**Conservation Biology, BIOL1120**

**“The Land Ethic” Reflection Paper**

‘The Land Ethic’ challenges readers to consider the importance of developing an ethic that pertains to the land and its creatures. Conservation of land, and the creatures we share our planet, is compared to other socially bred morals (i.e. The Golden Rule). Ethics, in the interest of civilization, have been adopted by humanity as rules of acceptable behavior in the name of the common peace.

The author feels that just as we have matured as a society and embraced communal values with each other, we will eventually also embrace a ‘Land Ethic’. The author’s concern is that we may embrace this too late to save many species. (‘The Land Ethic, Pg. 204)

I believe that conservation is a badly understood topic by most, including myself. Our society has grown by leaps and bounds over the last three to four hundred years. There are many accomplishments celebrated at their inception because these ideas and inventions were presumed to reduce many trials and issues, including pollution. Think about the automobile. This invention was celebrated for many reasons, including reducing or eliminating residue left by horses in the streets. (Inventor Strategies, n.d,) Can you image the flies, the smell and other concerns that an automobile removed? However the emissions of mass ownership of automobiles created an entirely new problem. I bring this example up to show how conflicts arise simply because of a lack of knowledge and information. Increasing education is not always the key because sometimes there are things that cannot be learned except for by practice.

The first example demonstrated in ‘The Land Ethic’ was of the farmers and their inability to form rules to self-regulate is an excellent example of human inaction (‘The Land Ethic, Pg. 208-209). As our world increases rapidly in size, there is more and more pressure to produce. Producing at a profit is a key factor as well. If one cannot make a living at their chosen profession, why would one continue to do it? Some argue that increased government intervention is needed. Some argue for less. It is my personal belief that any business is a business because it makes money. Governments haven’t created change successfully in the history of civilization and meddling on its part rarely brings long term improvement.

The question then could be argued, who can be counted on to make changes that are needed to improve our planet and the quality of life for today and tomorrow? I believe private sectors do make change and they do it best with less regulation. I ask; What if the question of land use and the degradation of the land were poised to consumers of the farmer’s products? Consumers are often galvanized to use the power of their purse strings to assist businesses in making better decisions. If it wasn’t, I wonder what the outcome might have been instead.

It is my belief that public pressure suffices quite nicely if the public is persuaded convincingly. You may very well be familiar with the dolphin safe symbol on tuna cans in the grocery store. This is an example of successful public pressure on private companies who decided to alter their practices in response. The story was of fishing companies who were entangling dolphins in their nets and these dolphins were (and still are today) dying in mass. (Bonanno, Constance, 2000) A few undercover videos were taken in the 1980’s and many stories were written. Anyone who heard, saw or read about it, saw ‘Flipper’, they saw Sea World; nearly everyone loves dolphins and their perpetual sunny grins and seeing, reading about this iconic and beloved animal caught and struggling in indifferent net caused a massive public outcry. Boycotts, protests and embargos were born. In result, many improvements were made, including at least six different ‘Dolphin safe’ labels on tuna cans. Many improvements remain to be made still, especially for the sharks and albatross who suffer greatly from tuna fishing, but awareness and sympathy were born. (Earth Island, n.d.) This example was possible because of public education through home television shows, and through humane captivity and showcasing of a species many of us have no contact with and many of us will never actually even see in person. The efforts of individuals and businesses, inadvertently or not, had built a strong sense of sympathy and awareness for dolphins in the public population. The bottom line; companies changed their practices in response to public pressure. (Bonanno, Constance, 2000) They changed because they are in business to be in business and the public, welding their purse strings and the government with their embargo’s, had the ability to put them out of business. Reward bad behavior and people will continue bad behavior. The opposite is just as true.

I believe that some local government assistance does help. I recently read that here locally in Salt Lake that 60% of trash going into our landfills could have been recycled. (**Stettler, 2011**) This same article went on to advise that recycle bins would be emptied weekly instead of bi-weekly and it also listed items that can and cannot be recycled. Not only was I informed and motivated, I was given the tools to decide to be a better member of my community. I think this last sentence is the key to our success as a whole to reduce pollution, land degradation, species loss and long term harm to our planet and home. We each must choose to be better informed and motivated in our actions. All the tools and education in the world will not make up for indifference. I cannot stop a country from hunting great whites or over fishing their seas. I can decline to reward that country with my business and money.

Going back to the ‘The Land Ethic’, I agree that property and land were seen by our predecessors, for centuries, as a conquest. Land and its possession were a valuable prize; something to be tamed and defeated. I would argue it was even seen by many as a living breathing creature that must be muscled to the plow. Given that humanity nearly expired several times due to elements, starvation, disease, and other related elements, this mindset is not really surprising. While some religions preach and practice conservation (Taoism), the Judaic religions (Islam, Christianity and Judaism) may preach some conservation but as a whole, they practice it very little.

