



## Expanding the Base from Ecology to Community

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I left home in Vermont to travel across the country out of enormous respect for The Nature Conservancy and because I recognize your courage in asking the questions that are implicit in this gathering: How does one really save land today? Can TNC possibly succeed alone? Whom do you need to have at your side today in order to succeed?

It takes courage to answer these hard questions because they expose us, but in seeing oneself more clearly comes the opportunity for tremendous innovation. From Roger Milliken's acceptance of the talking stick this morning; to Jerome Ringo's keynote; to the panels on population, poverty, consumerism; to all the explicit efforts to re-align what you care about with what others care about; it is clear that this is an extraordinary moment for the Nature Conservancy. And because I have recognized how my own life has expanded and contracted in direct proportion to my courage, I want to recognize this moment and the courage and humility that have created it.

What does it mean when the world's largest biodiversity conservation organization — The Nature Conservancy — talks about its role in alleviating human poverty? Is this a moral, strategic, or marketing dialogue, or all three? What does it mean for conservationists when a regional land trust in California decides to collaborate with migrant farm workers? What can we learn from a rural land trust in Colorado providing below-market-priced timber from its protected lands for affordable housing?

This is evidence of what I'm calling Conservation 2.0. In this new era of American demographics and global politics, a new form of leadership is being asked of conservationists.

The language and skills of Conservation 1.0 have been technical, financial and legal, and its goals have often been grounded in science and in counting bucks and acres as the measure of success. We are deeply indebted to this period in conservation for giving us our systems of national parks, wildlife refuges and conserved land all across the country.

Conservation 2.0 builds upon what was achieved over the last 40 years, and it is predominantly concerned with how, as a nation, we *relate to that land and to one another*.

Conservation 2.0 is about conserving land with a new set of tools on a much larger scale; from landscape-scale to culture-scale. The skills needed in this practice of conservation include story, dialogue across divides, cultural competency, dismantling racism, political agility and movement building. The opportunities for success in version 2.0 are a greatly expanded membership, greater public understanding, deeper collaborations, more funding, more legislative victories, and the chance to move beyond saving landscapes to creating a land ethic. This is the extraordinary opportunity of The Nature Conservancy today: to help create healthy people and whole communities, while at the same time build stronger, more resilient support for conservation itself.

Because of my respect for your work, I will be as forthright as I can be. You are very successful people. You work exceedingly hard and you do exemplary work, but it alone is *not sufficient*. Even though you are brilliant and strong, you are not strong enough to do this work alone. First, the challenges to biodiversity are too complex and far outpace what can be accomplished by laws or buying land. Second, your past successes will be challenged more and more until you can effectively make the case that your mission of biodiversity is relevant to someone like this man: Brahm Ahmadi of Oakland who founded Peoples Grocery to bring healthy food to urban neighborhoods where liquor stores stand in place of grocery stores.

Or this woman: LaDonna Redmond of Chicago, who is blending public health, land conservation and food security on the west side. Or Paula Garcia of New Mexico, who is conserving culture through conservation of traditional waterways.

They care deeply about land, and biodiversity too, but, to be honest, they do not see themselves in your work. How is it that those of us who care about protecting marginalized people and those who care about protecting the land have ended up today divided from one another?

Why does environmentalism in our country include far fewer people of color? Today, 90 percent of the supporters and donors to The Nature Conservancy are white and over fifty years of age.

My answer, in a word, is *divides*.

Across America, there is the divide between private abundance and public neglect. The top 1 percent of our population now controls one-third of the nation's wealth. There's the divide between ideologies: Environmentalism, capitalism, fundamentalism, all these –"isms" have isolated us from one another.

There's the divide between science and religion. Once upon a time, the divide was over whether or not we were fundamentally a Christian or enlightenment culture. But today, our polarizing politics has turned the volume up and now you're either a Christian Republican or a secular democrat.

The most extreme face of these divides is racism, of course, and the extent to which we do not know and thus fear the Other. I have come to accept with great heartache that our conservation movement is a segregated movement. We see that here today, but we see it at the Land Trust Alliance and at every gathering of conservation in the United States. For me, there is no more denial, no more guilt or hand-wringing. The only appropriate question is how are we going to change it?

Let me share with you how these divides play out in the environmental movement.

We call this the Whole Communities map.



First, there is the divide between those who care about people and those who care about nature. This divide is worsened by the fracture between those who have privilege and those who do not.

If you have financial resources and care about nature, you may be

interested in these types of issues: endangered species, acid rain, land conservation.

If you're privileged and focused on people, these very well may be your concerns: alternative energy, fuel-efficient cars, fair trade and organic agriculture.

If you have little privilege and care most about people, perhaps you are interested in public health, structural racism, democratic participation, and hunger.

Lastly, if you have little privilege and care most about nature, you may be interested in clean air, access to parks and urban greening.

Our point is this: all of these concerns are critically important, and none will succeed without the other. Those who care about endangered species will not make enduring progress without those who care about Katrina.

Here's why: without real alliances across the quadrants, conservationists risk being left behind by a changing public that doesn't know them. If you digest only one fact, let it be this one: by 2043, white Americans will be a minority in the United States. And in several cities like San Francisco, Albuquerque, and Los Angeles, whites are already the minority population.

Who will steward our conserved lands in 2043? Where are the Asian-Americans, the African-Americans, the Native-Americans, the Hispanic-Americans today in our conservation and environmental movements?

