

WHAT IS A WHOLE COMMUNITY?

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A LETTER TO THOSE WHO CARE FOR
AND RESTORE THE LAND

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Center for Whole Communities
Fayston, Vermont

A TRIBUTE

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To Julian Agyeman, Carl Anthony, Majora Carter,
Carolyn Finney, John Francis, Wendy Johnson, Van Jones,
Bill Jordan, Patty Limerick, Gil Livingston, Curt Meine,
Fred Provenza, Enrique Salmon, Scott Russell Sanders,
Tom Wessels, Courtney White, Helen Whybrow, and all
of our staff, board and alumni who have helped me
to shape these words through their own work.

There is never one voice, and I'm proud to say that my own
voice strongly reflects all of these good people and many
others not named, whose brilliance, wisdom and fearlessness
are the threads of a new movement, a new march toward
whole communities. It's an honor to be walking with you.

Peter Forbes

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PART ONE

A BEGINNING

This is the time of our becoming. As a community of people who care about the land and about our relationship to it, this is a moment of opportunity.

What we care about and what we stand for is powerful medicine for what most ails our planet. Within the land and within acts of restoration and conservation are essential clues for how to live joyfully and responsibly in a world being torn asunder. But our country will never taste what we ourselves are afraid to put on the table. The work of conservation is bigger and more important than our smaller interests in easements, acres, plans, dollars, and tax benefits. What was once a movement guided by passion, vision and values is in the process of being reduced to a technology – even, merely, to a commercial enterprise. The true benefit and skill of land conservationists is our ability to put on the table a feast of values that reminds every American of what is healthy, what is fair opportunity, what is beautiful and meaningful, and what it means to be in relationship.

In this mature place in the history of the land conservation movement, a gap has opened between what we know and what we imagine we can be. Old tools are no longer serving us well, and the challenges we face are complex. We see that there have

been unintended consequences of our work, and we struggle to find a new path. The trail we are on is obscure and confusing. We are caught in the awkward place of demanding changes when we could be inspiring them. In this critical moment, we can easily deceive ourselves by believing that we just haven't been reading the map correctly. Or, we can throw out the old map and look at these challenges as distinguishing opportunities to see beyond the way things are; as a chance to re-invent ourselves.

It will take our greater selves to realize that this moment of becoming asks something entirely different of us. This call is not to do more and to be bigger, but instead to pause long enough to reconsider the very questions that motivate us: Why and for whom do we do our work? Who do we want to be? What is our purpose? Where are we on purpose and off purpose? What keeps us from being more open to the claims of others? Who are our allies and what will it take to join their side? When did we replace wisdom with data and information? What tastes like truth today?

By asking ourselves what matters most and then being courageous enough to find fresh answers based on that truth, we are elevating conservation and restoration from a technology to a life-affirming wisdom. One thing is certain: as things now stand, we cannot possibly restore or conserve all the lands that need our attention or even that meet *our own stated goals*. American conservationists have been enormously successful in protecting land, marshalling the money and skills to pur-

chase more than 14 million acres of land in the last decade. But are Americans any closer to that land or to the values that the land teaches? To what degree have our conservation efforts created a balanced and healthy American culture? Today, the average American can recognize one thousand corporate logos, but can't identify ten plants and animals native to their region. Despite important examples to the contrary, *neither the values of the land nor the creatures of the land are flourishing in America.*

For too long, we conservationists have lived on the moral and spiritual capital of our past. In conserving and restoring our relationship to the land, we must also express our own spirit and a moral voice that knows, and cares, and responds. It's time to seek a fresh perspective on what was said thirty and sixty years ago by heroes like Aldo Leopold and Rachel Carson. What do MaVynne Betsch, John Francis, Miriam MacGillis, Jeanette Armstrong, Vine Deloria and Will Allen ask of us today? Do you know who these heroes are, and will you take the time to find out?

THE CONTEXT FOR CHANGE

The world is changing and conservationists shouldn't be left behind. We are part of a different community today than when the modern land conservation movement was born. The Latino population in America has risen by 58 percent in the last decade; almost 80 percent of Americans now live in

metropolitan areas; wealth has been concentrated to such a degree that the top one percent of the U.S. population now controls one-third of the nation's wealth, creating a dangerous and immoral divide between haves and have-nots. The poverty rate for African Americans and Hispanics is now nearly *three times* as high as that for whites. Meanwhile, the cultural forces against conservation and whole communities have been growing ever more pervasive. Today, our culture builds more malls than high schools, produces more prisoners than farmers, and develops land at the warp speed of 267 acres per hour. These are the everyday realities of American life. As we aspire to speak to more Americans we must understand that they are waiting first for our responses to these truths.

Every conservation organization in America today has both moral and strategic reasons to re-think why and for whom they are doing their work. There is an ethical need to address the concerns of all Americans. A diversity of people are asking conservation organizations to explain how they can control so much land and not look more like the community itself. Paint a mental picture of the full diversity of your community; now paint a mental picture of your land conservation organization. How are they different? What would happen if those pictures were more alike?

Strategically, new constituencies are needed because conservation's traditional bases of support are overwhelmingly white and rapidly aging. And in addition to attracting new support-

ers, conservationists need to make new friends among public health workers, politicians, and housing advocates. Polling data suggests that people of color are often the strongest supporters of conservation measures. For example, the Black Congressional Caucus has the longest, strongest pro-environmental record of any congressional caucus. But how often do their constituents see the benefits of land conservation?

Because of our success and visibility, the bar of citizenship is higher today for land conservationists than ever before. The community legitimately assigns to us responsibilities that go beyond our mission statements. When conservation groups control the development rights on a significant percentage of the land in a state or region, it shouldn't be surprising that the public expects those groups to have ethical positions on housing, growth, wealth and the future. As conservationists, we must make visible the ethics that guide not only *how* we work but *why and for whom*. We must also invest further in an authentic process of grassroots engagement.

Finally, we need to find new approaches to our work simply because no property boundary will ever survive a suffering humanity. We speak of "protecting" land through conservation easements or fee acquisitions but how do these tools "save" land from climate change, acid rain, or a public that simply no longer cares? To be truly meaningful and enduring, the work of conservation must be grounded not just in legal statutes, but in peoples' hearts, minds, and everyday choices.

A VISION FOR CONSERVATION

Many land conservation organizations want to act, and have acted, as more mature public citizens. They have done so by re-defining for themselves what matters most and then leading with those values first. Conservation's real goal is bigger than biological diversity, bigger than smart growth, bigger than urban greening. It's bigger than wilderness designations or food security. It's even bigger than the 14 million acres conserved in the last decade. The real success of land conservation is the power of all of the above to positively re-shape what wealth means in this country. Real success is conservation's ability to re-define for all people their health, their relationships, and their sense of fairness by joining with all of the other groups connected to the land movement – community revitalizers, environmental justice activists, public health advocates, green businesses – to transform communities and culture.

Conservation can play an essential role in creating healthy, whole communities by building more enduring relationships between people and the land. That relationship, as nurtured in our choices about how we eat, live, work and play, is the foundation for a more tolerant, generous and inclusive culture in this country. By collaborating more effectively with others, we can combine core competencies to convert abandoned and polluted city land into parks, urban gardens, and affordable housing. We can encourage farmers' markets and create community-supported agriculture that links rural, suburban and urban populations

and connects people with healthy food and water supplies. We can bear witness to the connections between unjustly distributed urban green space and the growing inequity between the health of white and non-white populations. We can create more lasting social and political support for wilderness. And we can demonstrate health, fairness and good relationship in each and every conservation project that we undertake.

