

Whole Thinking for Land Conservationists

Workshop
at the Land Trust Alliance
October 28, 2002
Austin, Texas
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Most of us have traveled hundreds, if not thousands, of miles to be here at this Rally and I am very conscious of the intention that brings us together. It's a powerful and wise intention, deserving of our recognition. I take your presence here very seriously, and therefore I'll be covering a lot of ground and giving you a crash course in what we've come to call "the great remembering," or the role of land conservation in creating social change. In short, how we as a conservation movement might more effectively lead with our values first to both protect land and create a change in people.

In coming to Austin this week we are not just going about our private lives, but searching for the ways to bring land -- and the values that land teaches us-- into the lives of our neighbors and our families. We are *already* quietly practicing the revolutionary ecology that I will speak about later.

We're here together because we share a love of the land, as well as an *unspoken* understanding of its power to grace us, humble us, and always to teach us the responsibility of being alive and being in community. I assume many of you are searching, like me, for the ways to use land conservation to create a different world than the one we find ourselves in today.

I want to strengthen your faith in the power of land, but I also will be a loyal critic of our conservation movement and suggest, as strongly as I can, that we have a moral responsibility to do better and to do differently. I'm going to offer new guideposts to help us see how our work in conservation can lead to more of a change in our culture.

We are standing on the edge of a deeply important epoch and a momentous decision. How do we apply the skills and resources of our movement to create the most good? We live with the awareness of the many problems our species faces, and the tools we have at our disposal seem inadequate to the level of change that is

required, and yet we still hold this enormous hope in our potential to take another course, to re-define what it means to be human. Hope, good will, and intention are powerful things, but they are not enough to get us through to the other side. This is the dance of hope and sorrow, and it's essential that we let both the sorrow and the hope move us toward healing our broken relationships with the world.

And so, the most important thing I can ask of you is your willingness to re-think the promise of land conservation. We have brilliantly developed sophisticated tools to protect land, namely the option agreements, financing mechanisms, and the conservation easements of our trade, but we have spent precious little time talking about our *purpose and our intention*. There's an absolutely critical role for conservation to play in the healthy of our culture and our planet, but to get there we've got to evolve the way we work. It doesn't require that we change our tools; but rather that we re-think our purpose and that we lead courageously with that new vision.

The purpose of conserving land is to enable people to find their spirit in the natural world and, in doing so, making *all of life* more whole and complete. Martin Buber, the Jewish philosopher, said, "nature needs man for what no angel can perform for it, namely it's hallowing." We can really only care for ourselves when we show our respect for -- our hallowing of-- the rest of life around us, human and non-human.

When conservationists speak of "saving land," what we really are attempting to save is not only a place, but our tenuous relationship with the rest of earthy life that exists there. It is not in our human capacity to "save the land" except to save it from ourselves. What we *can* save is the quality of our regard for and commitment to life and to all the sets of relationships that we call "the land." **If we focus on the quality of those relationships, nature will take care of the place.**

The two core ideas to help us re-think the promise of land conservation are this:

Our purpose is the integration of life;
our intent is to rebuild all the sets of relationships --human and nonhuman--
that we call the land.

Re-thinking land conservation as the promise of more enduring relationships is like seeing our world with new eyes. And this new worldview can create changes in our

culture as important as any in the history of our species. That's a big statement, I know. I wouldn't be so emphatic if I hadn't seen, dozens of times, how land conservation can have an affect on people way beyond the property line. It's our moral obligation to conserve land in a manner that does help people to live and imagine their lives differently.

We know that the old way of life is killing us and silencing the earth. We know that land conservation, as it is practiced today, is noble and powerful, but often not adding up to more than a whole lot of band-aids on a patient stricken with cancer. To enable land conservation to treat the cause of the cancer, as opposed to treating the symptoms, is the necessary re-invention that I'm talking about. And to do so will make it possible to live on this earth without destroying it and to know what is really possible for the human spirit.

Integration and relationships. Everything flows from these two ideas. Viewing the world through the lens of integration and relationship is called "Thinking of the whole", or just simply "Whole Thinking."