The core of Thomas Jefferson's ideal was the notion that America rose in the late 1700s from a favorable set of demographics: social, political and economic, that enabled our Republic to form. What is rising up today from America's demographics, are we joining them or running from them, and what will happen to our landscape and our communities as a result? Our demographics are changing, and so are our settlement patterns: By 2030, one quarter of all the world's protected areas will be less than 9 miles from a city.

To focus on a single issue, like biodiversity, is today both a privilege as well as a source of isolation. And focusing on a single issue can lead an organization to be overly competitive, more prone to exaggeration, and less adaptive and resilient.

What does this map suggest to land conservationists?

It says laws and science don't save land, people do. Conservationists need to care about what a whole community is because no property boundary will ever survive a public that no longer cares. To be truly meaningful and enduring, the work of conservation must be grounded not just in law statutes, but in the hearts, minds, and every day choices of diverse people. That means that those who love nature need to fully engage people, all people.

This is hard. As a conservationist, I was never trained or equipped to move across this map and create new alliances. Honestly, a lot of my friends in conservation got into conservation because, frankly, they preferred wilderness to people.

Some are already referring to this call to engage with people and community “mission creep”, but I would call it essential. It’s the form of leadership that fosters new alliances and innovation. Some have conveniently interpreted Darwin’s “survival of the fittest” to mean survival of the toughest, or survival of the one with the best messaging campaign or the closest relationships. But, for Darwin, survival of fittest meant survival of the most adaptable. How adaptable *is* The Nature Conservancy?

For example, if you’re going to succeed on cap and trade legislation to address climate change you’ll need coalitions far beyond environmentalists. You’ll need people of color and you’ll need the faith community. The Nature Conservancy will need to respond directly to the human face of global climate change by respecting how structural racism and systems of poverty determine that it will affect people to different degrees.

My observation is that there are three key doorway issues to enter more Americans homes with your message. This isn’t polling data about how people will vote. These are the frames of your work that would enable you to join a larger movement:

**Children:** Today’s children are the first to grow up without a relationship to nature. They spend 45 hours per week with electronic media, and they can identify 1,000 corporate logos but not ten plants or animals native to their own home ground. This is not good for either the land or for democracy. How will TNC flourish when these children have grown into adults and our elected officials?

**Food:** Americans of all incomes are deeply concerned with the quality and cost of food, and how we produce food has an enormous impact on biodiversity. So, one of the most effective levers for protecting biodiversity will be your ability to ally with the rapidly growing food justice and sustainable agriculture movements in the United States.

**Faith:** I wonder what it will take for TNC to acknowledge that it is both a scientific organization and a spiritual one. The central theme of your work is *life* and that is deeply spiritual. And you have tremendous faith. You are faithful to your dreams and to the diversity of life. I sense so much faith and spirituality within you. But I also sense that TNC is unwilling to speak of spirituality and faith because you confuse these things for religion, which is traditionally at odds with science.

According to Pew study on Religious Attitudes of Americans, 92 percent of Americans believe in God while 48 percent of TNC employees believe in God. Going further, 52 percent of TNC employees feel that religion causes more problems in society than it

solves. 63 percent of Americans pray and read scripture with their children, while 52 percent of TNC employees never go to church.

The path that bridges this divide is not debating religious or scientific views but, instead, by expressing what ideas and dreams **do** claim you and ask for your faithfulness. I think you'll be very surprised by the response you get from others and by the common ground you will share with them.

What I'm really asking of you is to consider leaving your own safe harbor and becoming part of larger movements for change. They are happening all around you. Paul Hawken calls it Blessed Unrest. We call it Whole Communities.

I respect that to leave that harbor could be scary or disorienting for The Nature Conservancy. You're grounded in business and science. You've had tremendous success in the past by focusing hard with that business-acumen and scientific knowledge. But the challenges today are not merely legal, financial or scientific. They are cultural.

And can any organization today really succeed alone? This isn't a call to change your mission. It's a call to change your alliances.

There's the adage, "If you want to go fast then go alone, but if you want to go far then go together." Dr. King said "we can not walk alone" and so what does The Nature Conservancy need to do to join others and to have others join you?

Connect more people, especially children, to more of your land. This is a challenge: for every dollar you spend on buying land, spend one dollar on connecting people (children) to the land. This could be one of the most important investments in The Nature Conservancy's future.

What you could do ... provide people with a relationship to land and nature is *medicine for which most ails our culture*. Our healthy relationship to land is the means by which we all generate, re-create, and renew transcendent values such as beauty, responsibility, love and the sacred, on which both ethics and morality depend. Once the human community gets healthy, that health will be reflected in the landscape.

**Your most important work is to offer a new story.** Today, you can't demand change, you can only inspire it. And what inspires Americans isn't adequately expressed in facts, and data, and five year plans. May I remind you that Dr. Martin Luther did not say "I have a plan." No, he said "I have a dream." Our failure to dream, today, has

given us the era of small thinking, the loss of our own prophetic voice, and no effective way to compete with the dominant cultural story.

I was 8 or 10 when I first heard Dr. King's *I have a Dream* speech. I was living in affluent Fairfield County, CT and I still remember that part of the speech where he says "I have a dream that one day in our nation my four children will be judged not for the color of their skin but for the content of their character." This was my first experience of race because I said to myself, do you mean that's not the way it is? Dr. King enabled this young white boy to see the world differently, and I've never gone back. That's the power of story. And that's the power of inclusiveness that Jerome Ringo spoke about this afternoon.

What is your vision of the future that you are trying to draw Americans toward?  
What is your "I have a dream" speech for biodiversity?  
Can all Americans see themselves in your story?  
How is this story relevant to their lives?

(The talk concluded with an eight minute clip of Dr. King's 1963 "I have a Dream" speech)