This is the beginning of a shared vision for a practice of land and community restoration that speaks more compellingly to the range of issues confronting our country. Many conservation leaders are beginning to understand that the way to reach this vision is by building authentic bridges among the conservation, social justice, community revitalization, faith, public health and food security sectors.

Many conservation organizations are asking themselves what it means today to be a full participant in their own community. How do they best merge their own interests with the hopes and aspirations of their neighbors, even those who are not "members" of conservation groups? They are searching for the practical tools to make choices between a dollar spent on land acquisition, or a dollar spent on land stewardship, or a dollar spent on public education. What will lead to healthy, whole communities? What is the more successful thing to do? Deep pragmatism emerges from asking ourselves such difficult philosophical questions. Although the answers are never easy, whole communities work can offer new perspectives,

fresh language, and access to one's own most meaningful stories and values that will make the path more clear.

REACHING FOR THE VISION

This is a critical moment to re-define why and for whom land is protected in this country. And the most effective way to do this is to shift the question away from, "How much land can we protect, for how much money?" to a question that inspires, leader by leader, a new approach: "What is a whole community and how do we get there?"

Along the way, there are other critical, difficult questions we will be asked to consider. Are our solutions meeting the scale of the problem? Are we using the right tools? What is the relationship between conservation and democracy?

Our country is a house divided, and those of us who believe in the land, and control land, have our hands on an important tool. There are divides between urban and rural, between rich and poor, black and white, red and blue, and all of these are changing our land and our American culture. What we do can help break down those divides – or make them higher. The historian Howard Zinn reminds us that we can't be neutral on a moving train. Today, if we're not intentionally, explicitly removing barriers then we are probably creating new ones. Those of us who love the land, and have some measure of control over it, must rise to higher standards of fairness, self-awareness, and wisdom than ever before.

The most important way conservationists can begin to heal these divides is by explicitly changing the questions we ask ourselves: Most fundamentally, what are our definitions of success and do they reflect our highest values? To pose this question to oneself and one's organization is to begin a process of re-discovering what matters most. The answers will reveal what is both good and less-good within ourselves and our institutions and will uncover the higher intelligence within both. This wisdom will enable us to do two critical things that the conservation movement desperately needs today: to lead more strongly with our values, and to find practical responses to today's problems.

Answering the question "*what matters most?*" will also help conservationists to regain lost moral ground. Most conservationists who ask themselves this question, and consider it more than just a few times, will respond with answers that reflect fundamental values about health, relationship, and fairness: answers that reflect *why* we do our work, not *how* we do it. And when we speak about the "why" of conservation, we express our sense of morality. And when we express our sense of morality, we begin to speak to many, many more Americans. The rapid growth of the evangelical movement in America is evidence of people's yearning for a moral vision. Those of us who love and care for the land have a moral vision to offer, but we rarely talk of it as such. Instead we talk about acres, dollars, endangered species and ecosystem management plans without explicitly speaking about the moral vision that brought these things into being.

Asking aloud these questions about the “why” of conservation is a critical step in breaking free from ways of thinking that have imprisoned us. Many of our conservation organizations and their leaders are imprisoned by their old definitions of success, by the silos they and funders have put themselves into, by the expectations of their membership, and by the competitiveness that they feel within their professions. And we are all limited by our own imagination of what’s possible.

Our culture at large is also imprisoned by similar forces: a long series of investments, financial and cultural, in ways of life and systems of land use that are less and less sustainable. We are invested in those systems through everything from the mortgages on our homes, to the savings in our retirement accounts, to the way we eat.

The transformative power of conservation is in its ability to help us break free. Despite all the investments in the old system, conservation is capable of creating a transition culture, a fabric of relationships between people and places that can take the place of the old culture that is dying. Making these changes requires the conservation movement to leave the comfort of our past tools and successes and direct our formidable resources toward new ways of thinking. Nothing is harder to do, nor requires more courage. It requires the courage to know we cannot do it alone, the courage to confess our own personal connections to these problems, the courage to talk about the difficult issues of race and privilege, the courage to resist business as usual, and the courage to speak of a different American dream.

PART TWO

SAVING RELATIONSHIPS

Where I write, I surround myself with small images and objects that help my mind and body to remember what it means to be human, to live within story. A print that shouts “Wake Up!,” a wooden spoon, a glass bottle of Kemp’s Balsam for Throat and Lungs, my familiar old cameras, a picture from 1950 of an Inupiat mother saying goodbye to her daughter, an African decanter for liquid, an old set of bows, pictures of people and places that I love, a clay figurine of a storyteller.

My desire to keep these objects close to me is a complicated matter. My appreciation of their beauty and form can overwhelm their more profound purpose in my life, which is to pull me toward my most authentic self. Sometimes I think about this old farmhouse burning, and all the writings, pictures, and objects of my lifetime returning to elemental dust. Perhaps this would be okay in the end, because it would help me to see that the meaning and purpose of these things – my relationship to them – is far more important than the objects themselves. I have come to see that “saving” anything, though it can come from the most altruistic motivation, such as saving for my children, reflects my privileged position in the world and begs me to ask myself: what am I saving this for? This desire to preserve, save, protect is a uniquely human artifice for trying to keep things the same, a defense against answering the complex and difficult question of our relation-

ship to life, and to death. Though completely understandable, the desire never to die keeps many of us from truly living.

To live is to navigate relationships, dependencies between humans and the rest of all life. It is through our stories of how we navigate these relationships that we find wisdom, meaning, and release from the fear of death. In my wiser moments when I understand these cycles of life, as when I witness them first-hand on our farm and in our woods, I am less interested in saving and more interested in living.

The problem I am never far away from is how we make the intellectual and physical shift from *saving* to *living*. How do we reconceive our lives from being about possessions to being about relationships? Even within my own beloved conservation movement, how do we make the shift from preserving places to nurturing relationships?

Much of what I most desire and yearn for in life is about relationship, and I don't mean simply the love of another human being. I desire to produce healthy food for my neighbors now and in times of crisis. I desire a culture where city children know the difference between a starling and a sparrow and were taught the difference by their kin. I want an earth where salmon can still return up rivers to spawn and where bear and eagle feed and then leave that salmon to fertilize ancient spruce trees. I want an earth where sea turtles still return to land to give birth, and where maple sap is turned into syrup, and bees

turn pollen into honey, and people understand and live with these native ways. These are ways of life that are best preserved by living them. And people – or creatures – who are living these ways of life don't think of their lives as possessions to be saved, but as a lineage of gifts to be passed forward in time. You can't put these experiences in a box and sell them, nor can you accurately describe them in the legal language of legislation or of a conservation easement. And yet, they are the experiences that define what it means to be human, or salmon, or bear. They must be lived to be felt.

Our desire to save any single place or object limits our vision as conservationists and makes it hard for us to see these experiences, connections, and relationships – though very likely they are what define the place or object we care about. Failing to see connections and relationships limits us to inadequate solutions. It defeats our capacity to see the whole story and to respond in a way that speaks to our full humanity.

For example, I am concerned that we are “saving” thousands of very beautiful and important miles of Maine coastline that will very likely end up under water because of global climate change. Because I love and am defined by parts of that coastline, I yearn for a more complete response, something that says, “We do this work of conserving land not just because it is our answer to the problem but because it is the most we currently know how to do. And our love of this land and its people calls upon us to stretch and find within ourselves a

deeper and more powerful response to today’s threats upon this place.”