Wendell Berry put it this way: "The proper business of a human economy is to make one whole thing of ourselves and this world"

Integration and relationship are what land is all about, and should be what land conservation is all about.

Whole thinking is the act of seeing all landscapes as being connected and seeing humans as an integral part of that picture. And thinking about the whole landscape, from cities to wildlands and from people to endangered species, is the only way to address the biological truths that underpin all of life. We can't hope to knit together landscapes before we have knitted together a philosophy of conservation that fully integrates people and the land. One that concretely shows that what we do to the land we simultaneously do to ourselves.

It's crucial, and smart, to look around us through the optic of Whole Thinking to see that the world is not exactly the way we would have it.

(Slides)

The land trust movement has saved 6.8 million acres of land, but I fear Americans are less connected to the land than ever before. In light of these realities, it's important that we ask ourselves the challenging questions: what is the role of land conservation in a culture that has largely abandoned the land? What is the role of land conservation in a society that may soon be at war? What is the meaning of land conservation to a people who are building more malls than high schools? What are our highest aspirations for our movement given these realities?

Let me tell you a story that I think will answers these questions better than I can.

Classie Parker is a third-generation resident of Central Harlem in New York where she produces food, beauty, tolerance, neighborliness, and a relationship to land for people, all on less than one-quarter of an acre. Ten years ago she was flipping hamburgers at White Castle, barely able to keep her family together. She felt stuck on a street where no body knew one another and where the drug dealers ran everything. Classie especially feared for the future of her father who was growing old and needed some way to spend more time being active and outside.

Classie had a vision for a place where the old and young could work together. Next to her building was a 3,600 sf foot vacant lot that was crowded with crack vials, needles, abandoned cars, and garbage of every kind. Classie got the idea to create a garden on that lot for her dad to work on, and she recruited her brother, and a Spanish couple who lived nearby and their five children to help her.

Five Star Garden is almost absurdly small, but for the people of 121st Street—who, for the most part, never leave Harlem—the garden is their own piece of land to which they have developed a very deep personal attachment. These are Classie's words:

We think of ourselves as farmers, city farmers. Never environmentalists. We love plants, we love being with the earth, working with the earth. But there is something here in this garden for everyone. And any race, creed, or color . . . now, can you explain that? This is one of the few places in Harlem where they can be free to be themselves. It's hard to put into words what moves people to come in

this garden and tell us their life stories, but it happens every day.
There's love here. People gonna go where they feel the flow of love.

There is a difference. You come in here and sit down, Peter, don't you feel comfortable with us? Don't you feel you're free to be you? That we're not going to judge you because you're a different color or because you're a male? Do you feel happy here? Do you feel intimidated? Don't you feel like my dad's your dad?

Classie boiled it all down: "Don't you feel like my dad is your dad?" I remember laughing as Classie said this, and I paused from our work to look up at her father, sitting ten feet across from me with his feet firmly planted on the earth, both hands resting on canes, eighty-seven years old, garden dirt on his face. What we had in common at that moment was profound: it was that soil and that place and the love and hope that Classie could wish for both of us.

(Slide: this is what land conservation teaches)

I have heard others say that we are on the brink of a Great Forgetting, a point where our relationships are so fractured that we have almost forgotten why they were important in the first place. Our ties with the land are so fragile right now that we can hardly even speak of the pain we feel in the broken places.

I prefer to believe that we are on the brink of a Great Remembering, a time when we have been punished enough by "The world I know is gone" that we are forced to show self-restraint. When our culture comes to realize the values of these last vestiges of nature and wildness and diversity that are the seeds of our healthy future. And through the expressions of self-restraint and respect that is land conservation, we experience a great remembering which is the healing of ourselves through a million different ways to reconnect with the life that is around us. This is the powerful story of integration and relationship.

