attraction) nearby that sparked important land management protection and restoration efforts.
- **A place of community.** Relationships are at the core of the Sitka Center. The Sitka Center nurtures and connects individuals with each other and with the natural environment. The place induces reflection and communion with nature, as well as long-term relationships among artists, faculty, students, residents, volunteers and other supporters.
- **A place that causes ripples.** The uniqueness of the area has been recognized with the creation of the Cascade Head Experimental Forest, a United Nations Biosphere Reserve, a Nature Conservancy Preserve, and a Scenic Research Area. Those who come here to study and create are inspired and transformed; the impact of the place ripples outward—inspiration and respiration, turning inward and reaching outward. Local rural spaces are increasingly important in our urbanizing global environment. Engagement with this place leads to action elsewhere. Even the *idea* of the place moves people: “People hear about the Sitka Center and imagine what the Sitka Center is in a way that makes them feel good.”

External Trends and Implications

Participants created a “mind map” of trends in response to the question, “*What forces or trends in the external environment will influence the evolution of the Sitka Center place-based center devoted to expanding the relationships between art, nature and humanity... in harmony with the environment of Cascade Head?*” The following clusters of trends stood out as being particularly influential for the future:

- The **growth in population** is significant, with people visiting and relocating to Oregon and the coast. Oregon has a reputation that will continue to attract people—particularly those who appreciate the outdoors. With **greater population density**, places like the Sitka Center become even more special. Newcomers, especially **retiring baby boomers** with financial resources and a passion for **lifelong learning**, are a potential pool of supporters for the Sitka Center.
- The coast is seeing a significant number of **second homeowners**, a trend that is driving up land values and development pressures. A challenge related to this trend is the “disconnect” between local communities and those who are not year-round residents; a potential opportunity for the Sitka Center is to strengthen social ties and awareness of the local ecosystem among part-time residents.
- **Global warming** and the concept of **peak oil** are triggering **increased environmental awareness** and concern, particularly among young people. A related set of trends includes renewed **interest in localism, civic engagement and place making**.
- **Class polarization** is on the rise, with a growing gap between the haves and have-nots in our society. Locally, this gap is showing up as home ownership is becoming increasingly unaffordable to long-term coastal residents.
- **Globalization** and **technological connectivity** are significant trends for the Sitka Center as artists are increasingly able to work over distances with each other and across disciplines, and **distance learning** opens new possibilities for off-site programming.
- A growing emphasis on **cultural development** in Oregon (and nationally) is a supportive trend for the Sitka Center, with greater recognition that local arts and culture contribute to quality of life and the economy.

For a list of all the trends identified by participants in the mind mapping exercise, see page 5.

Synthesis Dialogue

For the final part of the think tank dialogue participants focused on the question, “*Thinking back on what we’ve discussed today, what do you see as promising practices or opportunities for the Sitka Center in evolving as a place-based center for art and ecology in the future?*” Participants identified several interrelated opportunities: more fully embracing and integrating art and ecology, learning and sharing local history, becoming a model of sustainability, cultivating partnerships, and clarifying strategic questions about the Sitka Center’s relationship to the world. Ideas included the following:

- **Embrace art and ecology.** Tap the growing interest in interdisciplinary big picture thinking about art and ecology. Consider offering an ecology-oriented lecture series and playing a greater role in building awareness of the local watershed (e.g., build on the work done by the Sitka Center with the Crowley Creek Collaboration). Find meaningful measures of success for the Sitka Center based on the mission. As one participant noted, “Expanding doesn’t mean counting things.... Be sure everything ties to the mission: Are workshops and presentations expanding the relationships among art, nature and humanity?”
- **Extend the Sitka Center’s reach and influence through partnerships.** Collaborate more. Consider project-specific goals that can be undertaken with collaborating organizations locally and around the state. Explore opportunities with the Portland Art Museum, Reed College Gallery, and Marylhurst University. Partner with Camp Westwind to expand capacity without increasing the number of individuals on site at the Sitka Center.
- **Learn the history of the place and tell its stories.** The Sitka Center library contains an assortment of studies on the natural history of the area, including research about breaching the dikes and restoring the Salmon River estuary. There is a compelling story of restoration and conservation to be told. Bring in a historian to catalogue the historic materials and help tell the story—for the Sitka Center and the world. As a way to see the Sitka Center’s history more clearly in relationship to the diversity of the place, create a timeline with different layers (e.g., vegetation, streams, programs, etc.).
- **Become a model of sustainability.** In the Sitka Center’s physical plant, pursue alternative energy, green building materials, re-use of materials, etc. Model sustainable development within the Center’s operations.
- **Sitka Center as Refuge? Exemplar? Catalyst?** Each of these three possible stances has a different relationship to outside world to be clarified. Is the Sitka Center influencing the world quietly (as a refuge) as a retreat for artists? Is the Sitka Center serving as a model (an exemplar) through its programs and/or its physical plant in relationship to its surroundings? Does the Sitka Center (as a catalyst) want to help improve the local environment and/or inspire others to take action?
- **Other thoughts...**
 - Participants offered a range of perspectives on long-term planning: Some urged “unfolding” and assuring an “improvisatory” approach to the Sitka Center’s evolution; others urged boldness of vision with concrete future commitments.
 - In closing, participants highlighted the importance of spreading the word as the Sitka Center 2020 plan is completed, including sharing the plan broadly with stakeholders, media outlets, and all think tank participants.

Attachment

Sitka Center for Art and Ecology Think Tank Place and Location: Sitka Center and Its Environment

EXTERNAL TRENDS FROM MIND MAP

“What forces or trends in the external environment will influence the evolution of the Sitka Center place-based center devoted to expanding the relationships between art, nature and humanity... in harmony with the environment of Cascade Head?”

Think tank participants identified the following:

- Population growth, more people coming to Oregon and the coast
- Growth in baby boomers, boomer philanthropists with discretionary income
- Greater need for collaboration, synergy between organizations
- Global warming and climate change issues are triggering increased environmental awareness
- Declining cheap oil, peak oil concept
- Growing interest in localism and “place making”
- Land management controls (e.g., influencing logging, development, etc.) are always subject to change
- More interest in civic engagement
- Long distance learning
- Lifelong learning
- Increasing number of second homes at the coast; disconnect between these homeowners and local civic life
- Increasing land values at the coast are making home affordability a challenge for those who live here
- Globalization
- More global exchange among artists (like what scientists have been doing)
- More use of technology by artists
- Wifi, growing connectivity
- Growing class polarization: haves and have-nots
- Oregon is a destination: People are drawn to the beauty of the state and the coast
- Increasing cultural development—recognition that arts and culture contribute to quality of life and the economy
- Growing interest in interdisciplinary work
- Interest in PEACE