

Nature is, for us, a backdrop, a frame for our lives, a site to relax, recreate and develop an acceptable milieu. She is, for all, a refuge and resource, held hostage to a process that may eventually force her to fade, and all but vanish. This is nature, accepted from most ancient times as our common mother, utilized, some would say exploited, by a host of product oriented group, responding to real and perceived needs. One and all, developers, policy makers, politicians, operate under a soothing and seemingly harmless term, - multiple use.

To doubters, tree huggers and greens, the concept is questionable and fraught with eventual disaster. Present and future degradation of lake and streams is a lamentable and predictable fact. Forests and wetlands, indeed all natural systems are under continual threat. There's no restricting this pattern. Many of us wonder—what's nature for but to use. Read on.

To mother nature, modern society proclaims no quarter whether it be a forest set up for mowing, expanding a resort area, with continued overloading of lakes and streams, or on-going urbanization. A specter hovers over every forest and field; today productive farm, or fine forest. Tomorrow chainsaws whine or dozers and earthmovers grind away. Forest and topsoil is stripped and low spots leveled.

I saw a subdivision recently on the margin of a rapidly expanding city. Centuries of soil became silt, boiling down a ditch. Tree trunks were strewn over what would be roads. The horizon had vanished—it's all big, blocky houses. And so the advance, block after block, in unrelenting progression. A new four lane highway will allow for swift and safe traffic interchange. There's no end in sight for a process that by 2000 could dis-establish some of the most remote rural areas, and distant wilderness. Thus nature is convulsed throughout the temperate world.

It seems hopeless and out of step to ponder: in this world wide denouement what of wild trees and shrubs, herbs and grasses. What of butterflies, beetles, spiders. Or forests, out of nature's hand, rather than a well programmed computer. There's so much at stake- warblers, monarch

butterflies, darner dragonflies, viburnums, hawthorns, everyone will have their own list. All are now, and if not now, then later, squarely in the path of a developers or managers dream. Is there a choice- of must we all bow before the graven image-Progress.

Or perhaps, the word can be expanded to include more important values. There's a term, already in use, with startling implications. Its biodiversity, the anti-word to all this havoc. It sounds formidable, evoking researchers brandishing lists of plants and animals, laced into a complex network, namely, above-mentioned wild communities.

Biodiversity, like love, eludes simple definition, but we know and live by its results. This network furnishes us with clear, well balanced air. It generates filters and stores pure water. Here climate is established at a predictable mean. It generates soils recycling material once living into life once more, in what we can hope is an unending cycle. And in so doing, nature creates the natural landscapes we welcome and treasure. In short, biodiversity makes life possible, and for us worth living. Nature can, up to a point, adapt to our folly, and for that matter, so can we. But both, man and nature do have limits, the ultimate bottom line we face.

To grasp biodiversity we need recognize but one basic fact. Wild communities flourish in a diversity of plants and animals, related in series of interlocking patterns. That's it in a nutshell, so to speak. Trees, lets say, require mould for the extraction and transfer of nutriments from soil, built up in the vanished past by other plants. Roots, in turn, furnish a niche for mould; neither can exist without the other. All depend upon mites and tiny insects to shift and aerate the soil, just as ants and earthworms prepared the seedling site. Rainfall may have originated in a distant forest or sea, which in turn benefitted from other forests in nature's interlocking system.

Society must recognize this, and here's where we come in. "We" is not restricted to concerned resource people and academics. It includes all who, with field glass, and butterfly nets, bird and flower guides at hand, appreciating rocks and soil, pay attention to components making up these biotas. This is humanities support system- the history, present and future of all life. No equipment and books are required—you need only to be aware.

Once, long ago, in late summer, I met a man on a woods road in the U.P. He recognized me and recalled a column in the local paper. *"Remember that article on ambush bugs. You wrote - watch for the black specks tucked into goldenrod sprays. Gave it a try, couldn't find a thing. Then suddenly, a black speck! I pried the flowers apart, and saw the damdest bug you could imagine."* A most proper description of the ambush bug. Phymatus. I'll not extract a moral here, but our lives were enriched by this bit of information. Nature, we can say, is loaded, no matter what the situation.

So then let us ecofreaks, activists, those who research and teach these values in K-12, college and beyond, plus we who pay attention, observe, and perhaps, jot down a note or two, take a modest bow. We do indeed, at least figuratively, hug trees, respond to spotted owls, as we are said to, along with a host of other creatures. It's reasonable, considering alternatives, that man's future, minus our values is in doubt. In this sense we are the world's best hope. Let us, for humankind and the future, raise binocs, butterfly nets, and field guides on high. We are indeed a motley group, and no right thinking person would mistake us for an army. But we do pay attention, bear witness and sometimes fight—for owls, say, plus forests and wetlands—mankind's future.

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