



Understanding  
obstacles & pathways  
to sustainability  
through nature-  
relatedness

**WHAT IS MORE EFFECTIVE?**

**Does having more money or  
more trees on your block  
help improve your health?**

**WHAT DO YOU THINK?**



People feel better and have fewer health problems when there are more trees on their street.

Having on average 10 more trees in a city block =  
comparable to an increase in annual income of \$10,000;  
or moving to a neighborhood with \$10,000 higher median income;  
or being seven years younger.



Mental and physical health problems including hypertension, recovery rates, depression, anxiety and addiction, and symptoms associated with other conditions such as cancer, migraines, arthritis, or asthma can also be mitigated by being in green space.

However, green spaces must be accompanied by a field of care – urban/suburban projects often have lawns and trees, but can be isolated and dangerous places if there is no field of care – i.e. an active social fabric in place.

Whether or not there is a direct impact that trees have on human health – or whether the link is merely correlative —in real life, most things happen both ways and in combination with one another.

People love being in the outdoors.

*DO YOU?*

*HOW DOES IT MAKE YOU FEEL?*



The most intrepid visitors to Everglades National Park can travel the 99-mile Wilderness Waterway. It's an 8-day adventure.

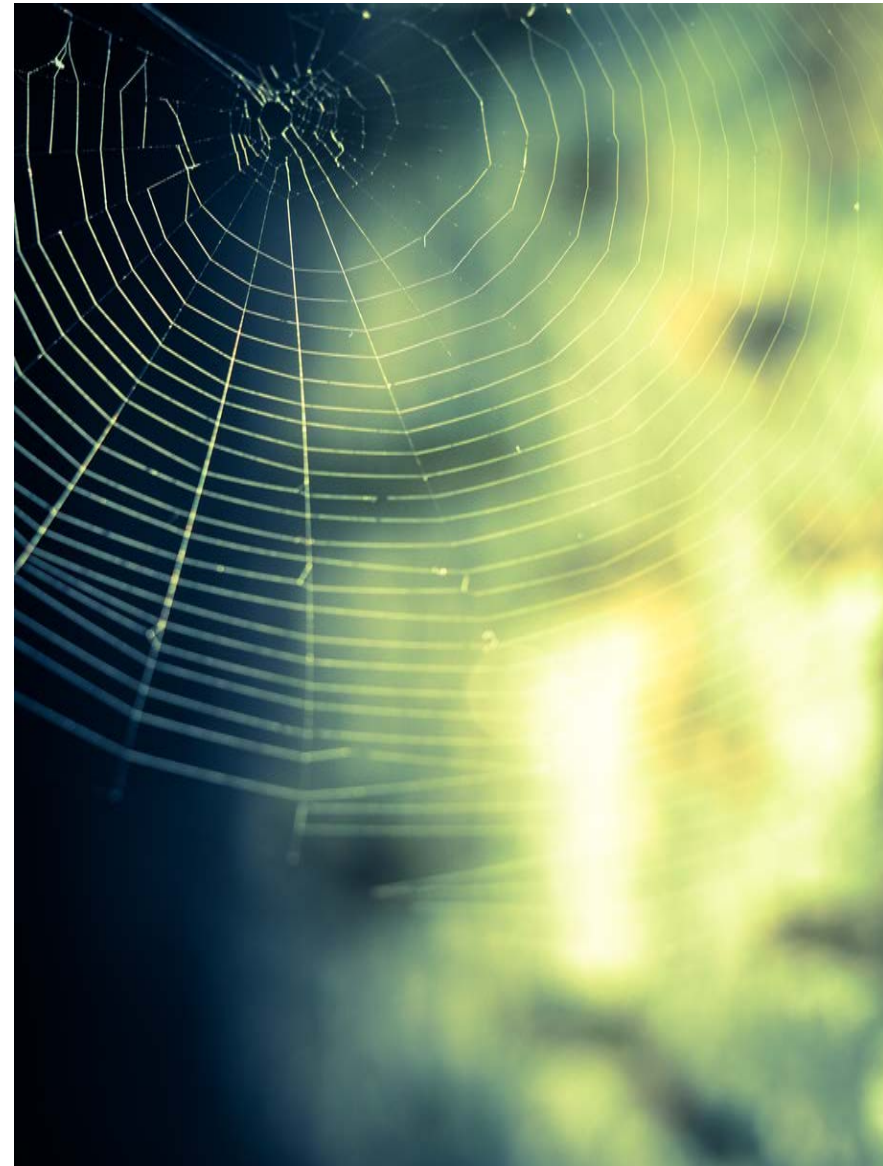
Globally, an estimated 8 billion visits are made annually to natural protected areas, that's more than the total global population.

