The Land Remembers

In 2008, I wrote a poem “the land remembers” after reading a book of the same name by Ben Logan. Logan’s book told the story of a farm family in Wisconsin and how the members of that family partnered with the land so that both land and family would prosper.

In 2013, I began my first year as a member of the Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC). When reviewing grant proposals for funding, the guiding phrase is “restore, protect, and enhance Minnesota's wetlands, prairies, forests, and habitat for fish, game, and wildlife”.

Most recently, I acquired “Green Fire”, a two-DVD set about “Aldo Leopold and a Land Ethic for our Time”.

These three events helped clarify my philosophy on how to be a better steward of the land, on how to create positive connections to the natural world. Combined with my years in education, and as a farmer and lover of the land and all that inhabit it, I have penned some thoughts to share. You may or may not agree with them, but hopefully, the discussion they promote will make a positive difference in how we treat the land.

**Start Young.** It takes a lifetime of learning, of being outdoors and interacting with the natural world, to understand the complexities of the system and how simple decisions can have positive or negative results.

**Be Inclusive.** All people of all ages, cultures and backgrounds, enjoy the outdoors. Although some may prefer indoors to out, nearly everyone will respond positively to friends, teachers, and family who ask them to join them in an outdoor activity.

**Do Something Valuable.** Everyone wants to make a difference, to be engaged in an activity that has a positive and tangible result. Bring in the young and old, experienced and not, to places and projects where they can impact the future and see the results of their labor.

**Be the Future.** No matter what age you are, walk the walk, model what you want the future generation to look and act like. Everyone, not just young people, learn how to act by watching and listening to those around them. Preach one thing and do another means you lose trust and the ability to work together in the future.

**No Exceptions.** There is a time to draw a line, to say “no, that is not good for the land”. Whether it is enforcing environmental rules, following best practices, or following your heart, you have to take a stand when you know the path being taken has a negative effect.

**Go One Step Farther.** Blaming others for actions that destroy the natural environment is commonplace. Research, find out the facts, clearly define the problem, talk to those more closely involved, and then bring the issue to the attention of those in authority. Continue up the ladder until you get the attention of somebody who will listen and help.

**Think Globally, Act Locally.** When viewed on a global scale, environmental problems, such as water quality, overwhelm us and make us think that only large-scale governmental efforts or international conservation organizations can tackle them. Look for those problems close to home where you can make a difference, do some fact finding, and engage your local community and schools into tackling them.

**Build Local Capacity.** Whether land is in the hands of governmental agencies, private parties, or corporations, it needs good stewards. Everyone is a consumer and, by purchasing decisions, determines what products are taken from and thrown back onto the land. All adults have the voting power to put good land stewards into office.

If I had to summarize and leave one message with you, it would be the last one. Building capacity in present and future generations so that they know what healthy land looks like and have the desire and skills to keep it that way, is the critical component in “protecting, enhancing, and restoring”, in creating an enduring “land ethic”, and in becoming “partners” with the land. To build that capacity will require collaboration between state agencies, school systems, outdoor organizations, and community members. If we could do that (and we can), just think of the legacy we will leave. After twenty years, when Outdoor Heritage funding from the sales tax is over, Minnesotans could say “thank you for all the good work, we feel ready to take it from here”.

