

Introduction: Wild Foresting — A Vision Emerges

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In Wildness is the Preservation of the World

— Henry David Thoreau
(*Walking*, 1862)

When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe

— John Muir
(*My First Summer in the Sierra*, 1911)

Wild foresting vision

A decade ago New Society Books published *Ecoforestry: The Art and Science of Sustainable Forest Use*.¹ Since then, there has been continuing evolution in the paradigms of responsible forest use although the outmoded industrial removal of forests has continued unabated. Wild forests are now central to the convergence of community ecoforestry, wholistic forestry, permaculture, wild farming, place-based education, ecological restoration and the movement to stem global warming.

Wild foresting refers to any responsible use of forests that appreciates, is attuned to and

learns from their wild energies and wisdom. Wild foresting activities are compatible with the evolutionary integrity and self organization of natural forest ecosystems. Wild foresting as a movement connects Indigenous knowledge systems with contemporary ecological knowledge; it reconciles the needs of the Earth with those of humans. It unites a great variety of practices tailored by local people to the characteristics and values of unique forest places around the world. It respects local adaptations uniquely suited to each forest stand and place, but it does not support large scale forest removal. *Thus, wild foresting is part of the broader movement for ecological responsibility.* It is especially in harmony with the platform principles of the deep ecology movement which stress the inherent values of diversity and of each being. Wild foresting is thus compatible with a vast diversity of cultural and personal worldviews ecologically adapted to specific places around the world.

Wild foresting practices sustain and promote deep forest wisdom, forest health and

2 WILD FORESTING

biological and cultural diversity. Wherever wild forests grow or are being restored, practitioners discover that health and life quality are intertwined with the integrity and resilience of diverse ecosystem processes that are uniquely expressed in local places. Wild foresting honors these processes, and it adapts human activities to the values these systems can sustain in perpetuity. Its diverse cultural adaptations evolve with forest systems. Instead of environmental crises, wild foresting leads to local control, personal freedom and rich cultural diversity. It also uses a more universal language found within the silence and melodious sounds of the natural and human world. It is in tune with the human heart and the creative love power flowing through all beings.

Global context and its challenges

Writings on the interactions of trees and people do not occur in a vacuum. This anthology addresses our profound social and environmental uncertainty and social dysfunction. A few years after the global media focused on the political and social crises brought on by the *war on terror* and the tsunami in Southeast Asia, two other tidal waves of greater long-term significance swept the planet. In March 2005 the *Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Report* stated that we are losing both species and habitat at unprecedented historical levels and are now on the brink of global ecological disaster. This Report was followed in 2007 by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)'s Fourth Assessment Report. It underscored the threats that we now face from the global impact of climatic changes on both social and biophysical systems.² These changes are a direct result of human practices and industrial development based on fossil fuels.

Both reports pointed out that ecosystems, like other non-linear systems, do not always respond to stresses in incremental ways. They can alternate between periods of relative stability and periods of great instability and change. At times of great stress, systems can undergo sudden and dramatic shifts, with discontinuities from one state to another. An example of this is the rapid loss of Arctic ice and the melting of permafrost in the north. Here, a series of positive feedback loops have the synergistic link of increasing temperatures and releasing vast stores of methane from the melting of permafrost. This leads to further temperature increases and the loss of pack ice, as well as the loss of the reflective capacity of a diminished snow and ice pack to offset solar radiation (the albedo effect) — which in turn adds to the overall temperature increase — and so on in a faster and faster cycle. Not surprisingly, at the end of August 2007 the US National Snow and Ice Data Center reported the most significant loss of Arctic ice in recorded history.³

The loss of Arctic ice is one of a number of environmental stresses that have led even mainstream media to question many of the common values and assumptions about our lifestyles and development models. The industrial world's faith in progress, as unending growth and exploitation of nature for the satisfaction of ever-increasing material and energy demands, is now being seriously challenged. Recent findings on climate change and the loss of biodiversity have emphasized once again the value of more traditional notions regarding our need for respectful relationships to the Earth and its many beings. The modern global economy is based on consumerism, the idea of the totally separate self, the market as arbiter and the power of corporations. Its institutions

define progress and economic health by continuing growth in Gross Domestic Product. These practices are all being deeply questioned, and new socially and ecologically responsible models of progress and development are appearing at the grass-roots level everywhere.