I am concerned when conservation groups talk about “saving” land from developers in Georgia when that land was stolen earlier from black family farmers. I am concerned when we “save” places in Montana to become rock climbing sites, while not honoring thousand-year-old Native American relationships with those places. I am concerned, as a farmer, about all farmland preservation efforts that don’t also address the needs of the larger community of life. I am concerned that some conservationists willfully accept Wal-Mart’s donation of money to wilderness preservation efforts but turn their backs on the effects of that corporation on our communities and local landscapes. I am deeply wary of all efforts that promote an object of desire, a special interest, as if success could ever come to one and not at the expense of others.

While consequences as those I’ve described may be unintended, do we accept them as inevitable? When we do, they render our work for land and people incomplete and unstable. Saving land while losing human understanding of the land, what lives there, why it needs to be part of our lives, what it has meant throughout history, is to create conflict. But working in a manner that honors connections and relationships as much as place is to repair and to make whole again, to foster peace.

WHAT DOES WHOLENESS TASTE LIKE?

To be whole again is to know what nourishes our families. It is to measure wealth not by the size of our bank accounts but by the stories we can tell about the places and people in our lives. To be whole again is to be proud to serve one another, to trust and be trusted, and to find the deep satisfactions of life that arise from diverse community.

To be whole again is to understand how biodiversity gives all of us a model of uniqueness rather than sameness.

To be whole again is to be truly safe, not by the protection that comes from police and burglar alarms and our memberships, but through the well being that arises when we no longer eat so heartily in front of those who are hungry.

To be whole again is to understand that love and enjoyment of land and community is as delightful as the pursuit of money, and that this joyful way of life can be available to every person no matter if they live in southcentral Los Angeles or Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

To conserve and restore land, while simultaneously admitting past errors, while acknowledging that our successes arise from someone else’s losses, and while gracefully accepting that the very best of our work is insufficient, is the first step in making our work whole again.

To be whole again is to rebuild our organizations into models that lead with their vision and values first, that have strong core competencies and yet also the humility and stability to collaborate deeply with groups very different from themselves.

BREAKING THE SPELL

If these ideas resonate with you but don't reflect the world you live in, then what is the spell we have fallen under to create the world we *do* live in?

The spell is woven into the 30,000 advertisements that reach our children each year, and it turns our hearts away from the land and away from one another. This spell says that the earth is a warehouse for our use, that nature is inexhaustible, that we have rights to exploit it but no obligations in return, and that nothing has value that can't be converted into money. This spell whispers to us hourly that the point of trees is board feet, the point of farms is money, and the point of people is to be consumers. It tricks us into believing that the only person who matters is me, and that my legitimate hunger for love, belonging, and esteem can be met through buying things.

This spell has fattened the pocketbooks and lengthened the lives of some while impoverishing and endangering the health of others, including future generations of children. It has also created a pathology of disconnection and alienation. Twenty-

five percent of all Americans now experience serious clinical depression during their lifetime, despite a higher "quality of life" than ever before. And if your family income is over \$150,000 a year, your chance of experiencing anxiety and depression is even higher.

Under the spell, our sense of personal identity – who we are and what we want to become – shifts from a focus on land, community and relationship to a focus on commodities, individual interests, and the size of our wallets. One of the largest landowners in Maine, the owner of a forest products company and a pillar of the business community, told me recently, "When the market is king, the land is toast. And when the land is toast our communities dissolve. When our communities dissolve, what's the point of doing business?"

I ask you: is this progress or is this extinction? How can we carry on the American experiment under these terms?

What's been called an "environmental crisis" is not only an external crisis about land and water and biodiversity. It is equally an internal crisis about our hearts and our diminished selves: our greed, our disconnection and isolation, our lack of imagination.

Dr. Martin Luther King said, "We need a stone of hope among these mountains of despair." A stone of hope is *our work* to repair and re-make ourselves whole by offering others the chance to reconnect with a whole and healthy world.

Ecologist Robert Michael Pyle coined the phrase “extinction of human experience” in his important book *The Thunder Tree*. He writes:

“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?”

The extinction of the condor is the slow, unspoken diminishment of ourselves. It is the damage that occurs when a part of our own capacity to think, feel and understand is lost because the world around us – the world that shapes us – is also lost. We lose the condor and we lose a part of ourselves. We lose some of our capacity to be in relationship with anything other than ourselves. And the child who doesn’t know the wren is the child who is afraid of walking to school, who has already begun to feel boundaries surround her.

The diversity in our lives teaches us social skills. As there is less and less diversity of all kinds in our experience, we lose the natural ways to learn how to behave in the world. And because fewer and fewer of us know how to behave and trust that others will know how to behave, we put up harder and harder boundaries

between ourselves, and between ourselves and the rest of creation. Eventually, we show both our love and our fear by what we fence out.

Here’s the evidence of our broken hearts: today, 42 percent of the private land in America is posted *No Trespassing*. And nearly 80 percent of land “protected” by private conservation organizations is posted *No Trespassing*.

The landscape around Walden Pond, the land and water that inspired Thoreau to write so effectively about the fate of humankind, has been trampled for generations and now human access is restricted to a narrow path around the water’s edge and five strands of steel wire on each side to keep you there. There’s great irony in this story: Thoreau wrote there about civil disobedience and wild nature, and 150 years later his trail around Walden is a cage. My guess is that Thoreau would have predicted this future condition of people and the land, but I also struggle knowing how hard it is under such conditions for new Thoreaus, whom we need *right now*, to emerge and challenge and guide us.

This motivation to “save” the land from people arises from our repeated experience of people doing bad things and because the non-human world is rapidly diminishing as a result. Not everything should be for human benefit and consumption simply because the human appetite is insatiable. But how do you curb the American appetite so that it’s no longer perceived

of as a threat? Can we really change people's behavior simply by demanding it? I don't think so. I think we can change behavior only by inspiring that change; by offering people a taste of a positive alternative.

Where can we expect Americans to look for clues and inspiration for what's most meaningful about living?

New experiences of land, community and politics have forged in me a complex response. I have seen first-hand in my own community, and across America, how places and diversity of life endure best when cared for by humans in their daily lives, and that human ways of life are best nurtured not by preserving them, but living them. As a nation and as a movement, we've spent too much time separating people and the land and precious little time being in dialogue about what defines a healthy relationship between the two. Perhaps if we focused on the dialogue, we wouldn't need quite so many *No Trespassing* signs.

The economic, social and environmental structures we create for ourselves give us the social clues to be our better selves or our worse selves. And this is the extraordinary power of land conservation: to help create healthy people and whole communities. Conservation and restoration put into our everyday lives the social clues for how to live differently. Conservation can help us to be our better selves, and to foster a culture of respect, forbearance, tolerance and peace.

Land is soil, of course, but it is also soul. Relationship to land, therefore, is deeply connected to our sense of patriotism, citizenship, egalitarianism and fairness, and our sense of limits. The walk toward whole communities sees the conservation of land as a cultural act to sustain our democratic traditions, to help people become native to a place, to nurture respect and forbearance, independence, and the source of our sustenance.

The soul of our country is born from those choices around our relationship to land and to one another. And that relationship can be good, bad or plain ugly. It's good when the relationship is about respect, joy and limitations. It's bad when it shows us stealing from our children for ourselves, and it's ugly when it alienates anyone from their rights as humans.

To struggle for a healthy relationship with the land through how we live, what we eat, and whom we welcome to our table is transformational because it ultimately *is* about love and healing. It's about relationship. And most people get this, without having to know all the science, because humans, at our core, are more tuned to relationship than to isolation.