To better understand the threshold at which we stand, let's remember how our collective humanity has already experienced two all encompassing revolutions, both of which were fundamentally about relationships. Ten thousand years ago, the

agricultural revolution changed forever how we organized ourselves from hunter/gatherers into nation/states. And, roughly two hundred years ago, the industrial revolution greatly accelerated this same change to take us from citizens of nation/states to laborers or consumers of a global capitalism. Each of these revolutions changed the way we view ourselves and the world around us. Each of these revolutions contributed enormously important advancements to our quality of life. But each also has had a dark result: our further separation from the world of life and a resulting set of pathologies. The psychologist Thom Hartmann explains this human transition as “the breaking of the intimate bond with the world around us, the separating of ourselves into increasingly isolated ‘boxes.’” Another psychologist, Theodore Rorzak, put it this way, “the earth hurts, and we hurt with it.” In other words, every tear in the earth became a tear in us.

One can view the last ten thousand years of human evolution as the process of burning the bridges to the world around us, the process of creating our own human-made culture at the expense of our relationships with the rest of life.

As a result, there is increasingly only one story to hear and one story to tell. This is the story where the only point of trees is board feet, the only point of farms is money, and the only point of people is to be consumers. We learn that the only person that matters is ourselves, and that the only time that matters is now.

All of us want to tell a different story, one that expresses what we really love, what inspires us beyond our individual needs, what matters most.

Forty years ago, a third revolution began. Some say it started with the publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*. Our eyes opened to the death that was around us and we gave voice to our sorrow. It was a palpable sorrow for the loss of songbirds, of the loss of the places of our childhood, the loss of the grizzly, and the loss of our own family members to new cancers. Slowly, painfully, we recognized that our prosperity could not possibly continue at the expense of the rest of life. This shift in our worldview was the awareness that who we are is **not** what we own. Who we are is something much greater, much more fulfilling, joyful and real. And that the meaning in who we are comes from our relationships with the world around us, human and non-human. That is the gold; everything else is just cheap and dangerous glitter.

This is the *ecological revolution*, or as the systems thinker Joanna Macy, puts it “a time of revolutionary ecology.” Or, as E.O. Wilson puts it, “the century of our environment.” This is not some nostalgic trip to the past, or some Luddite attempt to throw out technology and go back to simpler times. It’s the integration of our sophisticated modern lives into the whole of life. It’s the story of integration and relationships, the story of whole thinking.

Mahatma Gandhi led India with a model for social change that has been copied by Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela and many others. Broad shifts in culture can only occur, they say, in the presence of three forces: holding actions against the dominant culture, the creation of alternative ways of living, and a change in personal consciousness. Gandhi integrated all three. He directly confronted the oppression of British rule in India by enduring caning and arrest, and by creating ashrams and a new political party as a clear alternative to British rule. And he taught millions of Indians to weave their own cloth and to become more spiritually and materially independent.

Let’s pause a moment and apply a similar process of whole thinking to land conservation. How might our work contribute to holding actions, alternative ways of living, and a change in personal consciousness? Or, how might land conservation better lead to social change. And what is social change anyway? (Gandhi quote)

Without doubt, protecting a farm from becoming another big box store --for example-- is a critical holding action. It’s saying “no thank you!” to what has become the standard course of events or “the cost of doing business”. But when a community or a land trust decides to “save” a farm from becoming a big box store something else also happens. By choosing the farm over the big box store, we’re actually creating that alternative future. We’re not just saying no to big box store, but an emphatic yes to the farm and to the way of life that honors a relationship with land.

Anyone who doubts that we still get our most fundamental cultural information from the land should drive out to your closest strip mall, stand in front of it, and ask yourself "what does this place say about me?" Or, as the Amish ask it, what will this place do to my family?

What we choose to do with our landscape becomes, really, what we choose to do to ourselves.

And what about for the young woman who grew up playing next to that farm who grieves deeply, with unspoken fears, for the loss of that place ... and lived to see it remain a farm, or a forest, or a wetland, or a mountain top. This act of respect and forbearance can be an awakening, something everyone in this room could call a renewal of the human spirit.

Let me tell you another story.

This is Gil Griggs in front of the land he's farmed for forty years. Farming goes back over 200 years in Gil's family. But the land around him has really, really changed. Billerica, Mass was once Boston's breadbasket, but has now been sprawled almost to death. There were 8 big box stores over 200,000 sq feet in Billerica when Wal-mart came to town looking to open yet another one.