Because of the increasing power of technology and other global systems, the rate of consumptive change has continued to increase. This puts more of the basis of human life and cultures under extreme pressure. Regional and global ecosystems are undergoing severe alterations, with dire warnings from a wide range of empirical scientists and other observers. The realization that modern human civilization is on the verge of a collective tipping point that could send our support systems into rapid decline has become a common concern in current academic and popular literature. Thomas Homer-Dixon, Director of the Trudeau Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Toronto, published *The Upside of Down* in 2006. He described five interlocking *tectonic* societal and biophysical stresses, including the widening gap between the world's rich and poor, the growing instability of the global economic system and the increasing loss of biodiversity and climate uncertainty — all of which are creating conditions for an immanent *perfect storm* of global environmental and social breakdown.⁴ The abundant articles and books with similar themes all reflect the growing awareness that consumer industrial civilization, as it is now, is utterly unsustainable.⁵ It cannot survive into the coming decades as it is, but it must undergo profound changes in practices and organization. It is all of these above conditions that have led us to create this book.

Just as *Ecoforestry* gave positive descriptions of alternative practices to use forests and trees in responsible, respectful ways, *Wild Foresting* brings a full range of forest uses into the center of cultural appreciation, education and valuing. The forests of the world, and of local areas, belong to themselves. They should be for the *respectful* use of all creatures and the humans that dwell within them. The industrial liquidation of wild forests and their replacement by plantations of clones is a moral outrage and crime against all creatures and people everywhere. Wild foresting is a partner of ecoforestry in honoring and caring for three great movements of global significance: for social justice, for peace and nonviolence and for *ecological responsibility*. Ecoforestry and wild foresting support flourishing wild forests and vernacular cultures, with their own unique wild forest dialects and creative ways to live in tune with the natural world. Ecoforestry and ecoagriculture are both shorthand for ecologically responsible uses of forest, crop and range lands.

Modern-postmodern detour and returning to perennial wisdom

We now must create local practices and global means of cooperation that do not undermine the cultural and biological diversity which are essential to long range resilience. These means and practices are part of an ancient assembly of values that make the Earth a treasure in the galaxy. In the West we tend to think and talk as if there is one solution, one metaphysics, one way of experiencing the world, rather than recognizing that our current problems offer a multitude of opportunities and rich choices for lives of deep and great quality. As Arne Naess points out, the deep ecology movement has a long and deep front. There are vast numbers

Modernism

1. Reality is not personal, has no inherent value, but is ordered by natural laws.
2. We can understand Nature by knowing these laws.
3. Specialized empirical science is the only way to know these laws.
4. Humans can live well by applying this objective knowledge to practical matters.
5. This theoretical and practical knowledge enables us to master Nature with technology.

Postmodernism

1. Reality is neither personal nor orderly.
2. All approaches to knowing the natural world are relative.
3. Nature has no inherent values transcending human subjectivity and culture.
4. Humans might not understand Nature, but their technological skill gives them great power.
5. There is no meaning or value in life other than what we ourselves create.

The Modern-Postmodern divide

1. Reality is personal and ordered.
2. Order is in part created by multitudes of beings striving to realize themselves in multi-dimensional relationships.
3. The powers of Nature are in us and other beings, and wise actions are possible through integration and unification of our many ways of knowing and powers of acting.
4. Nature is filled with diverse intrinsic values that can be discovered, as well as possibilities for creating new ones.
5. Completion and fulfillment are found in deepening ourselves through authentic dwelling in harmony with Nature and each other.

Ecological approaches and worldviews

of ways to live in harmony with the natural world and each other.

We were both raised in the Euro-American context. We know that our particular cultural orientation, especially in the academic world, is still wrestling with the Modern-Postmodern divide and the *social construction of nature* that perpetuates a devalued natural world and an unacceptable nihilism. The main features of this divide are characterized by the five points at left.