If we focus on both the human heart *and* our laws, we'll find that the power of the heart is much more effective than our laws have ever been. History shows that this is the way large-scale social change has always happened. New civil rights laws in 1964 helped to prepare the ground for civil rights achievements, but what really sparked change was the American

hearts set afire by images such as Bull Connor using his water cannon; Rosa Parks being arrested; and Norman Rockwell's painting *The Problem We All Live With* of the little black girl entering an newly integrated school.

We forget that the Clean Air Act was signed into law in 1963 and the Wilderness and Civil Rights Acts in 1964. There were strong political, social, and intellectual connections between these two Acts of Congress. Neither is whole without the other, neither will survive without the other.

I feel called to help people and creatures to live their own unique lives. I used to name this conservation. Today, I think of this as nurturing and restoring whole communities. There is much that I deeply love about our world and find worthy of protection, and yet I no longer see myself as "saving" anything; I see myself working for change. I am *for* relationship between people and the land and for equity and fairness toward all lives, starting with our own human lives. The root meaning of healing is to make whole. I want to do my part to make whole the land and the people.

PART THREE

WALKING TOWARD WHOLE COMMUNITIES

The night sky was clear and quiet and we could see the full outline of the moon emerging over the Northfield range, its crescent ablaze. The air was still warm from the late August day but it was quickly giving way to the coolness of the thick pasture grass and the fog forming in the valley. A flock of geese passed 200 feet above us, heading south. The night was a deep cobalt and the mountains were flattened into thin lines of green. Mars and Venus were the other promising lights in the sky and beneath these planets sat twenty individuals in a circle, blankets over their laps and shoulders, a few lanterns placed in the middle to show their faces. There were voices, and laughter, and times of prolonged silence, as if it were better to let the night speak for us.

Sitting together at Knoll Farm were the directors of seven different conservation organizations, a community development officer, the head of a city-wide urban gardening association, the chief operating officer of a national conservation organization, a council member from a western tribal government, an Episcopal minister, the director of a farming-based job corps center for people of color, a program officer of a regional foundation, a vegetable farmer, a Buddhist teacher, a developer, the deputy director of a state natural resource agency, a college professor, a state legislator, and a rancher.

We were learning to speak to one another in the moonlight. After years of practice as warriors waging battles in the sun, we are reminded by the moonlight of places within us that are older and wiser. At Knoll Farm sunlight makes the gardens grow that feed us, the forests grow that warm us, and it powers us, but it is the more contemplative moonlight that focuses all of that energy into human meaning and intention. Sunlight may be *how* we live, but moonlight is *why* we live.

In this place of reflection and wisdom, no one is less strong, less competent, or less focused on results, but the attention shifts from us to others and from our strategies and tactics to an exploration of values. As we shift from daylight to moonlight, we see how much our strategies and tactics have divided us and how much our values can hold us together. We need leaders who have walked in the sun, but who can now lead us through the moonlight.

Within this group that evening were many of the divides of our nation, manifested in the eyes and faces of individuals. What these individuals found was that to care is not Republican or Democrat, black or white, conservative or radical. To care is simply human.

A new model of conservation is taking hold across the country that is intentionally and successfully bridging divides by showing that people, land and community matter most. This effort to honor land and people treats relationship as important as

place, inspires action rather than demands it, and is linked by values rather than divided by strategies and geography. This endeavor speaks to urban and rural people and asks them alike, what is a whole community and how do we get there?

It doesn't matter if you call this work "finding the radical center" as they do in the West or "building whole communities" as we do in the East. We're inspired by different circumstances but held together by common principles:

- Whole thinking: the commitment to look freshly at problems and to think and act with the whole system in mind
- Relationship is as important as place
- Commitment to grappling with issues of race, power and privilege, and understanding our personal connection to these issues
- Redefining success: commitment to finding shared meaning and values and new definitions of success as a source for deep collaboration
- Telling our stories and inspiring action, not demanding it

Whole thinkers are Russ Libby in Maine, sustaining a land-based culture of farming, gardening and democratic tradition; and Majora Carter in South Bronx working for economic

opportunity, fairness and a relationship to land for her community. They are Courtney White in the Four Corners region building a new coalition of ranchers committed to land health; Carl Anthony in New York contributing to a new story in America about race and place; Scott Boettger in Sun Valley asking how land conservation can serve a greater diversity of people and social needs; Will and Erika Allen in the Midwest connecting city residents to healthy food and the power of growing it themselves; Diane Snyder in the Northwest making the connection between fishing, water, jobs and community life; Fred Provenza in Colorado teaching us the relationship between mythology, cosmology, soil and social order; Gary Nabhan helping the people of the Southwest to feel again the healthy relationship between food and land; Maya Wiley in the East applying whole thinking to the social structures that divide people from the land and from each other. Together they are a braided river, a confluence of many different ways into a common journey, a new community of activists, all flowing toward whole communities.

People who share these approaches have very little tolerance for the divisiveness of labels. It is not unusual within this community to find a person who believes in the sanctity of God and the sacredness of earth, and who doesn't need the distraction of wondering why an evangelist would want to be an environmentalist. These are public health officials working on healthy natural habitat for humans, ranchers changing age-old practices to work for the total health of their land, human

rights activists seeking land as a source of healing, housing advocates and conservationists working on the same agenda. They are people of color who are all of the above but also people who are tired of educating others and trying to build a new place for themselves on the land and in history. And they are white people who recognize the flaws in their own personal story of place, race and privilege and are trying to reconcile those flaws with the good work they are trying to do.

For many of these individuals, their work started with a personal inquiry: Where is home? How can I serve? What is most authentic within myself? They recognized, in a moment of great self-awareness, that in the past their efforts on behalf of the land may have asked others to do things they or their organizations were unable and/or unwilling to do themselves. Van Jones, executive director of the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights in Oakland, California, said in 2006, "People who want to change society have a double duty. We have to be able to confront the warmonger within and without, the punitive incarcerator within and without. . . . We have to really look at how we are combative, punitive, self-destructive, greedy. We're passionate about changing that in the external world even as we enact it in our internal world and in our relationships with each other." Vaclav Havel, the poet-president of Czechoslovakia, said equally clearly, "If there is to be any chance at all of success, there is only one way to strive for decency, reason, responsibility, sincerity, civility and tolerance, and that is decently, reasonably, responsibly, sincerely, civilly and tolerantly."

If we are willing to look honestly at ourselves, and to acknowledge with compassion the daily struggle to make seamless our deed and creed, then we have opened the door to see the world with fresh eyes and to re-think our allies and our opposition. It is our imperfections, not our perfections, that give us the insight and the pathways to connect with others and to make real for them our humanity, hopes and dreams. Similarly, it is our relationships, not just our accomplishments, that create change in the world. Wendell Berry recently wrote in *The Way of Ignorance*, “mere opposition finally blinds us to the good of the things we are trying to save. And it divides us hopelessly from our opponents, who are no doubt caricaturing us while we are demonizing them. We lose, in short, the sense of shared humanity that would permit us to say even to our worst enemies, ‘We are working after all in your interest and your children’s. Ours is a common effort for a common good. Come and join us.’”

