

President's Letter

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Seventh Generation Thinking is attributed to Native American lore. Specifically, the Six Nations of the Iroquois (Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Seneca, Cayuga, and Tuscarora) are given the most credit for developing and codifying the idea here in the North American continent. The idea is that we do not inherit the land from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children.

In all of your deliberations in the Confederate Council, in your efforts at law making, in all your official acts, self interest shall be cast into oblivion. Cast not over your shoulder behind you the warnings of the nephews and nieces should they chide you for any error or wrong you may do, but return to the way of the Great Law which is just and right. Look and listen for the welfare of the whole people and have always in view not only the present but also the coming generations, even those whose faces are yet beneath the surface of the ground—the unborn of the future Nation.¹

But the thinking is not wholly Native American. Asian peoples long ago developed the idea of Harmony with Nature. The idea here is that the Earth is regarded as a living entity and everything it contains has a soul. This information came from the International Institute for Sustainable Development website.²

No, I am not that erudite in real life. The quote came from a Wikipedia site on Seventh Generation Sustainability. The Asian philosophy came from another site. My memory banks do not have that type of information readily available. When I started researching this, I knew the general slant of information but did not know the history or derivations. What I do know is where to find the information I need and how to apply it. Simply, a trick of a good early education. All it took was simple search from an Internet connection. It constantly amazes me that we can draw on vast amounts of information with a simple electronic connection.

In the abstract, Seventh Generation Thinking has a good ring to it. This philosophy

has an application to the worldview that is concerned with more than the self, the vested interest, or the quick gain. The underlying philosophy is a forward-looking thought process that helps advance a group and minimizes negative impacts to the world and its inhabitants.

In real life, the complexities of society and political will usually cloud the pure idea of Seventh Generation Thinking. In the environmental professions, we all want to reach this amazing plateau of planning and obtain the results that will keep the human race vital and productive for our children's children. In too many instances, we are faced with a Hobson's choice where the desired decision cannot be reached, where the consideration of following generations has not been incorporated into final designs or plans. Economic considerations or established methodology win out over innovation.

Seventh Generation Thinking is definitely a concept that can either encourage decisive planning or completely paralyze one with indecision regarding what is best for the future. Sometimes I question the decisiveness as possibly being tinged with self-interest. I will readily admit that I feel very small when I start thinking in that type of long-term aspect. Sometimes I can't quite wrap my mind around seven generations from now.

When I began research for this letter, I started thinking about a real time line. How long is seven generations? Looking at the information from sources I started down the road of "if at that time, people died at age 35, then seven generations was" . . . you get the idea. I was being too literal, too rooted in *knowing* rather than feeling the answer. In the 16th and 17th centuries, many people died before their 16th birthday. Not a good planning tool in that light. Do we consider today's life expectancy in calculating Seventh Generation Thinking? What country's life expectancy do we use?

I began again, but down a more abstract road. Seventh Generation Thinking should be something more comprehensible and not scaring me motionless. If I can know that a decision has a good result in my

lifetime, I might feel assured that the positive result will last longer. However, I still cannot *know*. So, I get to the place where I do my best, understand as long term as I can, and make a decision based on that positive input.

This is my first official President's Letter, and I began to consider how we in the National Association of Environmental Professionals (NAEP) have actually started to implement Seventh Generation Thinking in our own humble ways.

For NAEP, we have restarted our version of Seventh Generation Thinking in the past 5 years. We began initially with the establishment of a Chapter Committee under John Irving, whose aim was to address issues existing between NAEP and its affiliated chapters. With support from California AEP, the first Chapter Leadership Retreat was held in California. Now we are seeing the fruits of that labor. NAEP has been able to retain the majority of its chapters through our new affiliation agreement. It is not a one-way street: we realize each chapter must bring something to the bargain, something that advances us all. It appears we have found our start. This has now become a long-term planning tool for NAEP success. Following that first chapter retreat, NAEP has made the commitment to fund this meeting on a regular 5-year schedule. The next generation of environmental professionals will gain from this continued reexamination of what and who NAEP is.