Diverse ecological approaches transcend the shortcomings of this Modern-Postmodern impasse. These approaches are emerging in the Western nations and in other nations as well. In many places there are preexisting cultures, including those of our own ancestors, whose approaches to the world and relationships with all beings could be characterized broadly by the five features we list at left. These five features characterize a great diversity of shamanic cultures, the perennial wisdom of the traditions of nature spirituality (such as Shinto in Japan), as well as leading edge work in new cosmology of conscious living systems in the West described by writers like Ralph Metzner, Ervin Laszlo and New Story cosmologist Thomas Berry.

These figures show at a glance the main differences between the Modern, Postmodern and the diverse Ecological Approaches we describe. Note that the ecocentric narratives move across cultural differences and diversity as related to Nature and place. Pluralistic narratives based on culture-Nature ecology encourage mutual respect for diverse traditions and worldviews, ancient and new. They remind us that generations of humans and other beings will follow us. They encourage cross cultural communication to further global and local support for basic rights and

the inherent values of humans, cultures, Nature and beings of all kinds. Their themes encourage the flourishing of all beings. They recognize that all life is one.

Since this book focuses on ecological approaches related to harmony with Nature and wild forests, we emphasize the cross cultural but locally diverse features of the Platform Principles of the Deep Ecology Movement. Here are those principles as articulated by Arne Naess and others.

Importance of personal and community philosophies

It is inevitable in individualistic societies for people to have different personal philosophies of life, even though they recognize certain general principles. Without honoring personal philosophies, we would not respect and care for the sanctity and rights of individual persons, but having our own whole sense for life enables us to be full community members and work together on shared aims.

Naess calls philosophies of life that honor ecological values, such as diversity and symbiosis, ecosophies. In principle there can be as many *ecosophies* as there are people. *Ecophilosophy* is the study of diversity in ecology, culture and personal worldviews. There is a major revisioning of spiritual traditions throughout the world inspired by the return of ecological and perennial wisdom and the importance of spiritual practices that engender unity and compassion. Nonviolent and respectful communication with all cultures and beings is based on respect, gratitude and the realization that we are all interrelated. This is at the heart, for example, of the teachings of Jesus as told in some of the *Gospels* and in the suppressed *Gnostic Gospels*. To know the beautiful in the world is to know deeply through the perennial

1. All living beings have intrinsic value.
2. The richness and diversity of life has intrinsic value.
3. Except to satisfy vital needs, humankind does not have the right to reduce this diversity and this richness.
4. It would be better for human beings if there were fewer of them, and much better for other living creatures.
5. Today the extent and nature of human interference in the various ecosystems is not sustainable, and the lack of sustainability is rising.
6. Decisive improvement requires considerable change: social, economic, technological and ideological.
7. An ideological change would essentially entail seeking a better quality of life rather than a raised standard of living.
8. Those who accept the aforementioned points are responsible for trying to contribute directly or indirectly to the realization of the necessary changes.

Platform principles of the deep ecology movement

wisdom of the way of love. As Jesus taught, a loved world is filled with values that we know first hand. The power of love is a universal energy that can be actualized by each of us in our own personal way. This is our spiritual challenge and task — to become whole, complete persons — and as the world is always changing, we too must change with it.⁷ Fixed dogmas sound a death knell to authentic spiritual life which is ever deepening in awareness, appreciation and compassion.

Cultural and ecological diversity

To solve our many international problems cooperation is necessary, and yet it is possible and necessary to maintain cultural and individual diversity. No one worldview or ontology will be held by everyone everywhere. Our world

would be very impoverished if that were true. Even within countries such as India, Japan, China, Canada, Norway or the United States, there is considerable diversity in personal religions and worldviews. We each have our own unique way of experiencing, understanding and talking about the world. It is wrong to try to force others to think and feel the way we do, or to force them to use language the way we do. We each have our unique feelings and dialects that are interwoven with our place and personal history. Our right to this freedom to be ourselves is of course enshrined with obligations to respect the same freedom for others. This also applies to our judgments about the natural world with its great diversity of beings. We should recognize their right to flourish.

Nonviolent, respectful communication

Our communication should be nonviolent and respectful, especially toward those with whom we disagree. Nonviolent communication is compatible with direct action in support of ecological responsibility and caring for our home places and forests. Many supporting perennial wisdom distinguish between the small-*s self* of ego and the wider and deeper ecological sense of *Self* with which we each might come to identify. As we grow more mature we should become more tolerant and open to our differences and develop wider and deeper concerns that transcend narrow self-interests.

