



Consumers Energy, Michigan's largest utility, sponsored IRWA's Social Ecology Course in August 2014.

PREDICT Community Push Back

Using the Social Risk Management Matrix

BY JAMES A. KENT, J.D., KEVIN PREISTER, PH.D. AND
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IRWA has been adopting Social Ecology as a means to address successful community engagement at the project level. Most right of way practitioners have an interest in learning how to identify what projects are likely to experience “community challenges” in the project development process. Going hand-in-hand with that interest is a predictable desire to have that information as early as possible.

This session will provide participants with practical tools to use in determining social risk early in a project development cycle. Why do communities push-back against some projects, but not others? Is it really possible to tell ahead of time that a community will challenge a project? If so, why aren't project owners taking timely action to avoid those challenges which sometimes kill the project?

What is Social Ecology?

At the heart of Social Ecology is a descriptive process of the informal communication and support systems present in any community so that a real-time understanding of how the community functions can be obtained. Three concepts are important to understand how the community handles change.

1. Discover the informal networks operating in a community, along with the caretakers and communicators who are well-regarded by their peers and the natural gathering places where residents share information on a routine daily basis.
2. Understand human geography, or the ways that residents relate to their neighborhood and community areas.
3. Take part in issue management, which creates alignment between citizen interests and company interests.

With this knowledge in hand and through building personal relationships, a project is in a strategic position to identify and respond to emerging citizen issues. As this capacity is developed, a “moderate middle” is fostered which tempers the influence of extreme voices.



Presenting a social ecology program at the 2013 Annual Conference. From left, Right of Way Magazine's former Publisher/Editor-in-Chief Barbara Billitzer, James Kent, Kevin Preister and Glenn Winfree, SR/WA, who is credited with bringing IRWA and the JKA Group together.

Social Risks

We will present a Social Risk Scoring Matrix of 12 indicators that identify social risk to a project early. Attendees will make a preliminary assessment concerning the risks of community push-back using the scoring matrix and the following guiding questions from us:

- What concerns can you identify now that would raise a “yellow flag” in your mind about the possibility of trouble ahead?
- What are some of the more complex, high-risk factors that indicate the need for the in-depth analysis of a professional to prevent harm to the project’s budget and /or schedule?
- What are proven methods to address citizen issues early, before disruption occurs, as a means to stabilize the project development process?

In Summary

This interactive session will show how effective citizen engagement can save time, save money and save projects. Entitled, “How to Predict Community Push-Back Before It Is Too Late: Using the Social Risk Management Matrix,” the session is scheduled for June 26, from 1:00pm to 2:00pm.



Many participants at the conference will recognize this session on social risk management as part of Social Ecology, a continuing effort on IRWA's part to support effective community engagement. This is an ongoing effort that resulted in over 29 columns being published in the Right of Way Magazine. IRWA published these columns as a stand-alone anthology in 2017 called *Social Ecology: A Special Collection of Articles on the Art and Science of Social Ecology*, which has been very popular among IRWA members.

Equally popular among IRWA members is Course 225, Social Ecology: Listening to Community. This course brings the process to Chapters in an accredited learning program. There have been Course 225 sessions held in Montana, Michigan, California, Ontario, Arizona, Colorado and Alberta. Course 225 is already scheduled in 2018 in the following cities: San Antonio, Texas (April 4), Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (May 4), Concord, New Hampshire (May 15), Baltimore, Maryland (May 17) and Sacramento, California (August 8). Chapters are encouraged to continue to sign up for Course 225. 📍

Session Info:

How to Predict Community Push Back Before It Is Too Late

Tuesday, June 26th

1:00pm – 2:00pm



As President of the JKA Group, Jim is an advocate for using culture-based strategies when introducing site/corridor projects to local communities. He has fostered several successful long-term change projects in corporations and government units that have had long-term policy effects.



Kevin directs the Center for Social Ecology and Public Policy which creates corporate and governmental policy through culture-based project design. He has served as a project troubleshooter for numerous corporate and government clients.



Glenn Winfree, SR/WA is a Land Agent with Duke Energy with over 30 years of real estate experience. He is also the former Chair of the International Electric & Utilities Committee and an active member of the Carolinas Chapter 31.