Neoliberal commodification of nature has intensified.

*What does this mean?*

Privatization (of the Commons)

Recreational experiences have become more exclusive – are marketed as “ecotourism” (corporatized language).



The Center for Responsible Travel defines ecotourism as “**Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, socially and economically sustains the well-being of local people, and creates knowledge and understanding through interpretation and education of all involved (including staff, travelers, and community residents).**”

To be somewhat socially responsible and consumption-aware, Ecotourism should be sensitive to:

Environmentally:

Planning & Carbon footprint *IN SITU* / *EX SITU*  
(buildings / roads / transport / accessibility)

Sustainably sourced (recycled/upcycled materials)

Sanitation

Numbers visited

Habitat lost or disturbed

Socially:

Ethical form of income generation

Locally owned and operated

Circular economy

Inclusive and controlled by local stakeholders

**SOUND GOOD?**

SOURCE: [sustainabletourism.net](http://sustainabletourism.net)

## Walk Tasmania



source: [EcoTrek Tasmania](http://EcoTrek Tasmania)

Tasmania, the isolated island-state that lies south of mainland Australia, has some strikingly beautiful multi-day coastal hikes. [www.ecotrek.com.au](http://www.ecotrek.com.au) is an operator with a sustainable and community focus that can take you to discover the trails of Tasmania. Provided that you stick to the trails and leave nothing behind, hiking is a great sustainable way to familiarize yourself with a new place while keeping your carbon footprint down.

## Rafting in the Grand Canyon



source: [EcoTrek](http://EcoTrek)

Viewing the Grand Canyon from above is one thing, but rafting along those striking red rock walls makes for an adventure you'll never forget. [www.ecotrek.com.au](http://www.ecotrek.com.au), a major rafting operator in the canyon, is involved in researching non-fossil fuel propulsion systems and also supports the Grand Canyon conservation fund.



### **HOW?**

Carbon/Water/Ecological Footprints

(local to global flows travel miles / accessibility / resources / goods / people)

The commodification of nature as an eco-tourism experience, brings together the global and local, interconnected and dispersed.

Long-mile 'getaways', lived out in compressed time are an environmental nightmare.

Countless private eco-resorts rely on the privatization of the Commons to operate.

They are exclusive, extraordinarily expensive, and rarely materially non-consumptive.

They typically exasperate resource scarcity and environmental instability and are predicated on maximising economic growth.

Many exasperate economic stress on local communities.

They are rarely owned by local communities, but exploit local labor and resources to operate.

Nor are economic profits locally circulated - but are channeled away and directly into a form of private wealth concentration.



*Escape to an (un)spoiled world*  
— And discover a new kind of all-inclusive luxury

Club Med Michès Playa Esmeralda is a brand-new all-inclusive resort that's out of the ordinary in every way. Situated along the Dominican Republic's pristine north shore in an area with limited tourist development, this strikingly beautiful property balances nature preservation efforts with exclusive experiences. It's a stunning, **eco-chic resort** featuring four boutique villages that rewards romantics, adventurers and wellness seekers with personalized attention and an unparalleled escape from the everyday.



Club Med is owned by the Chinese conglomerate Fosun International, which posted a US\$ 93.1 billion net worth and US\$16.5 billion profit in 2018.

SOURCE: Fosun 2018 annual report.



The Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village is certified Green Lodging by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.



Launched in 2004, the Florida *Green Lodging* Program is an initiative of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) that designates and recognizes lodging facilities that make a voluntary commitment to conserve and protect Florida's natural resources. The program's environmental guidelines enable the hospitality industry to evaluate operations, set goals and take specific actions to continuously improve environmental performance.