As we mature we care more deeply for our family, neighbors and place. Their welfare is even more important than our own. We become an expression of our people and place. A person might say, "I live in this place and for years have explored it on every level. I love and identify with it." Aboriginal friends

say, "We are this land we live in and love. It tells us and others who we are." Our language and daily actions all have sense because our values and practices are deeply connected with knowledge of self and other, what our own local ecological Self is and so on. In this world there is still a great diversity of cultures and languages, as there has been for millennia. These should be respected locally and internationally, as should human rights, social justice and ecological responsibility. In the face of this great diversity and complexity of cultures and ecological communities, we become humble and realize our responsibility to be nonviolent in our communication from speech to direct action. We should have enlarging conversations rather than debates. In our highly technologized settings more and more of us lack contact with the natural world. Nowhere is this more critical than in the education of our children.

Nature deficit in learning

Wild foresting is a way to address the looming *nature deficit* in our children's education. It is critically important for us to address this deficit if we are to educate the younger generations to know and care for the natural world. In contemporary technological societies it has become increasingly obvious that the technological systems provide *virtual* experience as a substitute for authentic experience in the real world. It is no wonder, then, that many people educated within our systems from childhood through university have little actual deep personal experience in the natural world. Thus, some seem to believe that "nature is only a social construction," that there are only *subjective* realities and that only humans and their societies count. This is part of the post-modern legacy.

In countless studies we find that those who are defenders and eloquent protectors of the natural world and of wild beings are people whose deepest childhood experiences were in special places in the natural world. They played in such places without adult supervision and controlled programs. They created their own games, their own places, their own nests and huts. They dug caves, they lived in the trees and built tree houses, they made secret camps. They had special places they went to recover from childhood traumas and injuries. This is a key background in the setting of their childhood, and it is critical to processes of healing and wholeness for teens and adults.

Many traditional societies provide a context for this most important depth education in human life. It is through contact with the natural world that we connect with other beings, the plants and animals with whom we share our lives on a daily basis. They are in our dreams, they are our inner animals and plants that guide and tell us where we are, who we are, how to be whole and how to know ourselves in authentic ways. It is from such rich and complex origins in specific places that we are able to tell our own stories and weave our own personal place-based mythologies. In many cultures ceremonial initiations into a changed life with new names and stories are given in special places in vision quests and rites of passage, always rich with wild inner and outer plants and animals, forests and mountains, rivers and plains. It is all of these experiences and more that make us human dwellers on this Earth. It is from these rich experiences that our capacity to love all of nature is activated, and we become capable and competent whole humans who can care for and help others to find themselves. It is

how we know and become defenders of wild beings and forests. It is how we know our ecological selves.

In vision quests in traditional societies, in rediscovery programs, in outdoor adventure and therapy programs, in Norse *Friluftsliv*, in walkabouts and more, we find an emerging awareness of all that is said above. Some have systematized the central elements of these experiences and practices as they have surfaced in wilderness journeying in North America as the *Wildway*. All of these experiences resonate with practices related to the older shamanic journeying ceremonies and wild wandering which are done with focused intent or with open receptive searching; all of these and more are rich with mythologies and stories, filled with cross cultural symbols and complex values, grounded in wildness and the natural world. Forests and trees are prominent and of central importance. They are not merely a setting but a rich community of beings we are invited to join. We learn again and again from our own experiences, and from those of others whom we hear around the circle of firelight, that they and we ourselves have been nurtured and taught by this Earth and by its myriads of beings, rock, plant, tree and animal.

Perennial wisdom in nature and societies

The tree of knowledge and the world tree that supports the whole of reality are recurring themes in these stories and traditions. These animals and plants were often called helpers, or they can be called teachers too. They have many complex roles in cultures which live by nature spirituality and journeying. The more we learn about animals in their natural setting, the more we realize that they too learn

from each other and share knowledge. A wolf might learn fishing from a bear, birds show other birds how to solve puzzles, capture certain prey or use a tool. Tool-using creatures become teachers to other creatures. Not only that, we find that animals too have cultures and make tools, have creative capacities that shows us that they are aware and feel, sense and know the world. They accumulate and pass on their knowledge to their young.