WHOLE THINKING

Nothing has helped me more to understand whole systems thinking, or “whole thinking,” than my own family’s efforts to grow food and fiber for ourselves and our neighbors. The sign along the road says that we sell blueberries, eggs and lamb, but I’ve come to understand that what we really do is grow great quantities of grass. And this grass, rich in energy from the sun, completes its nutrient cycle and is decomposed back into the soil through the lives of our sheep. It’s the sun and grass

and soil that become the quality meat and wool that we sell. Sheep are our tools for turning sun, grass and healthy soil into our sustenance. If I were confused into thinking that wool and lamb were our goals, it would be possible for us to treat them as commodities and make great mistakes. For example, it wouldn’t matter if our soil was poor in one place because we could just move the sheep to another field. And it wouldn’t matter if all the pasture was over-grazed because we could feed the sheep grain. We could easily farm this way, but pretty soon our accounts would be deep in debt and our land would be played out. When we think like an ecosystem – that it to say in wholes – we’ll very likely succeed, and if we think in terms of commodities, we’ll very likely fail. If we focus on the health of the soil, the water, and the grass, almost anything is possible for us for an unlimited period of time. This feels like true wealth.

But farming this way requires knowledge and a self-awareness that’s hard to come by and not taught in many schools. First, we must ask ourselves, “What is our vision for our land and our lives?” Second, we have to understand how sun, water, and soil fit together to create wealth, and be willing to change our tools at any moment to achieve the wealth we seek. Lastly, we must be prepared on a daily basis to admit and face our errors.

Going from the small to the big helps people see the connections and relationships between things. And by grasping those connections, we find the possibility of new ways of describing

the values we place on land. When viewed in its parts – the biota and hydraulic functions – the importance of soil can be lost even to well-intentioned people. But viewed through whole thinking, we begin to see soil for what it is: the foundation of our cultural house. When one absorbs this powerful map of interconnected relationships, one cannot miss the idea that the connections between things are as important as the things being connected. And from this awareness comes the hallmark of the new land movement, that conservation is about restoring healthy relationships – human and nonhuman – to create a community that is a healthy whole.

How would the conservation movement, or any aspect of environmentalism today, be different if its actions were guided daily by the same three questions: “What is our vision for a healthy world? What role do we play in the larger effort to create whole communities? What are the unintended consequences of our endeavors?”

This is whole thinking. It’s the explicit effort to have our activism think and act like an ecosystem. Whole thinking is the commitment to re-think problems in the context of the larger systems in which they exist, and to see the sum of the parts. This act of seeing things freshly helps us to recognize where our actions over years may have created deep grooves that are now hard to climb out of. Every person and every organization has these grooves; in the best cases they’ve become our core competencies but in many other cases they are the cultures and practices that make us tired, tiresome, self-serving, and brittle.

When people and organizations practice whole thinking, they refocus first on their vision for the future. In examining the big picture and our role in it, our attention shifts naturally from *how* we do our work to *why* we do it. And when we focus our attention on the values we hold for the world, we see our tools in a more critical light, we realize the time of the lone wolf is over, and we recognize that our success is dependent on the success of others.

Whole thinking helps us to see clearly how divides have been unintentionally created and promoted. The modern environmental movement has self-organized, with the help of funders, business schools, and corporate role models, into specialists working on narrowly-defined problems, with few who are able to see root causes or are rewarded for speaking about them. This hyper-specialization within organizations working for the earth is the reason for many of our successes *and* why we are so easily criticized as representing the special interests of a narrow few. We have organizations that focus on wilderness, food security, endangered species, oceans, birds, turtles, community development, forests, historic preservation, clean water, social justice, and urban greening – as if any of these attributes could stand alone and succeed. The presence of each organization doing its own thing, making its own arguments to its own audiences, is why we collectively have not been able today to offer a compelling story for how to be an American.

It is also why our movement has a much greater emphasis on strategies and tactics than on vision and values. The former are perceived as “hard” and the latter are perceived as “soft.” But without both in equal measure our movement can never fly. We need clear strategies and tactics, but they are a source of fragmentation and deep divides if they don’t rest on a foundation of shared meaning and purpose. Whole thinking requires people and organizations to start each day not with a “to do” list but with a “why and for whom” list. In a world filled with action goals, strategic plans, and mission delivery systems, I ask, What do you dream about and long for? What is your vision for the future of our children? Who needs to be next to you? Why should I follow you?

Whole thinking sees the needs for specialization, but only in the presence of deep collaboration. In a healthy ecosystem, each species has its own specialized niche but is also dependent on the actions and successes of many others. To practice whole thinking would mean honoring the core competencies and strategies of different organizations while simultaneously creating the forums for understanding shared values; regularly speaking our vision for the future; finding the language and story that reflects our common vision; tossing out old tools and picking up new ones even if they’re not our own; sharing budgets when necessary to achieve this; recognizing and speaking aloud past mistakes and injustices.

Whole thinking is putting the fragmented pieces back together again. It means working the contradictions and holding the tensions that will inevitably arise in the reunion. It means listening to the truths of others and being inclusive enough to see that our strength comes not from the hardness of our positions, but from our ability to see across the divide to recognize allies.

Whole thinking is struggling to see the big picture and to put that picture back into the context of our everyday, smaller decisions. In applying whole thinking to land conservation, the first question becomes, *For whom and for what ends are we conserving this land?* Is the land itself the end goal, like a bag of oranges that can be weighed and sold for a set price, or is our intent in conservation something much greater and more powerful, though difficult to state in words?

RELATIONSHIP IS AS IMPORTANT AS PLACE

Those concerned with the fate of the land have access to one of culture’s most powerful symbols. Its strength is transcendent and universal, and it has earned its place in our imaginations through thousands of years of adaptation. Every child today can still recognize this symbol and speak something of its meaning. The symbol is of our positive human relationship with the land, and it is represented in the small family farmer, in the urban gardener, in the homesteader, in the cowboy, in the field biologist, in Harlan and Anna Hubbard, in Rachel Carson, in Mardy Murie, in Terry Tempest

Williams, in Scott and Helen Nearing, and in MaVynee Betsch.

What gives this symbol power is the relationship, the bond, between the human and the place. It's that bond which stirs our imagination and which we recognize as valuable beyond words. What makes this symbol endure in our minds is that it brings together and makes whole two epic human choices: to serve ourselves and to serve the larger community.

It's not hard to see how these forces must be balanced, and also to see how the symbol has been broken apart. One segment of our culture has fully adopted the rugged individualist as their symbol, and now demands all their rights to the land with no responsibilities. Another segment of our culture has adopted the symbol of pristine wilderness, and seeks to put up a wall that keeps people and their greed away from the land. Neither response is whole. We need the land to earn a living, yes, but we also need the land to earn a life, a human life made full and complete through being in relationship with the more than human.

We might be able to fence people out, but we cannot fence out the effects of people. It follows, then, that we can't save land through our separation from it, but only through our integration and our sense of belonging *to* it. We have not served the land well by assuming that conservation is more a legal act than a cultural act. By that I mean, assuming we can protect land *from* people through laws as opposed to *with* people

through relationships. Laws exist for times when relationships fail. Our laws protect land *from* us when we are at our worst rather than keep us together when we are at our best. And because so many of our relationships have failed, many have exchanged their faith in the notion of relationship for answers within the legal system.

What happens when people and communities lose that relationship with the land? Do the values stay? Do laws protect what's already left the heart? I think not. And that's the great misunderstanding of the conservation movement. Laws cannot protect what's already left the heart.

To those who have devoted their lives to saving wildness and other species of life, whole thinking asks them to consider how their work will endure the demands of an injured human species. Is it possible to save the gorillas of the Eastern Congo without addressing the social and economic needs of the nations living with and around these gorillas? Is it possible to protect the life of sea turtles without making whole the people of the Sea of Cortes? At the same time, is it possible to affirm human life without also protecting other species and the entire web on which we depend?