The Florida Green Lodging Program is administered primarily online. To become designated, facilities must conduct a thorough property assessment and implement a specified number of environmental practices in five areas of sustainable operations:

- Communication and Education (Customers, Employees, Public)
- Waste Reduction, Reuse and Recycling
- Water Conservation
- Energy Efficiency
- Indoor Air Quality

**AT A GLANCE, WOULD YOU CONSIDER THIS  
ECORESORT AN ETHICAL ENTERPRISE THAT MEETS  
THE TRIPLE BOTTOM LINE OF SUSTAINABILITY?**

## The Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village

5951 Silver King Blvd Cape Coral, Florida 33914



### The Westin Cape Coral Resort Summary

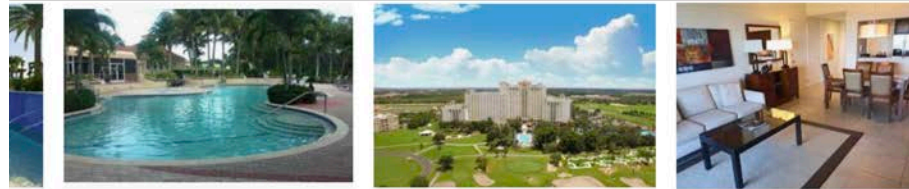
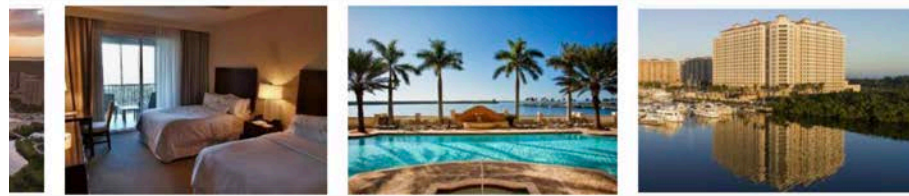
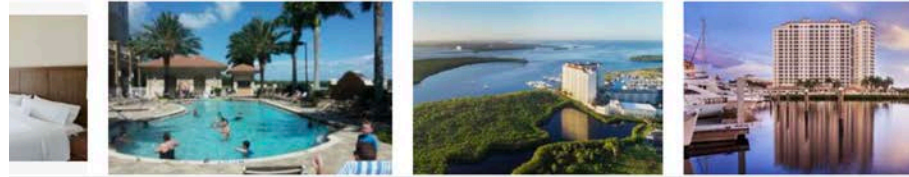
The Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village offers you stunning views of the Gulf of Mexico, Caloosahatchee River and Tarpon Point Marina. Whether you're looking for a small traditional room or an expansive three-bedroom suite, you're sure to find a comfortable place to stay. Even better, on site you will find two dining options, three heated pools, a full-service spa & salon, Tarpon Point Marina, The Promenade Shops, Westin Family Kids Club, and much more.

It is a luxury ecoresort with a 30,000 square foot meeting and events center a marina and a recently expanded marina. The parent company of the Westin Cape Coral is Starwood Hotels and Resorts Worldwide, LLC - a subsidiary of Marriott International (acquired 2016).

Starwood Hotels was one of the largest companies that owned, operated, franchised and managed hotels, resorts, spas, residences, and vacation ownership properties. It had 11 brands and owned, managed, or franchised 1,297 properties comprising 370,000 hotel rooms in approximately 100 countries.

- BOTH COMPANIES HAVE NUMEROUS LABOR, TELECOMMUNICATIONS, PRICE-FIXING, ENVIRONMENTAL, CONSUMER PROTECTION, DISCRIMINATORY PRACTICES VIOLATIONS
- This has resulted in the companies being fined almost \$20 million since 2000.

<https://violationtracker.goodjobsfirst.org/parent/marriott-international>



WHAT ABOUT ECO-TOURISM IN PUBLIC LANDS  
SUCH AS NATIONAL PARKS? ANY BETTER?



Yellowstone National Park

The 417 national park sites in the US are being taxed to the limit by an ever-growing visitor population.

