

Symposium on Wildness, Wilderness and the Creative Imagination
(2/20-22/05 – Iowa State University)

2. Dwellings: Wildness in the House

(Panel presentation and discussion with audience)

Jim Pease, ISU

- Because I am an educator, I have to be an optimist. Humans and nature are both resilient
- Need to expand our vision of what we call home (example: training a new puppy)
- Home is more than a built box with a chair and box inside that we watch
- Research with landowners proves what child development people have been saying: what we value as children determines what we become as adults, especially in terms of wilderness
- Luther Burbank quote – every child should help make mud pies, etc... any child deprived of these activities has been deprived of the best part of education
- We don't need wilderness; but we do need wild places and wild things
- Personal experience story about receiving a canoe paddle in 7th grade as gift from parents, though he and brother had to buy canoe from their earnings; best gift his parents could give him: the freedom and trust to explore
- quoted Gary Snyder: go learn the terrain and tell a good story when you return
- NPR story on Chernobyl and how old people going back there to die; he wondered why they didn't go back there to live; what is damaged is a value judgment
- Leopold: see ourselves as 'part of', not 'from'
- yes Iowa is next to last in publicly held land, but also have many private landowners like Cindy Hildebrand who are working to preserve/restore/share private lands
- Rachel Carson's "Sense of Wonder" – a child needs an adult to share the rediscovery; adults also need it
- Broaden our view of what home is: land, ecosystem, people, culture – we may not understand that they are our neighbors
- Gary Snyder quote: Nature is not a place to visit; it is home

Sara Gregg, ISU History

(teaches environmental history; new to Iowa after 6 years in NYC and 2 yrs in Washington DC)

- After researching changing landscape of Vermont over 100 years, she wonders what Iowa will look like in 100 years

Fred Kirschenmann, Leopold Center: wildness in the house of agriculture

1. Leopold essays: Trying to separate the tame and wild is dysfunctional; tame and wild are part of the same biotic community

2. Leopold essays: The health of the biotic community is evolving and interconnected. We cannot preserve things in their natural state; conservation is not preserving things as they are, but rather attending to land health so it can renew itself; even though we don't yet understand all the complexities of how that happens

3. What makes humans different? Humans can spoil nature in ways others can't. We've tried to set agriculture here and nature there; agriculture as the wounded area and nature as the unwounded/sacred area. All organisms modify nature in order to find a niche for themselves and in the process destroy a portion (earthworm example) – and if that wasn't so, it would not be an environment. What humans have to learn to do is find ways to modify the environment while also helping contribute to the health of the biotic community. 99.9% of all species are now extinct

4. Change our thinking... not tame vs wild but self renewal. Give up the idea that we can maintain agriculture here and wilderness there; patch ecology doesn't/hasn't worked; we're still losing species. We can't have healthy agriculture without some wildness; we thought we could – example of soil quality: soil is a complex living system; one teaspoon of soil has 2 million microbes; 2 books give examples of how we can do this (*Farm as Natural Habitat* and *Farming with the Wild*)

5. Challenges to the future of agriculture

* Fossil fuel depletion – everything farmers use is fossil fuel dependent; expect oil prices to hit \$90 per barrel in the next year or two; farmers won't be able to afford to do business as has become usual

* Climate instability – agricultural focus on corn and soybeans has been successful because climates have been relatively stable; that's not likely to continue

* environment degradation – example: Mississippi River “stuff” is filling the Gulf of Mexico

6. So why aren't we changing if all these things are happening and we know they're happening? Analysis of past/other civilizations and decision points ...

-- whether or not society anticipates a problem (ex: Australia importing rabbits)

-- failure to perceive problem when it has arrived (ex: ignoring measurements of unwanted chemicals in air/atmosphere)

-- don't try to solve problem because of rational behavior: clashes of interest and conflicting values between opposing groups

-- some problems are too difficult to solve given current technology so give up

Audience/panel discussion:

What is the role of landgrant university?

* Fred K: We're still operating under the social contract we agreed to in 1800s – do the research needed to give the working class the tools needed to reduce need for labor so labor can work elsewhere to improve quality of life for all; need to re-assess what our mission is; need more people on the land and living intimately with it; still doing research to increase yields; rest of society needs to also declare that we've met the assigned mission and decide what is wanted next

* Jim Pease: Since 1980 there's been an increased willingness of faculty and staff to take risks and work together looking at things with a systems approach; that's positive but it's not fast enough and the rewards system still doesn't recognize; Leopold Center has been a catalyst despite their funding problems; current Dean of Ag and ISU president understand that college of ag has to change

* Sheryl St Germain, ISU English: environmentalism needs to be part of fiber of life, not outside; we haven't told good enough stories

* Sara Gregg: 1992 poll showed 3/4 of Americans called themselves environmentalists; but behavior shows failure to act as environmentalists

Audience question/comment about WOI Midday – markets, etc and weather in Brazil etc, but why aren't we hearing about the costs of doing agriculture in Brazil?

Biodiversity and social impacts of using same model there as here (created a food/ag system based on efficiencies of scale) – sustainable ag depends on being able to maintain production into the future

Fundamental paradigm shift needed; Fred says he's talked to farmers who want to add 3rd or even 4th crop for diversity, but where would they sell it? Marketing system not set up

Past mistakes by environmentalists in not working with Reagan administration (or being ignored – depending on viewpoint) to find ways to put economic value on environment and environmental losses. Environmentalists have to be part of the conversation

Fred: Companies are beginning to see that it's in their economic interest to change; but hard to move the culture of a corporation; public demand helps

Role of conservatives - example of groups in some states lobbying school boards to drop environmental education classes

"We have created a religion out of our economy" – political causes – certain groups/people have pushed to connect some things that aren't necessarily meant to be connected.

How do we get younger people involved? They have the most at stake.

Sara Gregg - students here "get it"; her former students in NYC/Columbia didn't – matter of their experiences; people in their 20s and 30s do have a different sense of place

Major changes take place because of a confluence of events. (example: civil rights movement)

We will see major changes in agriculture in the next 25 years. How do we take these events and use them to move change? EX: If oil hits \$90/barrel, we have an opportunity to make a change - what are we doing to put the rest of the pieces in place so change can happen?