

Native Elder Research Center



Cherokee Perspectives on Land Use and Health: Merging Elder Knowledge and Tribal Policy

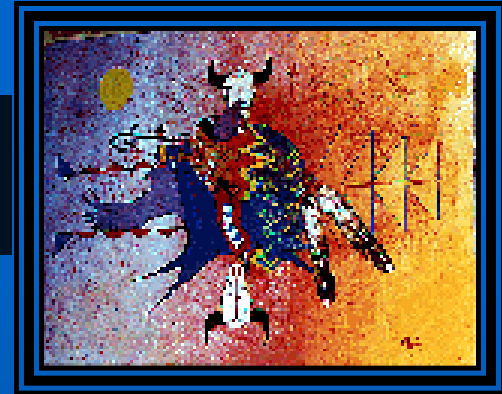
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Background & Significance



- Recent work points to health benefits of land conservation
- Shares common ground with values widespread among American Indian (AI) peoples
 - Moore M, Townsend M, Oldroyd J. 2006. Linking human and ecosystem health: The benefits of community involvement in conservation groups. *EcoHealth* 3:255-261.
 - Frumkin H. 2003. Healthy places: Exploring the evidence. *Am J Public Health*. 93:1451-1456.

Background & Significance



- Common AI perspective: Community health is related to the health of the land and the maintenance of relationships between humans and the nonhuman world.
 - Donatuto, J, L Campbell, and R Gregory. 2016. "Developing Responsive Indicators of Indigenous Community Health." *Int'l J Environ Res & Public Health*. 13(9): 899
 - Arquette M, Cole M, Cook K, LaFrance B, Peters M, Ransom J, et al. 2002. Holistic risk-based environmental decision making: A Native perspective. *Environ Health Perspect*. 110:259-264.

Indigenous Health Indicators

Coast Salish community health

Cultural
Use:
Respect/
stewardship,
practice



Natural
Resource
Security:
quality,
access,
safety



Community Connection:
family, work, sharing



Self
Determination:
development,
healing/
restoration, trust



Balance:
resilience, sense of
place, identity

Education: teachings, elders, youth

Research Questions



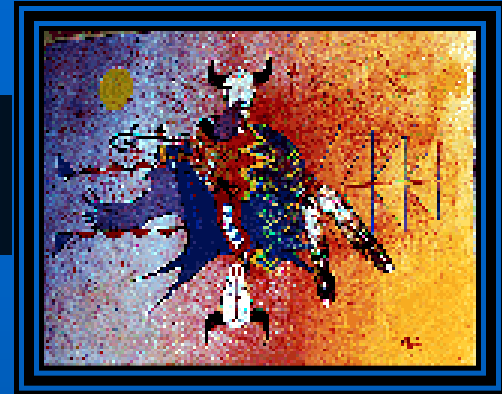
- Important questions arise at the intersection of traditional perspectives and tribal land use policy:
 - How do elders and knowledge-keepers apply traditional values to understand their tribes' land use decisions?
 - To what extent are tribal citizens willing for those perspectives to guide tribal policy in situations that may involve other budgetary tradeoffs?

Specific Aims



1. Analyze qualitative data from interviews with Cherokee elders on the relationship between community health and environmental health.
2. Use this data to develop a survey for tribal citizens to measure prevalence of knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs corresponding to the elders' perspectives; also their views on budgetary tradeoffs for tribal policies to reflect these perspectives.
3. Evaluate the changes in responses after tribal citizens are exposed to the elders' perspectives.

Methods



- Facilitated a PhotoVoice project with tribal elders centered on the group-defined themes of land and health
- Invited elders to discuss their photographs with reference to their knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about tribal land use and relationships between individual and environmental health
- Curated the elders' photos in a video highlights linkages between individual and environmental health and offers strategies for conserving the selected places and knowledge

Partners

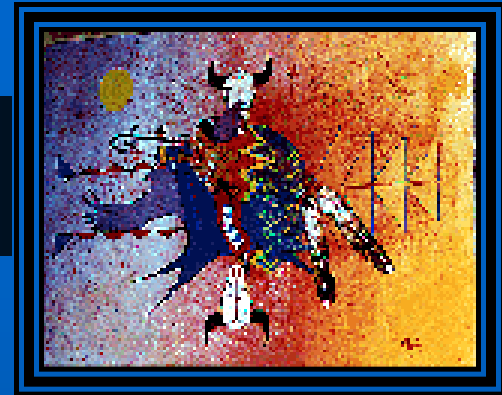


The Cherokee Nation Medicine Keepers:

- Formed in 2008
- Consist of 11 fluent-speaking Cherokee elders (5 women, 6 men)
- Function as advisory council to the tribal Administration Support Department on ethnobiological issues
- Mission: To perpetuate Cherokee knowledge of wild plants and to preserve the health of Cherokee lands for the benefit of present and future generations.