Millions of people...hundreds of thousands of vehicles...tons of trash... increasing need for sanitary services...is changing the experience a national park “getaway” once offered.

*“More than 300 million people visited the nation’s national parks last year and millions more visited state parks, wildlife refuges, and federally designated wilderness areas. Land managers say they welcome and want people to visit, enjoy, and cherish these special places — although managing the human impacts on these protected areas is a challenge — especially during an era of reduced federal funding.”*

Sharon Sullivan (2018) *Are We Loving Our Public Lands to Death*, Moab Sun News.



**UNLIMITED NUMBERS OF VISITORS TO NPS PRODUCE A TREMENDOUS BURDEN ON INFRASTRUCTURE AND CREATE ENORMOUS STRESS FOR WILDLIFE.**

# A DWINDLING BUDGET

The National Park Service's already has a \$12 billion gap needed to fix aging infrastructure that needs fixing (like outdated buildings and crumbling roads & bridges).

The 2020 budget provides just under \$300 million towards these projects.



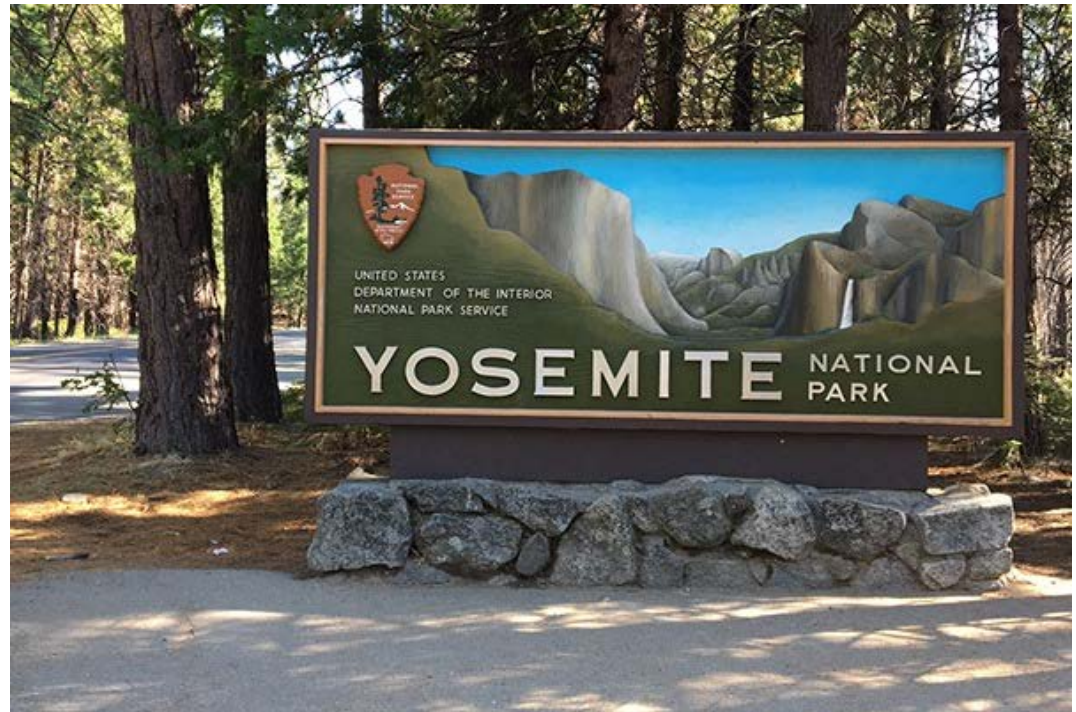
## A PRIVATIZATION PUSH

Private hospitality companies that operate visitor services in national parks are pushing the Trump administration to outsource more to the private sector - to privatize campgrounds, fee collection and other services at parks.

Behind the privatization campaign is the hospitality industry. It is led in part by big food-service corporations like Aramark Corp. (revenue \$14.6 billion, 2017).

*Is privatization of services a sustainable idea?*

*Would it take the pressure off NPS resources?*





### GROSS OUT FACTOID

One of the biggest Aramark scandals include several offenses where the company has been reported to serve maggot-infested food.

Aramark is the corporation leading the privatization charge.

