

Introductory Remarks to CLASS – July, 2006  
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Thank you for the privilege of addressing this distinguished group. You all share a unique and extremely important responsibility in caring for school and institutional trust lands.

The existential and emotional weight and charge of your particularly critical mission in support of our beloved children's education and protecting our beloved natural endowment places you in a position of great potential influence. That influence will be critical – indeed, possibly the determining factor – in deciding the future of children and nature in the West and in the nation.

Outside the entirely unacceptable concepts of greed and unbridled commercial exploitation of natural resources with which the West, the nation and the world have abundant experience – certainly enough to reject heedless exploitation as catastrophically unsustainable – there are basically two very divergent views of nature and the future.

To make this very clear, let me explore the history of human use of nature in America somewhat. The early European settlers in the West were strangers in a strange land. It was unlike anything they or their ancestors had encountered. The real boundary of the New World was the western edge of the tall grass prairies. As in the East it was a land occupied and extensively managed by other humans for thousands of years. Northern Europe particularly – possessed a climate which was in many ways forgiving of alteration and even misuse by agricultural peoples. Plant and animal communities in Europe did change in response to almost ubiquitous overgrazing and deforestation. But alternate – quite stable states with grazing tolerant native species replaced the more forest based ones. These outcomes seemed good to people at risk of starvation. Crop rotations including long periods as grazing land

maintained fertility and productivity. The climate was and is moist – seeds readily germinated – seedlings survived in high numbers.

When the people came to Eastern North America they encountered lands so similar in ecological functioning and even species identity that they called them by names like Nova Scotia (New Scotland), New England, New Holland, New Amsterdam, and New York.

Most never had any idea that the so called “virgin wilderness” they were seizing and using, prior to the later industrial exploitation, was an almost entirely humanized landscape created by many generations of Native Americans agriculture and proto-agricultural management. The “Indians” created the paradise the colonists encountered. They selected the plants and animals, they changed the landscapes, and they produced what they required to support their economies and ways of life.

The land the Colonists encountered was filled with a fabulous abundance of wildlife. It was extraordinarily, magnificently beautiful and survival friendly to those who understood it.

There were so many fish in the streams and lakes, so many nuts and berries and other fruits, surely the Colonist imagined, this was Eden, a spontaneously and naturally generated paradise. Much of it was park-like and open. People could race horses and drive wagons, carriages and sleds through eastern forests. Try that now.

Since the sunlight reached the ground frequently, soils were benefited by both grass roots and leaf falls. Home, subsistence and local trade based (not plantation based) Colonial agriculture prospered sustainably in these soils. Even when they replaced the forest, it was often with large acreages of orchards which functioned as grassy forestlands. They preserved forest areas and woodlots. Fields of grain and pastureland were treated as meadows by wildlife. Much acreage was dedicated to hay production and

grazing in an animal powered society and these animal wastes maintained fertility. Amish agriculture, (the most financially prosperous segment of U.S. Agriculture) continued from that time to the present, proves the prosperity and sustainability of these practices.

In its best and most thoughtful, conscious forms home based European agriculture blended into Native American Agriculture and proto-agriculture in the Colonial period and for a while thereafter. The (again so-called) wilderness Thoreau extolled in “Walden” was humanized. This tradition diverges from the culture of greed and thoughtless exploitation. It gave rise to American environmentalism and American expectations and beliefs about nature. Innocently combined with concepts and claims of real estate boosters and emigration recruiters in Europe and America created to sell land and get commissions, this cultural inheritance further innocently combined with similar half-accurate glorified and often completely erroneous additions by Romantic philosophers, transcendental philosophers and poets, novelists and painters.

These thinkers were now separated from the knowledge of the Native American management of and profound changes in nature by generations of settled life. Nature, raw nature, was something with which even their colonial ancestors had little if any experience. Not coincidentally, in those days, individually, most Americans were rich by European standards.

These romanticized and inexperienced nature lovers were then confronted with egregious and destructive industrial exploitation of nature. Vast woodlands were cut down to fuel steel production and provide lumber. The exploitation of human lives in wage – slave urban factories and chattel slave, industrial, world trade based plantations combined concepts of heartlessness and acted on

resources the exploiters, conveniently claiming to believe the boosters slogans, thought resilient and unlimited.

The pain of this ugliness, waste and destruction properly outraged those who loved nature. Very little was actually done to save nature until the time of Gifford Pinchot, Theodore Roosevelt (contemporaries of John Muir, whose ideas were also gaining prominence).

By that time the frontier had passed beyond the Europe-cognitive ecological areas – past even the parts of the plains corresponding to Polish and Russian steppes and into lands that have no like in Europe or the eastern U.S. Even the well intended made disastrous culturally based blunders by expecting these seasonal rainfall lands to function and respond like Europe.

The exploiters followed the railroads. Chemical and mechanical science outgrew experience and moral judgment and more destruction continued. It was a time of imperialism and petty imperialism. Everyone wanted to be king.