Methods (continued)



- Used qualitative and photographic data to inform survey instrument
- Recruited 84 Cherokee citizens in Tahlequah, OK during the 2015 Cherokee National Holiday to take a survey before and after viewing the 30-minute PhotoVoice video
- Survey measured the extent to which tribal citizens were willing to pursue land conservation given specific tradeoffs, and how viewing the PhotoVoice video changed that willingness

Selected Photos



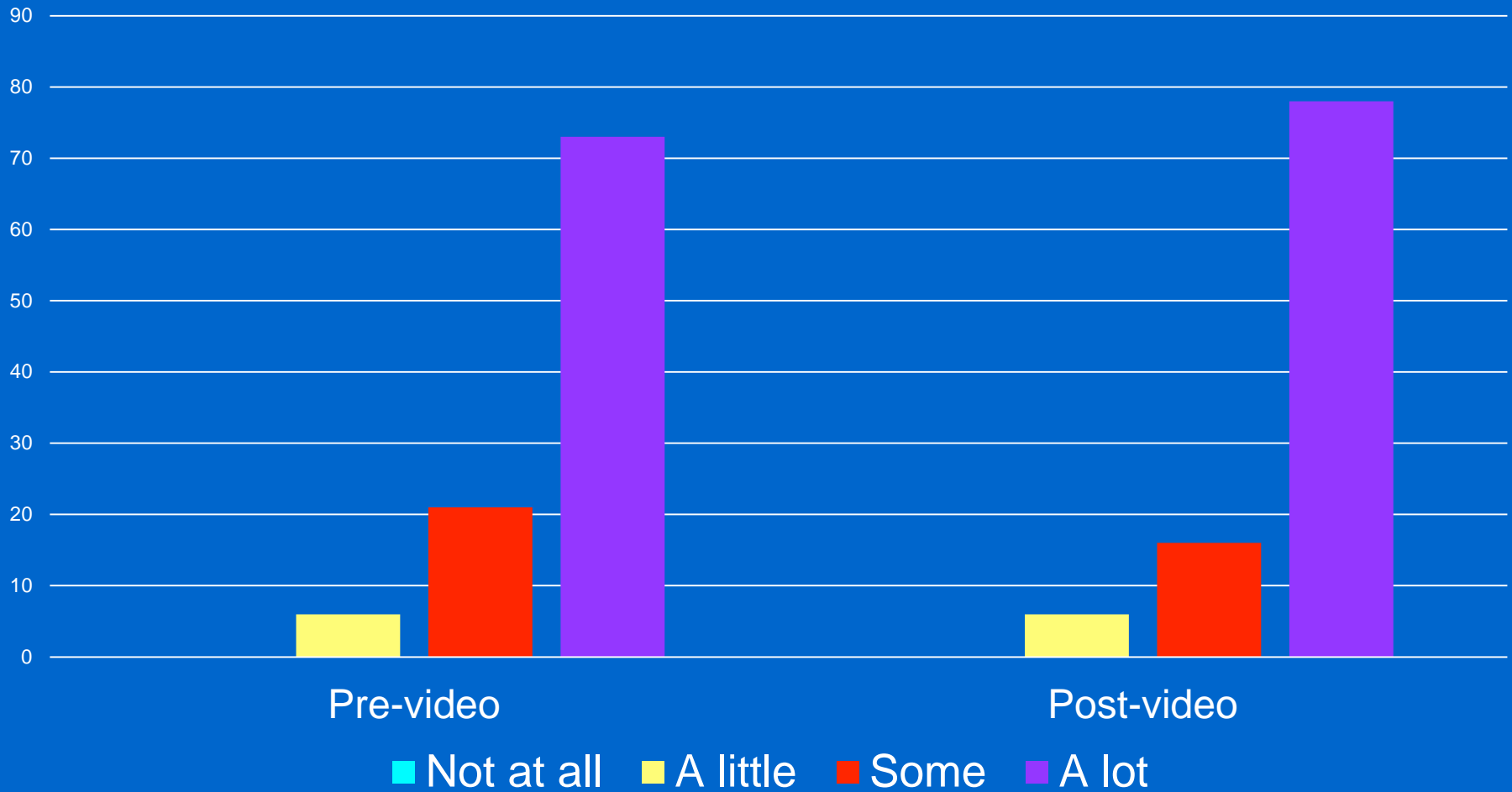
“Hearts comes
from the land,
and how we
take care of the
people there is
the medicine out
there.”

- Anna Sixkiller

- David Scott

How much do you think the health of your community where you live is affected by the condition of the surrounding natural environment?