It is one of a handful of companies that dominate the food service industry (it also has contracts for several prisons).

It has a track record filled with controversies over its contracting practices and labor policies.

- SOURCE: <https://www.corp-research.org/aramark>

Another large NPS private contractor pushing for more outsourcing of is Delaware North.

In 2016, the company lost its concession contract for Yosemite National Park (to Aramark).

As a result, the company asserted its trademark ownership over the park's logo and many uses of the park's name.

Consequently, T-shirts bearing the phrase "Yosemite National Park" were no longer allowed to be sold in park gift shops, and the NPS spent \$1.7 million dollars changing signs and logos across the park.\*

Sarah Kaplan, "A private company trademarked the phrase 'Yosemite National Park.' Should the U.S. pay to get it back?", The Washington Post, March 21, 2016, available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2016/03/21/a-private-company-trademarked-the-phrase-yosemite-national-park-should-the-u-s-pay-to-get-it-back/>.





# IN A TWIST, THE NPS PAYS CONCESSIONERS

INSTEAD OF THE GOVERNMENT PAYING THE CONTRACTORS AN AGREED AMOUNT FOR THE SERVICES THEY PROVIDE (like a normal contract), THE CONTRACTORS GIVE AN 8% OF EARNINGS TO THE NPS.



Further, laws such as the *Leasehold Surrender Interest* (LSI) undermine the system.

For example, under the LSI, if a concessioner installs a fire suppression system, it is entitled to financial compensation for that property at the conclusion of its concession contract.

*As a result, there is an estimated half-a-billion-dollars of obligations owed by the NPS to concessionaires who run lodges, restaurants, and even activities.*

**This requires the agency to divert tens of millions of dollars from some parks to others to reduce debts in others:**

Grand Teton NP in Wyoming - \$57 million;

Glacier NP in Montana - \$22 million;

Grand Canyon NP in Arizona - nearly \$100 million

Yellowstone NP - \$21.5 million.

SOURCE: National Parks Traveler

<https://www.nationalparkstraveler.org/2015/03/national-park-service-sitting-half-billion-dollars-concessions-obligations26283>

Despite a multi-billion dollar tourism industry, for people living in the US, time spent experiencing natural space has become extraordinarily condensed, with many people spending almost no time a week in a natural environment.

As well, cultural attachments to space are becoming more mediated and less viscerally experiential.

The result is a lack of physical, lived experience with the non-human world, social segregation, and few value interactions with people of difference.

Loadenthal and Rekow, From Environmental Loss to Resistance, Umass Press, 2020



***DO NATURE-RELATED EXPERIENCES BENEFIT OUR PERSONAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING?***

**YES, THEY DO.**

**JUST 5 MINUTES IN A GARDEN,  
OR EVEN A VIEW OF A  
GARDEN, CAN HELP REDUCE  
HYPERTENSION AND ELEVATE  
MOOD.**

- Roger S. Ulrich, Ph.D. Center for Health Systems and Design, Colleges of Architecture and Medicine, Texas A & M University

*So, could spending time in natural scenery (or even mediated visualizations of natural scenery) have larger positive implications for how we behave politically, or how we treat one another?*



## ACCORDING TO ONE STUDY, YES!

*John M. Zelenski, Raelyne L. Dopko, Colin A. Capaldi,  
Cooperation is in our nature: Nature exposure may  
promote cooperative and environmentally sustainable  
behavior, Journal of Environmental Psychology, Volume  
42, 2015, Pages 24-31.*

In the study, the researchers wanted to test the idea that there's a link between experiencing the natural world and behaving in a sustainable way.