I recently heard Fred Provenza, a highly respected range scientist, remind his audience of ranchers that managing land for any one species will always result in a worse outcome for that species, as well as for many others. Managing a forest for mule

deer will end up being destructive for the mule deer. Managing a diverse forest to produce white pine will ultimately lead to the instability of white pine. Managing a landscape or a planet for the benefit of people will just as assuredly lead to the destruction of people. The healthiest thing we can ever do is to try our best to manage and act for the whole. Managing and acting for the whole entails nurturing the relationships between things.

For many of us, this is just too great a proposition to consider until we apply it in a simple and straightforward way to our homes, to our organizations, to the lands we care for.

When our family first came to Knoll Farm and took responsibility for caring for its pastures and forest, we understood our responsibility to be “protecting” this land from many outside forces. A conservation easement had already been put on the land to keep it from being further developed with houses, but there were threats from a rapidly growing suburban community, from acid rain, from climate change, and from our own ignorance. An encounter with a large black bear on the very first summer living here made me re-think my own boundaries. This beautiful creature had come to feed in the orchards but her home was likely miles away. Watching her walk gracefully through our fields made me vow to help her remain healthy on this land, and I knew that her domain was much larger than mine. We pondered for many days about what we could do to help that bear flourish on these lands, and the answer we arrived at was to do our part to help

the people of this community to feel at peace and at home with the bear. This goal led us to take down all the *No Trespassing* signs on and around our land and to invite people in, because a community that does not know can not care. We have encouraged biologists, wild foragers, hunters, and hikers to know this land because their knowledge is a form of love, and the bear needs our love. We bring members of our own community and of far-flung communities to this farm to eat of her harvests, to have fun and to learn, and to connect with her beauty because they always see something different in themselves as a result. And because loving this land helps them to love their own homes better.

Our goal in doing all of these things is to help our family and others who come here to reach their own potential. When we see our own lives as full and respected, we realize the imperative to offer the same to all other creatures. This is an act of spirit, not an act of law. It reminds us that we will never succeed in saving biodiversity a moment before we succeed in healing ourselves and our relationships to other humans.

WHOLE LANGUAGE

With relationships in mind, our language changes quickly for the better. First, we realize how strange and even humorous our selection of words has become over the years. For example, environmentalists use a word like *sustainable* to reflect our highest aspirations, but in terms of relationship it quite

clearly means the lowest bearable standard. For example, would calling your marriage *sustainable* be a positive and inspiring description? When we view our work in terms of building relationships, we instead choose words like health, fairness, joy, resilience, and respect.

In keeping relationship in mind, we would shy away from *saving or preserving* because we're not trying to pickle anything or anyone. We would use instead words like *nurturing and cultivating*. And all the words associated with restoration: renew, heal, revive. The one I like the most is *repair*. We re-pair the land by bringing ourselves whole again with it.

When thinking in terms of relationships, one notices how much conservation is conflicted with the notion of time and change. In the past, the story and language of conservation often attempts to freeze our human relationship with the land into one particular moment or aspiration and then keep it there forever. For example, much of the legal language of conservation revolves around perpetuity, or the notion of a law lasting forever. Conservation easements are said *to exist in perpetuity*. Yet many land trusts are now discovering that easements put in place twenty years before can become obstacles to dense settlement patterns that would foster a healthier use of land. How can one solution, even thoughtfully conceived today, address our relationships in the future? Viewed through the lens of relationship, conservation easements are similar to long-winded pre-nuptial agreements that attempt to stipulate

and direct future courses of the marriage, but end up thwarting the dialogue and mature love upon which a healthy enduring marriage survives. How would these easements be different if they specifically embraced change, and if they shifted their emphasis from prohibiting uses to maintaining a dialogue about the values and behaviors that must characterize our relationships to the land into the future?

Change is constant, positive and necessary. Ecosystem health requires constant change. People need the opportunity to change, and certainly all of our relationships must change if they are to endure. Wholeness implies the ability of a system to embrace and adapt to change. We must seek out new structures in our legal systems, in our language, and in our communities that acknowledge and promote progress – therefore change – for the relationships between people and the land. Conservation would be more aligned with the universe, not to mention movements for social progress, if it would acknowledge change positively and embrace the values, people and places that conservation aspires to bring into the future.

Albert Einstein famously said that you cannot solve a problem with the same consciousness that created it. Posing philosophical questions is a necessary step in changing our consciousness. And grappling with these questions, which seem at first to be distant and inaccessible, is our greatest hope in creating brilliant contemporary solutions based upon very practical understandings of where we are. For example, the origin

of today's conservation easements lie in the fertile and inquisitive minds of young attorneys in the 1960s, people like Kingsbury Browne, Russ Brenneman and Peter Cooper, who were exploring philosophical questions about how to solve a problem. They created a unique contemporary solution because they gave themselves the freedom to think broadly and holistically. We have been thorough scientists, strong lawyers, and dogged advocates; now it's time to be prophets and poets again.

Finally, when viewed through the lens of relationship, one notices how words contribute powerfully to the boundaries between people and the land. Boundaries are important in both ecology and society, but there's an enormous qualitative difference between boundaries that are soft and permeable and those that are hard and defining. Soft boundaries are where people come and go, where there is trust, openness and freedom. Hard boundaries are gated communities, the ubiquitous *No Trespassing* signs, places where people can't go. Hard boundaries are created out of fear and mark the process of "othering:" calling someone "other" because of differences in skin tone, wealth, politics, or even how long they have lived in town. In ecological terms, a soft boundary might be the rich ecotone between forest and field and a hard boundary would be where waves crash to meet the beach. In cultural terms, a soft boundary is Central Park in New York City, which divides very wealthy neighborhoods from very poor neighborhoods and is the ecotone where

those different people rub shoulders and pass one another. A hard boundary is the Berlin Wall and the triple wall that is now proposed for United States' boundary with Mexico. Generally speaking, soft boundaries are celebrated as great achievements of human life and hard boundaries are pointed to as examples of our fear, our hoarding, our need to oppress to live. Of course, those on different sides of hard boundaries tend to see those boundaries very differently and use language that subtly represents those differences. This is exactly why it can be damaging for conservationists to use defensive terms like *protect* and *save* because these words prompt some to ask behind our backs, "Protecting it from and saving it for *whom?*"

RACE, POWER AND PRIVILEGE

Getting to wholeness requires telling the truth about history and about our relationships.

This is my view of the truth. The social foundations that enable conservation to happen in this country, namely the wealth of many of our organizations, the access we have to political and social power, the ability we have to evolve a legal system to our benefit, even our ability to own land and to work effectively with other land-owners, reflect a very privileged position. Sometimes, as conservationists, we act as if we hit a triple when in reality we were born on third base.

Our privilege is so vast that we can take it for granted, even pretend that it doesn't exist. Our privilege is so powerful that wielding it even subtly affects the lives of others. And the fact that we routinely use our privilege around something as fundamental to life as land – the source of physical and mental sustenance – is a potentially life-affirming or damaging power in this country. If we use that privilege primarily for ourselves then we ultimately squander the opportunity to create a whole community and we diminish ourselves. If we use that power and privilege to make meaningful relationships with land available to all people, we have taken what was never really ours in the beginning and turned it into something of value for everyone.

During my professional career in land conservation, I have witnessed and personally contributed to a trend that saw the far majority of land conservation dollars and land conservation programs primarily benefiting one segment of Americans: whites. While there are important and notable exceptions, this allocation of money and programs has occurred despite the political support that often made this funding possible. Americans of color have consistently supported environmental efforts in Congress and local bond measures around the country, but rarely received a proportionate fair share of conservation in return.