Gil's 25-acre vegetable farm was surrounded on two sides by big box stores. Two of them were empty and had weeds growing up out of the asphalt, but Wal-mart decided to buy Gil's farm, which he only leased.

Neither Gil nor the town had two nickels to rub together and so it was pretty clear that his farm would get developed. But his farm is where local folks bought their tomato plants in the spring and their pumpkins in the fall. The farm wasn't spectacular; in fact, it was sandwiched between two existing malls. But somehow, people knew—even though it wasn't something that could be proved by science—that the destruction of the farm would have meant a great loss to their community.

A small handful of dedicated people said they cared enough about Griggs Farm to leave their private lives behind and say to themselves: enough is enough! They took out ads in the local newspaper attacking Wal-mart by saying "There's more to life than cheap underwear!"

They got TPL to step in and challenge Wal-Mart. They called a special town meeting. T P L ' s conservation efforts had given the community a last-minute

chance to keep the farm, as it had always been, a place to buy locally grown food and to meet neighbors. Wal-mart had plans to build a 300,000-square-foot mall on Gil Griggs's corn and vegetable fields. There was very little money to do the former, and the promise of great financial reward if the community allowed the latter.

It was a choice of mythic proportions: a small, working-class town already beaten up hard by sprawl taking on Wal-mart developers. These developers were suing TPL and threatening the same action on the community itself. The town meeting had already turned down a request for funds to repair the high school roof, and yet this single act of conservation would cost the community over \$1 million. It seemed inevitable who would win that night.

At the special town meeting, and people were holding their children on their hips while they waited in long lines behind the microphones. They debated the alternatives as if the future of their own families was at stake. They were passionate, and angry, and alive. I heard in their voices the vulnerability and determination of people fully engaged in life. I saw in how they looked at one another that caring for the land went hand in hand with caring for their community.

David Suzuki wrote recently "consumerism has taken the place of citizenship as the chief way we contribute to the health of our society." While there is plenty of evidence to support this comment, *I saw something very different going on in Billerica*. Neighbors were expressing their allegiance to ideals, to one another, and to the land. I understood what this process was enabling them to affirm: citizenship in a specific place.

Conserving a small farm in the midst of asphalt was their own Great Remembering. I saw people thinking about a healthy future not in terms of what they could do for themselves but in terms of what they could do for others. They were seeing a solution not in terms of economic growth but in terms of relationships. They responded to that farm in a way that changed them and their community forever.

It was clear that evening how land conservation was leading directly to a change in how people conceived of their relationships, how they dwell and imagine their lives.

Let's return now to the idea of an ecological revolution and the role of land conservation in social change. I hope the stories of Classie Parker and Gil Griggs made it clear how conservation can become much, much more than holding actions.

Conservation is fundamental to the ecological revolution because it's medicine for what ails our society. It has the potential to be much more than a holding action, or a band-aid, **and can offer a** new vision for how we might better live, **and be a** source of personal transformation. Conservation affords people a direct experience with the natural world and therefore enables us to see the world with new eyes, and gives us the land on which to live out that new way of being.

Now that we know this, we have a moral responsibility to re-apply conservation in all ways that will enable it to create a change in how people imagine their lives. How do we get there?

It's a big question, and I have only the very beginning of the answers. I will offer three answers: whole thinking, storytelling, and preconceiving land conservation as the conservation of relationships.

1) Whole thinking

We've already been there, but let me offer more context. There's actually a good reason why it's been hard for conservationists to think and act in an integrated way. The environmental movement evolved very quickly at the beginning of our "ecological revolution" into technical and highly specialized organizations -- one that does endangered species, one that does wilderness, one that does urban greening, etc. because specialization allowed us to compete well against our opposition.

And that specialization has given us many important tangible achievements, *but no integrated philosophy of how to live well*. To "live well" means to care for the land as the only enduring way to care of us. The "good life" in America has come to mean something almost exactly the opposite: that our security and wealth and happiness comes primarily from our bank accounts and not from our relationship with the world around us. September 11 proved how completely wrong this is.