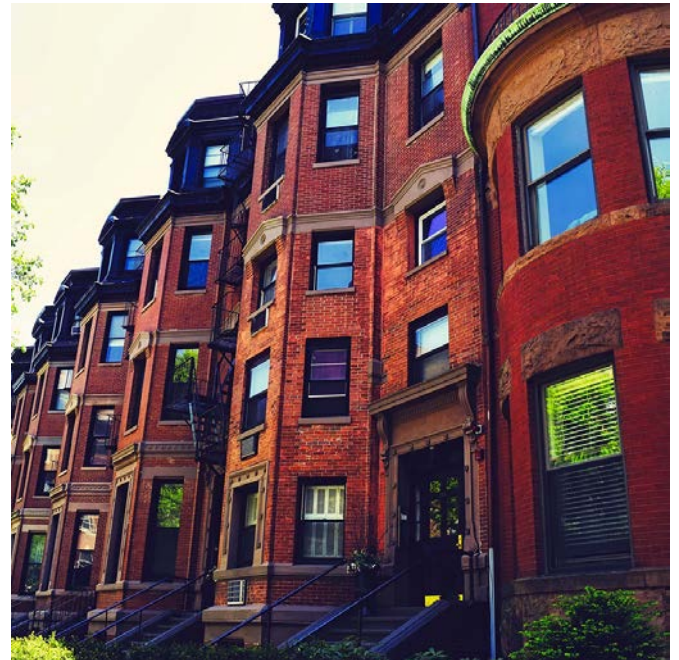
They set up a series of experiments where two groups of participants watched short videos:

One was a nature video, BBC's Planet Earth

The other was of NYC architecture.

Then they played a game they called the "fish-themed Commons dilemma," where each group had to decide how to fish over the course of a number of fishing "seasons."

***What do you think happened?***



Those who had watched the nature video worked together more cooperatively and “harvested significantly fewer fish per season.” Moreover, the virtual oceans in which they fished supported sustainable fishing for longer.

In contrast, those who watched the architecture video harvested more fish early on, going for the money, and crashing the “ecosystem” as fast as they could.

AFTER 15 “SEASONS”:

Participants who watched the architecture video ‘fished’, 49.09% of the oceans to extinction.

compared to  
28.57% of those that watched the nature videos.


Researchers then modified the study, changing the nature video to include natural disasters. Interestingly...

***The effects were the same and did not depend on the degree of the ‘pleasantness’ of the nature video.***





Given what we know about people's responses to nature imagery, using nature-focused messages, rather than economic or national security framings, may help to advance cooperative action.



Another study shows that the frequency of time spent in nature correlates to an increase in environmental concerns and behaviors.

Elizabeth K. Nisbet, John M. Zelenski, and Steven A. Murphy, "The Nature Relatedness Scale: Linking Individuals' Connection with Nature to Environmental Concern and Behavior," *Environment and Behavior* 41, no. 5 (September 1, 2009): 715–40, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013916508318748>.





E.O. Wilson defines **biophilia** as "the urge to affiliate with other forms of life".

Edward O. Wilson, *Biophilia* (1984).

His *biophilia hypothesis* suggests that we have evolved in natural environments and, thus, they still support optimal human functioning.

This thinking echoes Indigenous worldviews.

**WE CAN CONCLUDE THAT SOCIETIES BENEFIT IN A MULTITUDE OF WAYS BY INVESTING IN NATURE.**

*How?*

# CONNECTION TO PLACE: STEWARDSHIP THRU FIELDS OF CARE



The Indigenous Kogi of the Sierra Nevada mountains, Columbia

## **Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)**

Caring for Earth as a living entity


Living mountains and rivers

Personhood law

Restoration Ecology 70/30 rule

**IT WORKS!**

Highly attuned to nature, the Kogi believe they exist to care for the world – a world they fear we are destroying.



**In this new era, is it necessary to reconceptualize the very notion of the “environment”?**

***Should we recognize Indigenous and Traditional Ecological Knowledges as legitimate forms of evidenced-based science?***