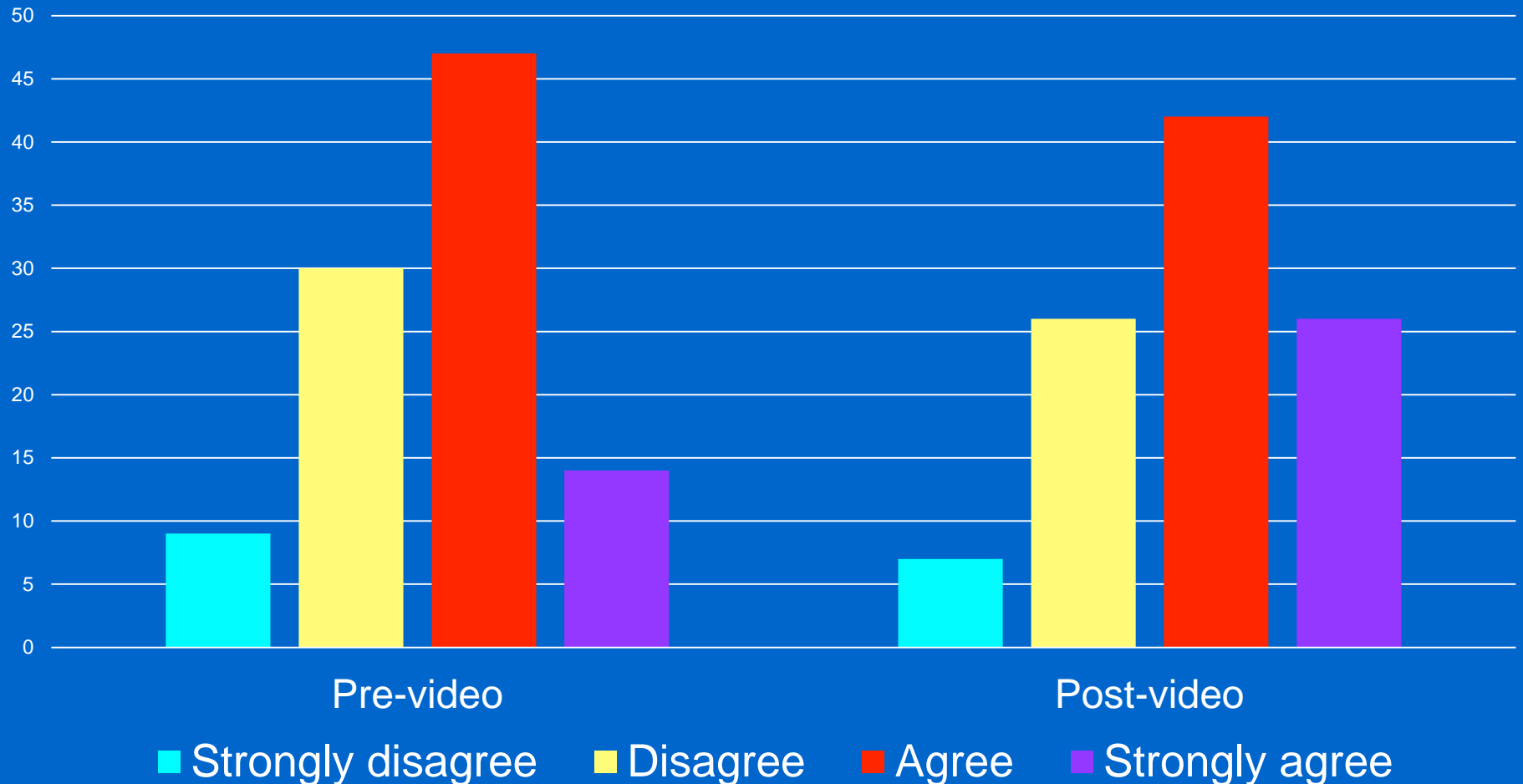
Average change in agreement = 0.0*



* A positive value indicates higher agreement in the post- vs. pre-video opinion; 95% CI = -0.1, 0.2

Willingness to conserve tribal lands if it meant reducing funding for Cherokee Nation education programs *by 10%*