Competing with our opposition (whatever that may be: capitalism or the consumer culture that bombards us with 30,000 advertisements each month) isn't working, and here's the proof according to our own General Accounting Office: 3 million acres of farms and forests will be developed this year while only 1 million might be protected if all public and private conservationists stretch themselves.

We can't compete our way into an ecological revolution. But we can offer people, through each and every one of protected lands, a different view of the world that is simply healthier, happier and more realistic than the one our dominant culture would have us believe in.

After forty years, the modern conservation movement still offers little help in how to lead one's life differently from the prevailing cultural forces of our time. We have treated the symptoms of the problem, but done little to offer an *integrated philosophy of how to live well*. Whole thinking is the only way out of the specialization box.

Classie Parker offers her neighbors an integrated philosophy of how to live well.

2) Story-telling

Stories are our oxygen, especially in these times of fear and uncertainty,. They are the best way to help people feel the importance of land in their lives. I feel so strongly about the act of story telling to the future of land conservation that the Center for Land and People produced a book about it, which I hope you will read. I won't say more now.

3) Re-thinking land conservation as the conservation of relationships

It's all about relationship. For 100 years, the conservation movement has observed nature wisely and carefully, but our movement has not had people participating in, or *part of*, nature. The reason for this historically, and the primary impression left by too many conservationists presently, is that people are bad for the land.

Land is good for people, yes, but are people good for the land? We either glorify humans or demonize them. The honest answer isn't nearly as clear: most of recent

human history has not been good for the land. But there's also plenty of evidence of modern people living a different relationship with the land. I know history, and I still have faith in our ability to learn and to evolve. Everyone in this room knows that many people have been exploiters of the land. No question. But we also know of our human capacity for love, respect, and for doing good. We must not throw out the people-land relationship; we must work to improve it.

How are we ever going to curb our population, or restore in people some sense of their responsibility to the earth without a strong connection to the land? How will people know what is sacred and essential to a whole life? It is our relationship to land, in fact, which gives us our highest hope of survival because it is our relationship to land that has developed our highest values: our sense of patience, commitment, generosity, and belief in a story that is larger than ourselves.

Thinking of conservation as the conservation of relationships is a wonderfully innocent and subversive process of rewilding people and the land. Rewilding means restoring to both people and the land a sense of wholeness or connection to one another because it is only through our relationships with the rest of life that we find our capacity to be uniquely ourselves or, in other words, to be untamed, self-willed, or wild.

It is our radical interconnectedness with life that is the source of our capacity to suffer with our world. Take that away from us, and how do you expect us to act?

The last two hundred years of our history are the best proof I can offer that the systematic, cultural tearing of people away from the land has given us many things, but it has not made our culture happier, healthier, or more secure.

So, this is the radical idea: our job as land conservationists is to turn the tide. Our job is to restore meaning to people's lives through a relationship with the land. And, to restore people's ability to relate to the land with care and health in mind.

Everyway we can.

We're not just conserving places, we're conserving human relationships with those places: interdependencies between people and place, between people and one

another, between people and species, between the human world and the more-than-human world.

Let me read you what some others have said about relationship and connection.

From Robert Michael Pyle:

“So it goes, on and on, the extinction of experience sucking the life from the land, the intimacy from our connection. This is how the passing of otherwise common species from our immediate vicinities can be as significant as the total loss of rarities. People who care conserve; people who don’t know don’t care. What is the extinction of the condor to a child who has never known the wren?”

From Matt Cartmill:

“The singular glory of humanity is not our isolation from the order of nature, but our ever-growing comprehension of how we fit into it.”

From Jack Turner:

“Wilderness and wildness is not determined by the absence of people but by the relationships between people and place.

Everything we do, every tool we use should focus on both the land and on understanding and conserving the relationships and meaning of that place to people. What does this look like?

It’s as simple initially as asking ourselves in every project, how can this individual piece of land contribute to a land ethic? What relationships are we trying to conserve on this land? What do we hope to learn from our own relationship to this place? What are the stories from this place that we want to bring to our community? What does this place say about us? (slide of place and relationships). What does this place teach us?