I had the privilege of a military upbringing here in the United States. While this back ground presented some challenges, the most rewarding aspect was my exposure to various types of climates and surroundings. New Orleans and South California are very different and not just because of their dissimilar social and economic environments. I grew up with a deep love for the places I lived. Returning to South California with my childhood memories of hiking, fishing, beaches, quiet hills and camping, I found a California with beaches closed due to pollution wafting up from Mexico, 6% of the wetlands remained, limited hiking was allowed, and snarled traffic and trash seemed to be littered everywhere. Seeing these dramatic changes, I fled and moved to Utah.

This was a defining moment for me and shaped a lot of my conservation beliefs in recycling, reusing and conserving. It is my understanding that I cannot change the overall direction our society is going in but I can make a tiny tiny tiny dent by reducing my own contribution to the ‘Great Pacific Garbage Patch’ (Mosakowski 2008). If every single one of us made the effort to reusing a plastic bag several times, to use a re-usable one when able to, that alone would make a sizable difference in our waste output.

Here in Utah, I would apply this ethic by encouraging, educating, supplying the needed tools to reduce air pollution. Individually people are choosing to car pool and bike to their destinations. State and local authorities are implementing designated bike lanes, carpool lanes and ‘park n’ ride’ lots’ to support our individual actions. Emissions are only a small part of air pollution issues but changing that small part can make a big difference. Recycle, reuse and conserve is a ‘battle cry’ of significant value in solving litter and landfill overages.

Little can presently be done about the many refineries in the immediate present timeframe but much can be done in the long term with a plan. This is recognized, in one example, by Kennecott’s (New Release 2010) proposal to dramatically reduce air emissions in Salt Lake City with a variety of tactics, including ones as simple as reducing the amount of trips their trucks make between refineries and mines. Chevron (USDOJ 2003) reached an agreement with the Environmental Protection Agency to reduce harmful air emissions by almost 10, 000 tons a year from five U.S. petroleum refineries, including one refinery located here in Salt Lake City.

I believe that individuals in Salt Lake see the priceless beauty and natural treasure that our wild lands are. I think that our land relation today is one that is of growing awareness and appreciation. I do not see the land as an equal is some aspects; just as I do not see my dog as an equal. To illustrate what I mean by this example, is that my dog does not have a voice (barking, ‘snarfing’ and whining do not count); she cannot protest with a sign, vote or hold a job. It is my responsibility to see to her safety, health and security because I choose to include her in my life and as such I choose to be responsible for her. She is my friend of infinite value and I am hers. The difference between her and the land is that the land will be here after her, me, after others, and its state and well-being are intricately linked to my state of well-being and for many others. It is in humanities interest, not just in humanities responsibility, to see to the security of protecting the interests of the earth we live on as it is essential for our own short and long term well-being.

Considering the statement “A land ethic changes the role of humans from conqueror of the land community to plain members and citizens of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such.” To apply this philosophy there must be a plan crafted individually as each society has many aspects and factors that must be considered in order to obtain success because, for example, the issues of Oregon have little to do with the issues in Alabama. Our book ‘Conversation Biology’ uses the example of local and national governments focusing on the conservation of native sea turtles (Primack 2006). Using an approach that combines continuous local education with economic possibilities, such as selling conservation as a tourist’s point of interest (and disposable income) resulted in a win-win for turtles and people.

Leopold feels that all creatures and plants are members of a biotic community. Near the closing of his essay, “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.” He suggests that land no longer be viewed only from an economic stand point but also in terms of what is “Ethically and esthetically right”. A complication is that what I find appealing (esthetically), and right (ethically), another may not. This is why national, state and local parks, reserves and forests are such a success. They preserve what ***is*** and do so with an educated staff. In addition wild lands attract a significant volume of visitors every year. If they were better managed I think we could see a profit on the visitor paid fees, camping due, hiking passes, car passes, etc. that are collected from those that patron protected spaces. These dues are in addition to significant tax payer funding.

Leopold also states his stance that it is “inconceivable to me that an ethical relationship [with land] can exist without love, respect, admiration, and a high regard for its value.” (‘The Land Ethic, Pg. 224-225) To answer the question of which is more motivating for me, beauty of duty, is a nearly impossible as I view the two as inseparable in regards to land. The land is beautiful, from it I came and to it I will return. The earth is my mother; she can be tyrannical and temperamental as well as giving and welcoming. Returning to the example of my dog, I am responsible for her safety and health. I think of the land the same way, I am responsible for the planet’s safety and health.

The last point we were asked to consider is if our “land ethic” emanates primarily from self-interest or from a true interest in non-human elements. I understand the feeling of empathy and sympathy and the differences between. Self-interest is motivating and important to me because without self-interest in a topic I know I could lose interest. My relationship with the land and the mountains here and with the swamps, wetlands and forests I grew up with, is a relationship of self-interest. The land is my life line to sanity sometimes. On a nasty day in January this coming winter I know that as I sit in my car, frozen in dress pants, stuck on concrete in traffic, under two layers of socks, my toes will be painted bright blue. They will be the brightest blue I own to remind me that up in the mountains, there are clear blue skies.

