

There's No Place Like Home

This is a world in which a long-term drought caused by climate change has a catastrophic impact on the robust ethanol industry, which leads to economic and social collapse within the northern Great Plains. This collapse and struggle spawns renewal and a new, more equitable and just way of life for all people and species.

In 2050:

- Diversity is valued and celebrated. Everyone has equal voice. People are choosing to live in and move into the region.
- The region is growing and vibrant, with population continuing to rise for the 2nd decade thanks to the influx of immigrant populations and the return of young people.
- Decentralized and sustainable energy systems are the norm.
- Local philanthropy is an important supporter of community vitality.
- The region has been recognized globally for its model of sustainable agriculture, multi-state collaborative leadership and for its model of holistic and experiential learning in its schools.

How did we get here?

- With global warming allowing two crops a year and GMO corn producing 300 bushel corn, farmers pushed production and saw an increased income. But the benefits were short lived. A 10 year drought left ground water depleted, production practices left soil with no organic reserve, and ethanol demand exceeded the available corn. Farmers faced foreclosures and rural communities declined.
- This led to a period of catastrophic social and economic collapse that sparked racially motivated violence and riots.
- Young, energetic leaders returned to the region and took initiative to positively change the social aspects of the region, by hosting civic dialogues that become a place for open communication, learning and reconciliation. The governmental bodies across the region followed, working collaboratively at all levels to jointly improve the region as a whole, with emphasis on uniting, not dividing.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What characteristics of “There’s No Place Like Home” do you feel need to be part of the future we want to create?
- 2) Will it take a catastrophe to get to this future?
- 3) Can you imagine a time racism actually ends and diversity is celebrated? Why or why not?
- 4) How do you think climate change will impact your local area?
- 5) How do we work now to minimize the potential negative impacts of climate change?

THE GOOD LANDS

This is a story of the western part of the region, how their struggles differ from the eastern side and how they find unique opportunities and niches by creating a new identity: The Good Lands. Through active guidance and leadership from the region's tribal nations, a collaborative government and leadership structure is formed. The Good Lands become a leader in renewable energy research, and are nationally recognized for their economic, environmental and social reforms.

In 2050:

- Over 40 million acres of land is owned by only 100 entities, including individuals, organizations and tribal nations. Most of it is for shared private and public use, thanks to new federal laws encouraging cooperation between landowners, NGOs, state and local governments.
- The Good Lands is a place where human cultures are celebrated, renewable energy research leads the nation, people can reconnect personally and spiritually with the land and where all species thrive. Eco-tourism is a major industry.
- Everyone in The Good Lands shares the benefits of the energy programs through a renewable energy and carbon sequestration credit dividend paid out to all residents.
- Nature and spirituality are embedded in daily lives. Health care is based on wellness.

How did we get here?

- As the population dwindles away and rural communities continue to die, land becomes available. A strong federal shift toward energy independence leads to increased interest in harnessing the energy resources of the western part of the region, which include both wind energy and carbon sequestration.
- Private purchasers and consortiums begin to buy up the land. The land is deemed open land, and through responsible and sustainable practices provides much needed energy.
- The tribal nations provide key leadership through this process and find a renewed sense of identity. With the elimination of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, tribes work to successfully purchase back their land. The state governments, tribal chairs, academics and local leaders work together to benefit The Good Lands; each cooperate with each other to build a healthy, strong regional community.
- The environment returns to natural prairie and the area west of the Missouri River becomes a new destination for eco-tourism; The Good Lands.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Does "The Good Lands" change your thinking about what the western parts of our region may look like?
- 2) Is "The Good Lands" a positive story for you or a tale of decline and sadness?
- 3) What characteristics, if any, of "The Good Lands" do you feel need to be part of the future we create?
- 4) What role will the tribal nations play in creating the future we want?
- 5) Do you think the state governments could cooperate at the level described? Why or why not?

The Big Empty

This is a world in which the region sees an expansion of ethanol and biofuel production, which provide short-term growth for rural communities. But advances in technology lead to improved efficiency and increasing economies of scale. As the ethanol facilities grow larger, fewer and fewer employees are needed to operate them. Family farms disappear and rural economies falter as corporate farming and mega ethanol plants take over. A third of the region's population dies and is not replaced. Lack of proper services and loss of rural communities lead to a region empty of people and hope.

In 2050:

- Ethanol plants once provided jobs and hope to the region, but now are operated with few employees and robotic equipment. They control their own corporate farms and are completely self-sufficient. By making all their purchases nationally, they assist in the demise of Ag-related businesses and rural economies within our region.
- The population continually declines. The baby boomer generation is dying off and there is no immigration to replace them. Businesses pull out of rural communities for the lack of workforce.
- People in the region primarily live in a few vibrant cities; it's the only place with available services, resources and jobs. The citizens that choose to stay in rural areas, face hardships finding health care, shopping, jobs and education. Eventually as the last people in the rural communities die, the towns are demolished to make more farmland available for the corporate farms.

How did we get there?

- Current growing problems in Iraq and the Middle East, along with growing demand for energy worldwide, leads to fast paced innovations in ethanol production and closed-loop, environmentally responsible systems.
- The northern Great Plains is a key region for ethanol production which leads to the growth of small communities and towns throughout the rural region and a mini population boom as job opportunities dramatically increase.
- Advances in technology soon lead to increased production cost pressures and the need to leverage both economies of scale and plant efficiency. The result is the development of the mega, integrated ethanol plants, which displaces a significant number of workers and their families.
- Growing unemployment and the dying off of the baby boomers leads to the demise of many key services including postal, medical, retail and public safety.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Is the region adequately planning for the impacts of population decline due to our aging population?
- 2) Is it plausible to expect that enough new people will move into the region to replace the population loss due to death?
- 3) Can an environmentally responsible and economically successful ethanol industry support the future we want to create?
- 4) What characteristics, if any, of "The Big Empty" do you feel need to be part of the future we create?
- 5) What characteristics, if any, of "The Big Empty" need to be omitted, in order to create the future we want?

A Tech-no-color World

This is a world in which choices made related to both on-line and physical access, significantly impact future lifestyle, quality of life and opportunities for people in the northern Great Plains. The region is split into two worlds: one shaped by advanced connective technologies and the other by a focus on maintaining the transportation infrastructure.

In 2050:

- Minnesota, Iowa and Nebraska see a youthful, tech-savvy, monochromatic population with no desire or need to leave their homes.
- North and South Dakota see aging populations and a few small, intergenerational communities, that are artistic, spiritual, connected to nature and celebrate diversity.
- Technology has created a global network for education, careers and relationships but has also led to cyber terrorism, the potential for cyber war and the impact of cyber drugs. Youth, as young as 15 are being drafted to protect and defend the country's financial and digital infrastructure.

How did we get there?

- Cyber warfare changed the nation's psyche and led to major investments in cyber security technologies.
- The region splits into two distinct places as a result of differences in funding philosophies and priorities.
 - o North and South Dakota funded transportation and valued maintaining and supporting infrastructures to retain rural schools, communities and medical services.
 - o Minnesota's youthful leadership funded advanced connective technologies and valued being a player in the global marketplace and universal access for everyone.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Could technology advancements lead to lifestyles dominated by technology and create a region of tech have and have nots?
- 2) What part of the region would you choose to live in and why?
- 3) Would you travel to the "Tech" Twin Cities for shopping and recreation? Or would you prefer to shop and recreate in other urban centers less reliant on technology?
- 4) What characteristics of "Tech-no-color World" do you feel need to be part of the future we create?
- 5) Can we leverage the benefits of communication technology while preserving what we value in our current way of life?