Let me tell you two more stories that helped me to understand how the radical center of land conservation is all about relationship.

Henry David Thoreau penned his now famous line: “In wildness is the preservation of the world” while living in decidedly suburban digs. True it was a cabin of less than 100 square feet built at a cost of only \$28.00 but what few remember is that Walden was no wilderness. When Henry lived there, he could easily hear five times a day the whistle of the commuter train that passed within a quarter mile of his cabin. And a good meal and a place to wash his laundry was less than a mile away in town.

It’s important to understand this, to credit Henry for writing something about wildness so powerfully symbolic and moving in a place that was hardly wild. The point being that Henry found wildness there in himself, and in his deep attachment and love for the place. Henry’s relationship with that pond enabled him to become more self-willed, or wild.

And it’s a good thing because the man and the book have made a huge difference. In one of history’s great connections, Gandhi drew his inspiration for much of his thinking while in jail in 1908 reading the story of another jailed dissenter, one Henry David Thoreau.

So, a rather average pond in Eastern Massachusetts inspired at least one man, and that one man went on to inspire the world. People now flock to Walden Pond not because it is or ever was a wild place, but because of the relationship between that man and his pond and what that relationship led to. TPL and I spent five years working on the effort to protect Walden Pond and the lesson that is most memorable is this: Every community has a Walden Pond because all Walden ever was was a simple place that inspired a single individual. It’s the relationship between the person and his or her geography that continues to inspire people.

There’s many examples of this: John Muir’s relationship with the Sierra high Country, [Marty and Olaus Murie](#)’s relationship with the Brooks range, Harlan and Anna Hubbard’s relationship with the Ohio River, Aldo Leopold’s relationship with Sand County, Helen and Scott Nearings’ relationship with their homesteads in Vermont and Maine. There’s something deeply inspiring to us whenever people

develop a relationship with the land that leads them to change their own lives; There's something there that many of us yearn for.

I think immediately of Helen and Scott Nearing and their forest farm, which sustained them almost entirely for the last forty years of their lives. The nutrients that gave life to their passions came from the soils, the nature, that they mixed with their hands. They were literally *of that place*. Helen and Scott's life work launched both the organic farming movement and the land trust movement.

The writer Pearl Buck honored Helen and Scott when she said: "The best thing the Nearings gave us is the practical proof that in our country and our age an individual can still create his or her own life" Of all of the Nearing achievements, the ability to help us carve out a unique life in the face of modern homogenization may, indeed, be the most important lesson they left us. And that they did so with such personal commitment to the land makes many of us hungry for the story of that relationship.

One summer several years ago, I was at Forest Farm when an old station wagon pulled into the farm with Indiana plates and an overheating radiator. A middle-aged man got out and walked around to the back of the car and, with great effort, took out a very large rock and walked with it fifty feet to the garden wall where he felt it. He had traveled a thousand miles to see and walk on the land that had inspired Helen and Scott. Later, after my Indiana friend had left, I saw that he had inscribed a single line on the stone which now read: "Born originals, how comes it to pass that so many of us die copies?"

What common elements are shared by all of these stories? What ties them together? What are the pieces we might look for in your own project? Let me offer three ideas:

These conservation projects all did the following:

- 1) Helped people to see the world differently, to dwell and imagine their lives differently.
- 2) Confronted mainstream culture with a different story about what life was meant to be.

- 3) Offered people the example of a healthy relationship, a more meaningful connection, with the rest of life.

How do we do more projects that help people to see the world differently?

How do we do more conservation projects that help people to feel meaningfully connected to the rest of life?

Let me share with you what TPL has come to identify as the ten benefits of its mission. We have now begun the long process of working with fellow conservationists, and sociologists, and many others to understand how we might better measure our conservation effectiveness based on these benefits. And, most importantly, I hope it is now abundantly clear how we are extending the philosophy of conservation biology to include the habitat needs of people. Think of this as steps toward a conservation biology for people.

