

Recovery in an Era of Indifference: Why Does Conservation Have Such a Narrow Public Base?

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A pre-condition for all successful conservation, stewardship and recovery projects is a broad public awareness and empathy with nature, plus the presence of committed individuals. Legislation and various government programs can protect threatened species and ecosystems to some degree, but their long-term fate will be determined by the attitudes and choices of the broader public. The author, an ecologist, examines the personal wellsprings of the stewardship ethic in a Canadian context, analyzes the kinds of individual experiences that foster the desire to steward, and asks the question; can these experiences be franchised? The conventional approach, to rely on the primary school system to inculcate an ecological awareness and a stewardship ethic, is seen as a failure. A sense of regional and individual “placeness” appears to be crucial to the development of a stewardship ethic, and the development of this concept is explored using examples drawn primarily from Western Canada.