For a significant number of people, conservation has also meant the loss of their land. I have personally witnessed this in the case

of rural villagers in Nepal, black family farmers in South Carolina, traditional taro growers in Hawaii, rural ranchers in New Mexico, and Native Americans in Massachusetts. There are important conservation efforts that are now directly reversing these trends, but the truth must be spoken and written before an enduring reconciliation can occur.

One morning last summer a group convened by Center for Whole Communities was in deep dialogue on the question of their vision for the future. A white woman from Wyoming spoke about her deep sense of fulfillment about how she and her organization had, against all odds, protected over 200,000 acres of land over the last ten years. She was speaking more about the sustained energy and commitment it took than of the accomplishment itself. Everyone in the room felt that it was work deserving of our respect. Out of the silence that followed her story came the voice of a Native American woman, now living in Georgia, who respectfully noted with some difficulty that her people were from Wyoming and how their reservation had been reduced in size over the last century by hundreds of thousands of acres. She told a different story, across the same landscape, of land loss, of alienation, and of disconnection.

Bringing ourselves whole again with the land is easier for some than for others. Our relationships to the land are varied by history and by the present realities of race, power and privilege. At Knoll Farm, we feel the result of problems created

generations ago and perpetuated still today. Several Native Americans who have participated in our programs have said something similar to these words from one: “We are so connected to our pain as a people that we have become disconnected from the land.” And many of our African American alumni have told us, during and after their time at Knoll Farm, how difficult it was for them physically and emotionally to live at an unfamiliar farm where they are challenged by very real fears and memories from their personal and cultural past.

It’s a privilege for any person to pursue their vision to see land protected because they have the money, the skills, and the political access to see that vision realized. That vision can become unfair and alienating in the eyes of others who don’t have that access, who had their own land stolen from them, or who come from a complicated and bitter relationship to the land. This is a time for great self-awareness, humility, and the capacity to see our own personal connection to the divides, no matter where we live.

We won’t be able to fully resolve problems created by past injustices and inequalities, but we must grapple with the ways we are personally perpetuating these problems today. The widening racial and economic divides of our country are intertwined with the story of the environmental movement, and of a disconnected society. Much of land conservation and environmentalism has been in favor of one class of people. Success for that one class has often meant failure for another; some acts of land conservation and environmentalism have directly

displaced people and taken their land. What are we willing to give up in order to see across these divides and to recognize new allies?

The core challenge of practicing whole thinking and nurturing whole communities is our capacity to create trust and dialogue among diverse people. We cannot create a new story of whole communities before this older story about race, privilege and the land has been fully acknowledged. This is far more difficult than claiming our own stories; it involves hearing and truly absorbing others’ stories. It’s being fully open to the pain of the past and to risk the process of healing. And the healing begins with listening.

A whole community is built upon a *moral landscape* where people are treated fairly and where other species of life are respected. A moral landscape creates a moral culture. Conversely, a landscape conserved or protected without intention toward equity can never really create a civil society. This work asks us to consider, “is my relationship or my organization’s relationship to the land fair to others? And if not, what can I personally do about it?”

A world filled with lines and divisions only leads to fragmentation – the sense of alienation, disconnection and domination that contributes to our culture of fear and violence. This culture of fear is our greatest barrier to fostering whole communities, and is a force deeply affected by our relationship to the

land and to one another. Conservation organizations control significant resources – land, dollars, political power – and their choices can heighten or diminish this culture of fear. The conservation of land can tear down the walls between people or it can make those walls higher.

Some of the most important work that can be done is to create the safe harbors where different people can have honest and sustained dialogue with one another, where people can ask reciprocal questions. Why do I need you and why do you need me? Why does the health of the land and people need us working together?

RE-DEFINING SUCCESS

While running for President of the United States in 1968, Robert F. Kennedy said this about our country's definitions of success:

“Our gross national product counts air pollution and cigarette advertising...It counts the destruction of our redwoods and the loss of our natural wonders to chaotic sprawl...Yet the gross national product does not allow for the health of our children, nor the quality of their education...It measures...neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country; it measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile. And it tells us everything about America except why we are proud to be Americans.”

The same is true for those of us who protect and care for the land: as long as we focus on dollars raised and acres saved, what we measure says very little about why we are proud to be conservationists.

Our real success is our ability to re-define for Americans their health, their relationships, and their sense of fairness. And we can best do this by joining with all of the other groups connected to the land movement – environmental justice activists, community revitalizers, public health advocates – to transform communities and culture. The challenge is that we become what we measure, yet the fact remains that what the movement primarily measures right now is dollars, and acres.

How do we get to something different, to a deeper understanding of what we want as well as greater progress in getting more of it? The journey starts with taking the time to ask ourselves what matters most. Why are we conserving and restoring land? What does the shore look like that we are rowing toward? What are the values we are trying to bring into the world through our strategies and tactics?

Based upon our work with many different coalitions and organizations, here is a taste of how Center for Whole Communities answers these questions. We hold a vision of many different people and organizations walking together toward whole communities: a world in which all people, land

and community interact in a way that fosters health and vitality for all. Underlying that vision are core values which include:

- Whole thinking
- Respect for peoples' values and passion for place
- Integration of healthy land and people
- Respect for all life and the natural systems upon which we depend
- Reciprocity and co-dependence
- Fairness
- Understanding our different connections to land
- Balance
- Shared power
- Stewardship for future generations
- Humility

And here are statements about ten practices within land restoration and conservation which directly contribute to this vision. We believe we can describe and measure our collective progress in achieving these practices:

Justice and Fairness

- Treating all community members fairly;
- Acknowledging the pain, loss or injustice connected with land;
- Engaging community members who have suffered injustice;
- Seeking to share power and decision-making.

Strengthening Connections between Land and People

- Increasing people's direct access to and experience of the land;
- Providing opportunities for learning and inspiration;
- Acknowledging and honoring the reciprocal relationship between land and people;
- Helping people to understand how the physical, emotional and spiritual well being of people depends on the health and well being of the land.

Civic Engagement and Social Capital

- Creating spaces for community dialogue, learning and engagement;
- Promoting working together, cooperation and collaboration;
- Participating in creating political structures that serve and are accountable to all community members;
- Building new grassroots networks;
- Building trust and authentic relationships.

Healthy Natural Lands and Biodiversity

- Conserving healthy natural habitats;
- Creating and protecting the interconnectivity among habitats;
- Promoting the moral standing of non-human species, both for the intrinsic value of that life and to affirm our own human sense of fairness and morality;
- Making management decisions that benefit the overall biodiversity on the property.

Healthy Habitat for People

- Providing for the production and consumption of healthy food;
- Offering opportunities for recreation;
- Ensuring a clean environment.

Stewardship

- Valuing and caring for the health of the land over time;
- Respecting community values for and in the land;
- Helping people see and care for larger systems;
- Respecting the interdependence of the surrounding land and people.

Community and Economic Vitality

- Supporting an active, working relationship between conservation and working lands/waters;
- Encouraging direct links between community members, land and products derived from those lands;
- Promoting local land-based economic development that preserves the long-term health of the land;
- Promoting a more holistic view of the relationship between land, culture and economy in the community.

Telling and Learning from our Stories of Land and Place

- Taking the time to learn about and record the history and stories of the lands we protect;
- Having the stories of land, place and community inform both the why and how of our work;
- Providing the forum for community members to tell their stories;
- Helping people to understand and appreciate how others have lived, and live in a manner that respects the culture and history of a place for present and future generations;
- Creating greater opportunity for reconciliation through our increased understanding and appreciation for the history of the land and its inhabitants, particularly the untold and omitted stories.