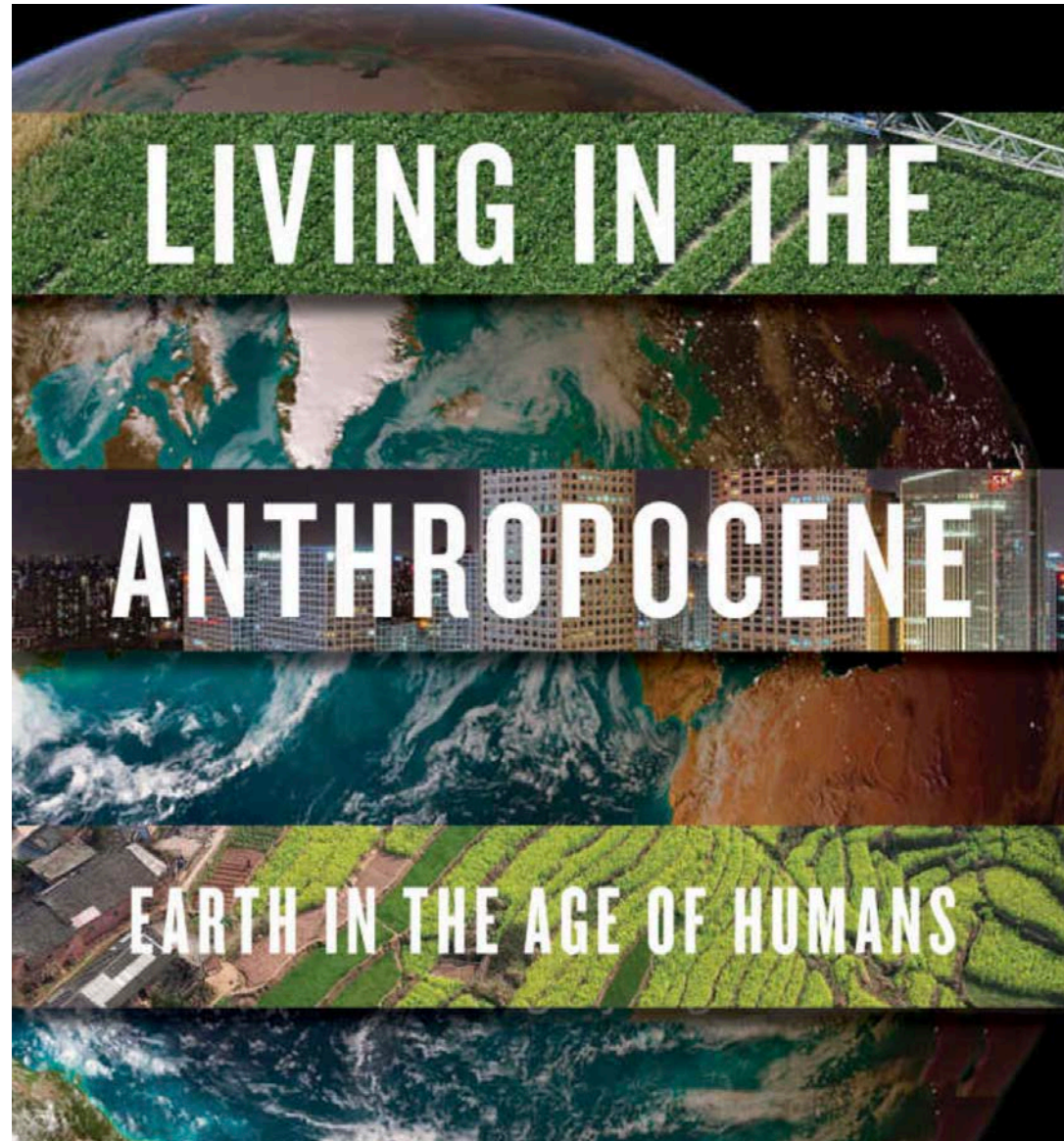
Humans are driving major changes to the planet's ecosystems.

WE ARE OVERSHOOTING THE PLANETARY BOUNDARIES and depleting the basic requirements for human and non-human life--air, water, soil, food.

These changes have become so obvious on a global scale that scientists believe we are living in a new planetary epoch - the Anthropocene.

*In this new era, do we need to change the stories & cosmologies we live by?*

*What might these be?*



A range of social theorists, activists, revolutionary thinkers, scientists, and anarchist philosophers have provided a solid groundwork from which to build sustainability frameworks around decentralism, small-scale communities, communalism, local autonomy, mutual aid, and degrowth/steady-state/post-growth economies.

None of these structures are emancipatory, or ecologically sustainable in their own right.

They are frameworks built on and stem from:

connecting with others;

commitments to social and environmental justice;

a deep affection for nature.