When stating that everyone (with some exceptions) wanted to be king – the statement purposely includes the proletarian revolutionaries acting to pull down monarchies. The Marxist/Leninist/Socialist leaders and activists set up industrial and imperial power structures and behaved in ways indistinguishable by the masses and nature from the prior industrial and political imperialism. Nature and the populace were killed off with industrial efficiency, wars raged internally and with other nations.

Individual activists could (and can) feel imbued with the powers of empire by tyrannizing “counterrevolutionaries” in a compromised morality which deadens individual conscience and responsibility as part of a sloganized mass movement of competitive ruthlessness.

There is a powerful human longing to be liberated from the errors of the past. Especially, many of us wish to be liberated from the imperialism imbedded in mass propagandized education, imperial industrialism, mass politics, mass marketing, the mass and elite cultures of science-as-religion and the mass and elite cultures of environmentalism-as-religion.

All this leads to a story: I call it Leaping to a Conclusion.

My Navajo Niece Kathryn Jim, told me she was with a group of other young Navajo's at Slide Rock, north of Sedona, Arizona in Oak Creek Canyon (near where they recently had a wildfire that made national news).

Contrary to Navajo cultural tradition, two boys were drunk and showing off for the girls. The girls thought they were acting like idiots and begged one of them not to jump off a waterfall. They and the other boys yelled that the water was too shallow. They warned him that he would break his neck or skull or both.

“Don't worry!” he smiled “It's OK! I can swim!”

He never got a chance to swim. He floated to the surface, bloody and unconscious, though not badly hurt.

His drunken buddy floundered over and lifted him out of the water just as he came to and began to flail wildly in an attempt to swim away.

They both fell over and it took some time for the undamaged drinker to lift his friend in his arms to help him out of the water.

Navajo Culture does not suffer fools at all. The other kids were dying with laughter at the sight of the pair's antics. Then the

“rescuer” cried out indignantly, “hey, don’t laugh! It’s not funny. He might have a conclusion!”

Conclusions are dangerous things. In our classes we have seen that even highly educated government agency and other influential people cannot in practice distinguish between an observation and a conclusion. Our indoctrinating educational culture places so much emphasis on “right answers” that the leap from the observation to the conclusion is generally instantaneous.

Many of our students are shocked to hear us say what I’m about to say to you. We tell them that they should not believe anything we say without careful personal observation and should then be open continually to the idea that they could be wrong. Don’t just believe me. Check it out. Be careful and critical of what people say while you do.

I am here to propose that State School and Institutional Trust lands officials support a culture and a choice that flows out of intimate ongoing personal knowledge of nature and the Native American concepts of a humanized native landscape which honors the right of every species to exist and prosper. It blends well with and also flows from the agricultural, proto-agricultural, pastoral, and proto-pastoral Native American and European tradition as well as those of other peoples. As a culture of the land this entirely opposes exploitation and imperialism. Native Americans did not call the lands they inhabited a wilderness. They called them home. *Oikos* = *eco* (as in ecology and economy) = *home* or *household*. It is a very old idea.

Their concept of managed land was based on the practical need for rich soils, edible and valuable plants, productive wildlife friendly habitats, clean water, abundant fish and birds, firewood, cordage and basketry materials, building materials, medicines, etc, etc. Many of these groups mined for stone and clay. Some mined for

and refined copper, gold and silver. They managed watersheds to increase and stabilize stream flows, built check dams, canals, water diversions, excavated streambeds for water in dry seasons, dug wells, built roads and trails, spread wild plants to other areas as needed, farmed, used prescribed fire in wet seasons very extensively to improve watersheds, increase aspens and associated plants, produce berries and attract game. They had a large and urgent interest in preventing catastrophic wildfire and worked hard to prevent it.

Remember that Europeans and others saw Native American homelands as paradisiacally beautiful and abundant. Human presence is potentially a great benefit to nature. This is the view taken by prestigious scientific groups like the Society for Range Management, anthropologists, archaeologists, and geographers. Native peoples almost universally share this view.

The other choice is based on leaping to an unfounded but uncritically accepted conclusion to surrender nature to abiotic (non-living) forces and the survival of the biggest, most aggressive, most toxic, most useless to humans and wildlife organisms in any community. In this worldview, the only value that counts and the only question humans are allowed to ask is “is it natural?” which in practice means “is it of random causation or within a range of generally nasty outcomes described above in this paragraph.” Another definition of “natural” is apparently “with sufficient disregard for prudence or objective measurements of health.”

Which of these choices will educate the most children? The real irony is that the vast majority of even educated proponents of the second – to rural people nihilistic and destructive – choice expect in total faith that turning nature over to its abiotic kinetic energy pathway and aggressive biological forces will create the paradise actually created by the first – or humanized landscape choice. They

also believe as a matter of total faith that allowing any cultural or economic utility is exploitation and will create the rape, pillage and destruction of nature. Is it possible that this reactive position may be somewhat extreme and/or connected to un-announced agendas?