“The Land Ethic” summarized the need for a change in our society’s relationship with the planet we live on. I found it is presented useful arguments. The example I related to most was calling for the need for “an extension of ethics” (‘The Land Ethic, Pg. 202) and calling that an ‘evolution’. Not very many years ago, human existence was a fragile thread. Now we are a dominant feature on the planet. Yearly hurricanes and diseases take only fractions of us and I think it is time to re-evaluate our role as a whole. Individuals have already begun the needed research. America is a very young country and because of the efforts of motivated conservationists, we have a significant amount land preserved compared to older and more developed countries. America is also relatively wealthy and most citizens are not rampantly burning forests for firewood, pasture and livestock. While the reading did not change my opinions it did offer a valuable and different way of thinking about the ones I have.

A point in the paper I disagreed with was, “When the private landowner is asked to perform some unprofitable act for the good of community, he today assents only with outstretched palm…” (‘The Land Ethic, Pg. 213). Some of the best and most efficiently run organizations are private. Government run organizations seem to always be broke and on the verge of financial collapse. Prices constantly go up, more taxes are allocated and next year it will be more of the same.

Private landowners control “approximately 60 percent of the land base and 80 percent of the wildlife in the 48 contiguous states” (Stanfield, 2000). Stanfield goes on to suggest that “without the cooperation of the private sector, public parks and wildlife refuges will become island ecosystems… lands will be in jeopardy.” In addition, “Another problem for conservation is that wildlife is considered common property.” According to Robert J. Smith of the Center for Private Conservation, public ownership results in overexploitation of the land's natural resources, while private ownership results in sustainable use and preservation (Stanfield, 2000).

I would recommend this reading to other students while adding other reading that have the same argument of needed conservation but include the many dedicated efforts made by businesses, private companies and individuals.

References

* Bonanno, A., Constance, D., 2000, ‘Great tuna fish sandwich hunt…’ CBS Interactive Business Network, Retrieved September 13, 2011; <http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0JQP/is_325/ai_30327709/>
* Kettering, Jana, December 12, 2010, Kennecott New release, Retrieved August 31, 2011; <http://www.kennecott.com/library/media/KUC%20power%20plant%20proposed%20upgrade%20NR.PDF>
* Mosakowski, T., ‘Garbage patch of the Pacific’: March 25, 2008, Natural News.com, Retrieved August 31, 2011; <http://www.naturalnews.com/022885.html>
* n.a., October 16, 2003, Chevron EPA agreement US Dept of Justice Release, Retrieved September 9, 2011; <http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/2003/October/03_enrd_575.htm>
* n.a., n.d., Inventory-Strategies, Retrieved September 13, 2011; <http://www.inventor-strategies.com/invention-of-automobile.html>
* n.a., n.d. Earth Island, Retrieved September 13, 201; <http://www.earthisland.org/dolphinSafeTuna/consumer/>
* Primack, Richard B., Essentials of Conservation Biology, Fourth Edition, ‘A Case Study of Sea Turtle’ Chapter One Pg 7-9. 2006. Print.
* Stanfield, Cynthia, August 31, 2000, ‘Private Wildlife Conservation’ <http://www.ncpa.org/pub/ba338>
* Stettler, J., ‘[Salt Lake County to roll out weekly curbside recycling’,](http://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=16762873&itype=storyID&keyword=recycling&sdate=2010-09-06&edate=2011-09-06&qtype=all) August 28, 2011, The Salt Lake Tribune, Retrieved August 28, 2011; <http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/politics/52456282-90/recycling-county-percent-curbside.html.csp>

**Reflection Paper Grading Rubric**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Assignment**  **Objective/Criteria** | **Performance Indicators** | | | | **Total Pts.** |
| **No Credit** | **Meets Less than Expectations** | **Meets Expectations** | **Exceptional** |
| Reflection Paper  Summary | (0 pts)  Did not complete | (5 pts)  Did not provide good synthesis of article | (10 pts)  Provided required synthesis | (15 pts)  Exceeded synthesis expectations | 15 |
| Question Responses | (0 pts)  Did not complete | (5 pts)  Did not provide good thoughtful answers to questions | (10 pts)  Provided required responses | (15 pts)  Exceeded synthesis expectations | 15 |
| Reflection Paper  Reflection | (0 pts)  Did not complete | (2 pts)  Did not provide good, thoughtful, respectful ideas and opinions | (3 pts)  Provided minimum required opinion | (5pts)  Provided good, respectful and well thought out refection | 5 |
| Posted on ePortfolio | (0 pts)  Did not post |  |  | (5 pts)  Posted on ePortfolio | 5 |
| Total Possible |  |  |  |  | 40 pts |