This great treasure of knowledge we are describing is in danger of being lost by the globalizing, monoculturing technological systems created by our modern industrial societies with their associated financial and marketing systems. It has often been claimed that technological systems are in themselves value-neutral, but we know now that value neutrality is impossible to attain. All systems throughout the human and nonhuman world are also systems of valuing; they are living processes and not fixed things. There are good value systems and bad value systems. They can be adaptive and have complementary impacts on the world, or they are maladaptive and have negative impacts on their users and their world. Many human societies went extinct because they developed systems that destroyed both their inner and outer ecology. Their selves and places were demolished by their systems of control and practice. Sometimes they learned before it was too late; sometimes they continued to do the same things that were making them ill, with even greater intensity, convinced that if they did so everything would be all right. But, of course, it was not, and these people and their societies perished.

Ways ahead

This book is not a rant about what is going wrong with the world; there are plenty of

those. It is a clarion call for positive action and commitment; it is about love, hope and renewal. Indeed, all of the authors point to a silver lining that can lighten the breakdown and subsequent transformation of both our dominant expansionist consumer worldview and the exploitive ways it relates to most humans and the Earth. Our global systems of transportation and communication do not have to be instruments of central control, domination and destruction. Instead, they can help to spread awareness that we are all interconnected and that the fate of our local and regional ecosystems is also our fate. The fate of the systems we have created is in our hands. *We can* commit ourselves to work at the individual, community and regional levels to shape new practices and rebirth old ones that are in harmony with the great diversity of living beings with whom we are blessed to share this planet.

It is at times when complex systems are most unstable that they are supersensitive. It is at such times that even small fluctuations and pressures can give rise to large-scale consequences and outcomes. This is often called the *butterfly effect* whereby a butterfly flapping its wings in California shifts a highly unstable weather system, so as to cause a storm in Mongolia. Or again, like a climber at the top of a mountain peak, where any slight shift in route one way or another will lead her to any number of possible valley places. What directions can we shift in our own lives to help the many creative beings to be born around us? We each have far greater power and gifts to offer than we realize most of the time because we are disempowered by being deprived of free play in nature and subjected to passive conditioning and entertainment. As Arne Naess remarks "We each have far more capacity than we realize. We tend to seriously underestimate

ourselves.” We can be our own persons responding in unique ways to our own personal challenges, and we can dwell in our unique home places. This is also one of the deep insights of the shamanic ways whose ceremonies empower each person to connect with their own unique genius, starting from wild wandering and free play in nature. Do not require everyone to do the same thing, but invite all to contribute their unique gifts to our global efforts at nonviolent attunement to the natural world and each other. There are myriad positive ways forward.

Globally, we have reached a *decision window* with respect to our future. We need to celebrate and support those individuals and communities who are role models for living sustainably within their ecological communities. Over 60 years ago Mahatma Gandhi wisely noted that if we are to create a better world for all sentient beings, not only must the means and the ends for achieving this be of the same nonviolent quality, but we must also strive to “be the change that we want to see in the world.” As Gandhi put it in another context, “We need more production by the masses and less mass production from big machines.” Millions of local adaptations are rich sources of our salvation, not megapower, monolithic monocultures.

It is with humility that we look at how a number of remarkable humans and communities in various parts of the world are currently acting as butterfly wings for setting in motion positive tipping for the renewal of one of this planet’s most precious evolutionary manifestations — its forests. And while many of these articles are focused on forests and trees, they all are relevant to places beyond the edges of

the forest. Indeed, the lessons contained here, in learning how to live responsibly with forest communities, are transferable to all other areas of human interaction with nature. For it is by learning to walk gently on the forest floor that we also learn to soften our ego boundaries and experience the universe as a vibrant living whole. This deep unity experience takes place in Merv Wilkinson’s Wildwood forest in Canada and in the shamanic rituals of Peru, and these experiences can have subtle and profound effects on us all. It is in this spirit, and with the vision of a renewed and healthy planet with vigorous wild forests, that this book has been drawn together. It is given with gratitude and hope.

(Editors’ note: Some of the material in this article is from the book manuscript *Caring for Home Places* by Alan Drenson, 2007.)

*Khutzemateen
grizzly bear
sanctuary*