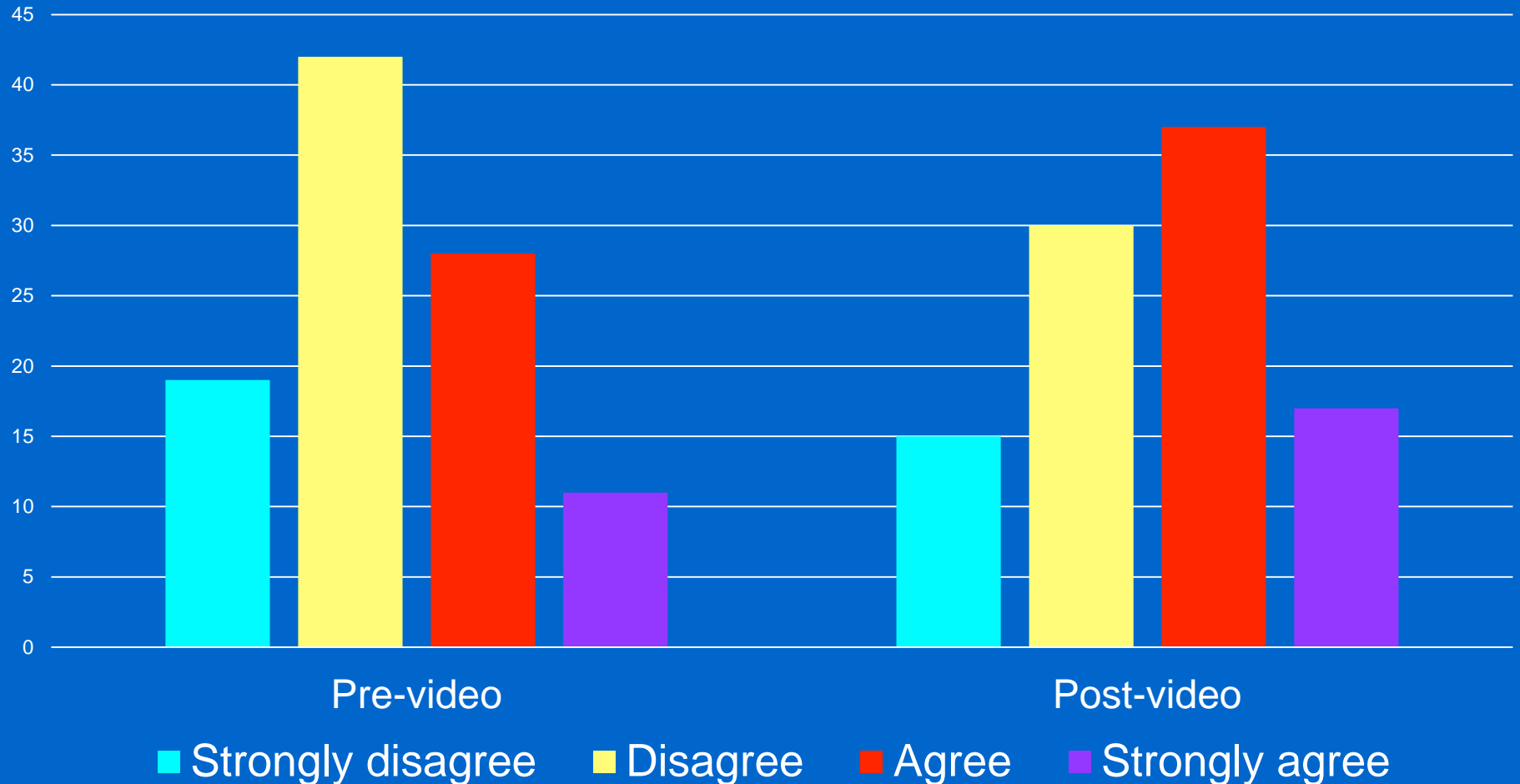
Average change in agreement = 0.2*



* A positive value indicates higher agreement in the post- vs. pre-video opinion; 95% CI = 0.1, 0.4

Willingness to conserve tribal lands if it meant reducing funding for Cherokee Nation health services *by 10%*

Average change in agreement = 0.2*



* A positive value indicates higher agreement in the post- vs. pre-video opinion; 95% CI = 0.1, 0.4

Discussion



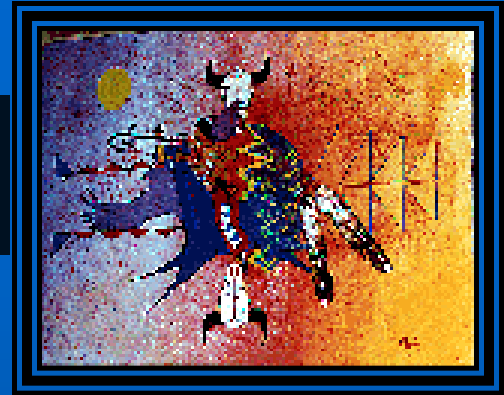
- Data show significant shifts in priorities for many domains (tribal land reacquisition, impact of grazing, connection to language)
- Results suggest broadcasting elder perspectives as effective for enlisting support for tribal land conservation
- Data have been used to influence tribal land use policy
- PhotoVoice video used in numerous forums to convey elder perspectives at regional and national meetings
- Documentation of cultural knowledge and individual elder perspectives for future generations

Future Research



- “Knowing the Land: Resource Access, Conservation, and Cherokee Land-Based Education in Oklahoma”
- NSF Early Career Faculty Award
- 5-year project (2017-2022)
- Integrated research and education project
- Draws on previous research that posits a connection between community well-being and linked issues of natural resource access, tribal land conservation, and cultural revitalization.

Acknowledgements



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