Working in Partnership

- Taking care to gather information about all of the cultural and physical resources of the land;
- Listening to those connected with the land;
- Understanding and engaging with existing community-based organizations and networks;
- Engaging the larger community in discussing the future of the land;
- Sharing with or relinquishing to the community decision-making authority over outcomes.

Community Resilience

- Balancing land conservation with community housing goals;
- Accomplishing land conservation while preserving opportunities for meeting the community's transportation needs;
- Maintaining infrastructure within the community that is necessary for accomplishing its social goals (e.g., public safety, education, health care);
- Supporting "smart growth" principles and practices;
- Working to ensure the community's long-term economic vitality.

As we head down this road together, one quickly recognizes that success is reciprocal: I can't succeed without your work, and your work won't succeed without mine. We also see the degree to which our values can hold us together even though our strategies and tactics may diverge considerably. And, quite naturally, we see how we can no longer demand change but only inspire it.

TELLING OUR STORIES

What does Dr. King's *I Have a Dream* speech look like today for conservationists?

This important American speech succeeds because Dr. King lays out a vision, through story, of the way he hopes America

might one day be. It is honest and critical, but leaves no one feeling powerless. It is daringly positive, simple, but with a grand vision. And, most importantly, Dr. King offers a powerful vision for the future while at the same time acknowledging that he might not live to see it.

Imagine if every story that conservationists told about the land helped people to see what really matters and how they can have more of it.

Arundhati Roy tells us that the people who have been protecting the Narmada River of India have a saying: "You can wake someone who is asleep, but you cannot wake someone who is pretending to be asleep."

Our stories *must* wake the people who are afraid and pretending to be asleep. And we can best do that through empathy, compassion and love, not fear and pessimism. We wake people through positive stories that show them the possibility of living in a different way.

Story is the way we *carry the land inside of us*. An authentic story has power. Stories of the land awaken and rekindle these experiences of wholeness inside each and every one of us. Stories help us imagine the future differently. Stories create community, enable us to see through the eyes of other people, and open us to the claims of others. We tell stories to cross the borders that separate us from one another.

Stories help us dwell in time, and help us to deal with suffering, loss and death. Stories teach us empathy, and how to be human. Our stories should help people to understand *what really matters and how they can get more of it*.

Story is ultimately about relationship. *The soul of the land becomes the soul of our culture not through information or data alone, but through the metaphor and analogy of story.*

The shades of love that people feel for the land, whether they are new to that place or have been there for generations, can be adequately expressed only in terms of human emotion: the expression of our deepest, unspoken values. Telling stories helps conservationists to explain the role that land plays in shaping healthy human lives. Telling stories conveys the emotion, meaning, and power of land conservation's mission. Telling stories is our best hope of reflecting the kind of world we want to live in and, therefore, gives us a hope of creating it.

We must tell these stories because they are growing rarer and more and more essential to us. Without these stories of connection and relationship, there is increasingly one dominant story to hear and one story to tell. The developers, the clearcutters, the advertisers will be left to enact their simple story: money is more important than life.

WHERE THIS STORY LEADS

A whole community is a mosaic of people living their lives in constant awareness and relationship with a healthy place. A whole community can feed and care for itself. It is secure in the most basic sense of food, shelter, and health. It is not organized for consumption or to house people when they are not working elsewhere but designed for living, laughing and playing, too. In a whole community, neighbors rely and are dependent on one another. A whole community is both self-sufficient and utterly interdependent.

A healthy, whole community can take care of itself, but it does not have hard boundaries. In a whole community, people can come and go. A whole community seeks to reduce the boundaries between its members and it helps newcomers to become native because it needs their new ideas. But it also knows what it stands for and can communicate those values. A whole community is in constant dialogue, through its streets, markets, commons and workplaces, about what matters most. It knows that change is always coming and it can pick which form of change it wants. It understands the consequences of change.

Whole communities share their own wealth through their belief in civic engagement and the commons, and its members share their wealth through neighborliness. Whole communities do not need to hoard anything. A whole community knows how much is enough.

A whole community assumes that every community member has something to offer, where there is space and room for everyone. A whole community excludes no one, and cherishes diversity of all kinds.

A whole community is safer and healthier for all forms of life. A whole community nurtures and protects biological diversity, and is a web of interdependent relationships. A whole community knows and cares for its land and water. Its members act with an awareness of the questions, How will this change affect our landscapes and our water? How will this change affect our children and their children? In a whole community, efficiency, economy and progress are never more important than people or the land.

In this difficult time in our history, what will we choose to carry forward with us? Empathy and courage. Appreciation, patience, peace, aliveness, a different view of abundance. New definitions of what is medicine and what is wealth. We will learn to use our unlimited human resources and not just our limited natural resources. We will be friendlier toward one another.

May we have the courage to meet people, time and time again, where they are. May we have the courage to stay engaged, to speak out to lose our membership and to make mistakes. And may we have the courage to speak regularly with people who frighten us. May we find the courage to help people feel comfortable at the boundaries, to suspend judgement, to be tolerant, to suffer injustice and to keep going.

This could be a good time. If we can trust and let go into the water, the current can carry us to a different place. The good news is that one doesn't create wholeness the way one creates an industrial society; wholeness is a state to which all things want to move when obstacles are removed. Wholeness happens when we let go of the shore and enter the current. Where we end up will likely be a very long way from where we are today, and the trip may be among the most turbulent and transformational that any living generation on earth has yet experienced. But, if we can navigate this river with grace and fairness, we can be part of a society that requires less hoarding and is, at its core, a more peaceful place.

Those in conservation who are willing to enter the current are innovators who have come to see that their work can powerfully confront the divides of our nation and the contemporary realities of income disparity, housing shortages, food security, violence and prison society, and children's health. They are change-agents who are beginning to recognize how conservation and restoration can either raise the walls between people or tear those walls down.

A world at a breaking point calls upon all of us to stretch. We may choose to "speak truth with love to power." We may lift the veil and see the world differently, we may come to re-think our purpose and this powerful work of restoring the health of land and people, and we may let go of the shore and see where the current takes us. But I also understand that we may not. This is the moment we are in.

ABOUT CENTER FOR WHOLE COMMUNITIES

Center for Whole Communities was created in 2003 to help forge a more powerful, cohesive and inclusive story about people, land and community. We are a bridge between different organizations and communities; a safe harbor where diverse groups can creatively solve complex problems and find more effective strategies for leadership. We provide trusted forums for dialogue, stories of change and new tools for those working for whole communities.

Our work transcends organizational and leadership development to offer a whole-systems approach to helping the environmental movement more effectively contribute to a culture of engaged citizenship and land stewardship in this country. As Margo Tamez, poet, environmental justice activist, and scholar said, “At Whole Communities there are leaders who are taking up the hard and worthwhile work of creating a forum where individuals, representing diverse backgrounds and communities, meet one another and engage in serious conversation about the way we are living on Earth. These dialogues are absolutely essential not only to gaining deepened familiarity with the ills, but [they] also challenge participants to move to deeper connection with commitment to the Earth, human communities, and our selves.”

We are based at Knoll Farm, a working organic farm in the Mad River Valley of Vermont, and our programs reach across

the country. We are governed by a diverse board of directors, who afford us with important relationships with the environmental justice, faith, academic, community development and traditional land conservation communities. To learn more about our work, programs and other publications, please visit us online at www.wholecommunities.org.

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and communities.*

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TO A FRIEND

If this essay has struck a cord with you, we urge you to pass it on. Put your name here, leave your notes in the margins, and send this book to a colleague. Urge others to do the same. Treat this small book as a set of ideas, better spread on the winds than left on a shelf.

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