It is understandable that, having personal or cultural memories of nature's exploitation and seeing ongoing consequences in the form of polluted waterways, crushed mountains and urban sprawl, overgrazed rangelands and over-harvested forests and the ongoing exploitation of 3<sup>rd</sup> world resources that people might at least feel powerful protective impulses. But isn't it sort of crazy to pretend these are the only possible human actions? Aversion reactions to trauma are not rational matters; they are gut-centered fear reactions. The real concern is the loss of cognitive clarity.

There arises the issue of Conservation Refugees. Mark Dowie, a distinguished journalist and educator has published extensively about millions in Africa and every continent displaced by the impulse to "protect" Nature. The biodiversity of parks melts away over time by the actions of abiotic forces and entirely predictable successional and threshold dynamics. But that's Ok – it's all been anointed to be "natural." People are necessarily unnatural according to this view and don't count at all.

In the doctrinaire application of the abiotic 2<sup>nd</sup> choice dogma, death = life. Destruction of biological values created by centuries, like high organic matter soils, is good. Remember, the only question you can ask is "is it natural?" If a woodcutters chainsaw disturbs a Goshawk with its' noise or campers disturb it on its nest and interrupt its parenting – that's an Endangered Species Act felony. Rangers however can let a lightning strike discovered at 30 inches wide burn 60,000 acres in explosive conditions, kill millions of creatures and maybe 30 goshawk chicks and that's OK, 'cause it's natural!

The logical disconnect between what is horrible destruction and what is, under the abiotic 2<sup>nd</sup> nihilistic choice, perfectly natural and fine and dandy is astonishing from the perspective of the 1<sup>st</sup> “nature-as-home” choice. So is the disconnect between the painful sacrifices expected of rural people to protect species of concern and the lax, reckless and permissive view of catastrophic fire, drought, floods, insect infestations, etc on these species.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> choice has created an empire of the mind. It has seized and is seizing the Natural Parks, Federal lands, private lands and state lands, the universities, the public schools, the airways, and the public's concept of nature. It has no biological awareness, no feedback process and no mercy. Those in its hallucinatory grip cannot perceive horrible destruction and loss of health, functioning and biodiversity as nature dying. They can only ask one question.

Does it make you nervous to be around people whose only tools of management are neglect and fire – and who then declare whatever the fire does to be good no matter what it kills and destroys – because it's “natural” even if its burning in a human created 100 year fire suppression fuel load and they started it?

If humans create beauty, health, resilience, biodiversity and prosperity it is all scorned by 2<sup>nd</sup> choicers as ideologically impure and not “natural” enough. This is logic only a Khmer Rouge Ideological Re-Education Commissar, a Grand Inquisitor or a racial purity prosecutor could follow. Anyone else would be continually distracted by the ongoing massive intrusions of reality.

I'd rather talk about our ability to recreate lost stream flows, springs and riparian habitats, to restore grass and flowers to native communities and bring back native plants and wildlife. I'm going to show you huge landscapes where every erosion feature is healing or is healed.

We've been able to do all this for years now – and more.

Nobody wants to hear about it. It involves humans, livestock, management, and genuine communication and learning...and it requires asking more than one question.

At the beginning I suggested that you in the audience and your agencies can play a critical role in saving nature and society.

This is because your fiduciary charge inoculates you against the surrounding ideology of what I call “naturalishness” or the 2<sup>nd</sup> Choice. You are obligated to both protect the children's educational legacy and produce optimal funds for actual – real time – education. You cannot take refuge in abstract posturing and generally have no wish to do so.

You are, as long as you do this work, people of the first choice.

My suggestion and plea is that you all more fully and consciously engage in the first choice activity of promoting ecological restoration processes as revenue producing activities for the people who rent or lease the lands you control.

In my area of Northern Arizona the second choice has made it so that the average public lands ranch is subsidized by off-ranch work. The average ranch produces a gross income of 70¢ per acre annually.

Compare this to gross revenues of up to \$3.00 per acre and a net of \$1.50 per acre from wildlife related activities alone on similar private ranches added to \$7.00 per acre net profit from \$14.00 per acre gross revenues where the first choice has been allowed to work.

Where do you suppose wildlife, clean water, biodiversity and health are greatest? By the second choice paradigm the profitable land should be falling apart. The opposite is true.

Yellowstone's northern range is falling apart according to many experts, from wildlife overgrazing. Tens of thousands of acres are monocultures of short lodge pole pine saplings with no wildlife still persist in the park as a result of the fire years ago. Canyonlands, Arches and Capitol Reef are falling apart due to loss of entire classes of vegetation due to progressive encroachment by woody species (big, mean and toxic). I'll show you a lot of pictures.

In closing this introduction I want to emphasize that I have a lot of good news. Even very doctrinaire second choicers can, with assistance, see the evidence. We can with relative ease repair a great many degraded ecological conditions and the abundance of nature will generally pay us to do it.

Last of all I wish to let you know that as humans, you can be a very great blessing to nature and not an inevitable pollution, a disease, or any of the things angry, sad people say we are. You have a choice. I recommend choice 1.