Ten Benefits of Land Conservation according to TPL:

1. ***A safe and healthy world***: maintaining broad environmental health, air and water quality, hazard prevention, biological diversity, and land remediation.
2. ***A sense of belonging***: fostering a cultural, historical and spiritual relationship with the land
3. ***A sense of human joy***
4. ***Individual human health***: recreation, bike paths, hiking
5. ***Increasing the human experience of nature***: providing places for experiencing inspiration, beauty, humility, connection
6. ***Learning***: providing opportunities for the study and understanding of the earth sciences, biological sciences, environmental education
7. ***A process of civic engagement***: changing power structures, bringing people together, getting people out of their private lives
8. ***Fostering multi-cultural interactions in public places***: bringing diverse people together to experience one another and the natural world.
9. ***A sense of responsibility beyond oneself and one's place***: taking responsibility for the whole landscape, from inner city to wilderness, fosters bioregionalism and understanding the connection between the city and the wild

10. Positive community economics

If we can lead with these ten principles in mind, this is what we will achieve:

We will protect what people love. Conservation will highlight people's shared values and local passion for what they know and love because this brings people together and helps people to be less fearful of one another. By protecting what people love, we will offer a positive vision of the world we want to live in.

We will make clearer that healthy land is healthy people. Conservation is about economic, mental, physical, and spiritual well being. It's about healing ourselves and other life. Through this view of life as one healthy whole, restoration of land and oneself becomes the same.

We will show how conservation Strives for fairness. Conservation's impact becomes more profound as it serves all people, regardless of income, color, or where one lives. Everyone needs and deserves a relationship with the land.

We will show that Conservation honors home. By focusing on where people live, work and play, conservation protects the places that enable us to think about who we are and where we belong. It roots us, and helps us to better value and appreciate the places immediately around us. The work of local conservation provides the daily reminders that what we do to the land we do to ourselves.

Conclusion:

Fifty years ago, Aldo Leopold wrote "there are two things that interest me: the relationship of people to each other, and the relationship of people to the land." What's vitally important about this statement is that Leopold was thinking deeply about **BOTH** people and the land. He was part biologist and part sociologist. He cared deeply about both the land and the people. He never separated them. He understood the nutrient cycles of the soil and the integrated, wholistic nature of life. And he knew that people need a natural habitat in order to maintain healthy bodies, hearts and souls. Leopold saw the health of people and the health of the land as inextricably linked in a dance of hope and sorrow.

There's no time left this morning to talk sufficiently about this relationship between people and the land except to make two points. First, to acknowledge the truth that everyone does have a relationship to the land; it's just that many of these relationships are disastrous in that they benefit one party (the human) over everything else. Second, to offer the mutual health of land and people as the yardstick to evaluate the quality of the relationship.

And why talk about this relationship at all? Wouldn't it be easier and better, many say, if people just left nature alone? Much of nature does need to be completely self-willed, but to do that we must carry *all of nature* in our hearts and minds. Remember what Robert Michael Pyle said, "People who care conserve; people who don't know, don't care."

There's a world out there that both *doesn't know and doesn't care*. And the result is a stunted people in an ailing land. Our life work in conservation can make people whole by connecting them responsibly to a place and to a bigger story than themselves. This asks that we engender knowledge as well as affection, and let's never forget love's result: compassion, commitment, and empathy. Our love of land becomes wildness inside of us, saving us and saving the land.

And it *does* require a dance of hope and sorrow: confronting, as much as we can tolerate, those relationships with the earth that bring us sorrow and fear. The poet Barbara Deming reminds us "our own pulse beats in every stranger's throat." If this is true, it brings me great hope because humans, at our core, are more tuned to relationship than to isolation. We are more nourished by meaning and joy and love than we are by greed, addiction, and competitiveness.

The stories of the good relationships with the land resonate with all humans more loudly, more courageously, and more joyfully than anything else we conservationists could ever legislate, negotiate or protect.

A relationship to the land is the way we free ourselves from this culture of rewards to create another culture of meaning and connection. Land conservation can be the way we translate the soul of the land into the soul of our culture.

Thank you for being here this morning.