## FIELDS OF CARE / PEACE ECOLOGY

- Murray Bookchin, "Social Ecology versus Deep Ecology: A Challenge for the Ecology Movement," *Green Perspectives: Newsletter of the Green Program Project 4-5* (Summer 1987), [http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist\\_Archives/bookchin/soccecovdeepeco.html](http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/bookchin/soccecovdeepeco.html)
- Anne Marie Dalton, *Ecotheology and the Practice of Hope* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2011), 49.



**Do you agree or disagree...**

*that our societal systems must move beyond current dependencies on perpetual growth?*

*that we need to reconstruct power relations in order to affect positive structural changes in our societal organizations?*

- Carolyn Merchant, *Science and Nature* (New York: Routledge, 2017).



## POLARIZATION

In regard to climate change, it is people's cultural identity (rather than their knowledge of science) that determines people's opinion.

- Yale law and psychology professor Dan Kahan

These groups interpret the same information differently based on which community they identify with.

- Anthony Leiserowitz, director of the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication



*Our Children's Trust*



*Trump Administration*

There are some dimensions to bridging the perceptual gaps between the left and right that we do understand.

We understand that cultivating positive relationships to nature, or “nature relatedness,” is essential for health and well-being.

- Terry Hartig et al., “Health Benefits of Nature Experience: Psychological, Social and Cultural Processes,” in *Forests, Trees and Human Health*, ed. Kjell Nilsson et al. (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2011), 127–68, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-9806-1\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-9806-1_5); Julia Corbett, *Out of the Woods: Seeing Nature in the Everyday* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2018).

We know that integrating worst-case and best-case environmental loss and recovery narratives into one storyline is more effective than presenting either one in isolation.

- Renee Lertzman, *Environmental Melancholia: Psychoanalytic Dimensions of Engagement* (New York: Routledge, 2015).



Visual aids, telling human stories, and giving broad-stroke messages before details have been shown to be valuable communicating tools. Aside from nature imagery, the most effective imagery shows one or two people actively working to create a positive impact.



To effectively communicate using nature-relatedness, environmental narratives must be assembled to align with people's worldviews, and communicated through non-'triggering' semantics.

As our understanding of groups outside of our own grows, so too we can grow effectual awareness.

## Conservative narratives for embedding uncertain messages about climate change

The following narratives are recommended by COIN in their 2012 report, *A new conversation with the centre-right about climate change: Values, frames and narratives*.<sup>18</sup>

### *Putting the 'conserve' into conservatism*

Conservatives tend to value the aesthetic beauty of nature. Use this as a way of anchoring a wider conversation about climate risks.

"The **landscape and countryside** of our country is something we should all be proud of, and work together to protect. Over the years, we have cleaned up our rivers, banished smog from our cities, and protected our forests. Climate change poses **new dangers** to the countryside we value so much: more frequent and extreme flooding, disruption to seasonal changes, and the wildlife which depends on them. Our cities too will become congested and polluted without a shift to clean energy. So the only **responsible** course of action is to reduce the risks we face from climate change."

Climate policies may seem to threaten the 'status quo', which is a key centre-right concern. But climate impacts are more of a threat.

Being responsible and risk-averse is something most centre-right citizens are likely to endorse.

# Integrating (reconciling) narratives

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(rather than presenting one POV in isolation)

## *A safe, secure and healthy future*

Many people are proud of the industrial revolution and all it has achieved. Rather than demonise it, recognise it – and the new opportunities offered by renewables.

“During the **industrial revolution** we built our countries using our natural resources — coal, oil and gas — and we led the world into a new, prosperous era. But we are also rich in the natural resources that will meet the challenges of the 21st century: clean technologies that won’t damage our health or spoil our environment. To keep the lights on, we must make ourselves more **resilient**: our future security rests on renewable energy sources that will never run out, and will provide safe, secure, long-term jobs and opportunities for engineers, labourers, technicians, scientists and tradespeople.”

Resilience and security are core centre-right values.

*Do you think nature-relatedness is foundational to helping us achieve a more sustainable future?*

ARE YOU PAYING ATTENTION TO THE INTENTION YOU SET?