Starting in 2006, NAEP realized that leadership was only half of the equation of a functional association. It took until 2009 for us to hire the best management firm we could find. We learned lessons along the way: bigger is not better, established is not better, caring and committed is what we needed to revitalize association. A management firm that thought of our future first, the success of the association as a whole, seemed to us as one that would place self-interest in its proper context and ensure our success. We are reaching membership goals and providing a good return for the annual investment. We are looking at improving service and services. Our future is in that membership base, in you individually and collectively. ("Look and

listen for the welfare of the whole people and have always in view not only the present but also the coming generations.”)

NAEP embarked in 2008 on a quest to redefine ourselves and return to relevance. Our strategic initiatives were determined in the summer of 2008 and by the end of 2009 we had completed all but the details of our strategy for the future. The basis for these changes were rooted in the general knowledge that we were not serving our members or our future well . . . and sometimes not at all.

We established the Jim Roberts Fund in 2008 as a memorial to a part of the foundation of the NAEP. By remembering Jim Roberts in this way, we have developed the plan to keep his dreams alive for the coming generations of environmental professionals. We have reached a plateau that reflects great progress, but we are still short of our goal of a self-sustaining foundation that awards an annual scholarship to a deserving student who can articulate how education will support ethical work on environmental problems. The thorny issue of ethics mixed with the hope of the future professional. More forward thinking . . . seventh generation? You make the call. I will go with the idea that we are doing our best with the success of the group in mind.

Last year we finally took seriously one of our obligations to the membership (and affiliates): to provide timely environmental news. I trust that the new face (and content) of the E-News³ has improved your view of NAEP as a source of information that has direct application to your daily job. The changes in the E-News to date are just the beginning. We are looking to provide members with a forum to learn, grow, and discuss issues we all face daily.

Sometimes local concerns are shown to have national appeal and applicability. Sometimes we have featured varying viewpoints on the same issue (e.g., Deepwater Horizon articles). All of this effort has been accomplished with the idea of enriching us all. We would like to provide information that will keep you at the top of the profession through shared knowledge. We hope to see more participation and discussion in coming months and years. We will see E-News become a place for new writers to establish themselves and experienced writers to share their knowledge with the rest of us.

This year, as NAEP's new President, I am continuing the quest to better ourselves for the future generations of environmental professionals. We are now emphasizing students—not just the traditional students, but the continuing students that we all should admit we are as professionals in our various environmental areas of practice. We cannot be holistic in our thinking and be stale in our knowledge. We cannot make decisions for good future actions if we are not current in the knowledge of *now*.

We need to all realize that *students* are NAEP's *future*. Without them we will ossify.

Throughout the coming year, we will initiate several education initiatives:

By the time you read this, we will have had our first NAEP webinar on “Appropriate Use of Mitigation and Monitoring and Clarifying the Appropriate Use of Mitigated Findings of No Significant Impact.”

At the 2011 NAEP Conference, we also were able to roll out the latest initiative: an educational partnership with Ameri-

can Public University. This will allow our membership access to specific course work and certificates of training, and allow for the potential to customize a degree program for a specific learning need. We anticipate that this partnership will benefit those in NAEP who are looking to earn an advanced degree, those in need of some specific training or formal knowledge to advance their career, and those who have experience but still thirst for knowledge. In other words, this will help students in NAEP.

Additionally, the Career Development Committee has begun to work with a strong focus on attracting new graduates to NAEP and to make the networking that is available work toward placing the best people in jobs that companies need to fill.

Our future looks bright, and our efforts to get here were great. To paraphrase someone I spoke with recently, we are working toward becoming the *preeminent environmental association*. I wish I could be here seven generations from now to enjoy the progress.

Join NAEP and become a student, or a teacher, in our quest to be *THE* Association of Environmental Professionals.

Notes

1. This quote is from section 28 of the Constitution of the Iroquois Nations, available at <http://www.indigenouspeople.net/iroqcon.htm>.
2. *Our Responsibility to the Seventh Generation: Indigenous Perspective and Relationships with the Environment*, IISDNet, <http://www.iisd.org/7thgen/environment.htm>.
3. NAEP National E-News, <http://www.naep.org/mc/page.do?sitePageId=92342&orgId=naep>.