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**CONNECTING WITH NATURE
THROUGH LAND USE DECISION MAKING**

By

Cathy Setterlin

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Environmental Studies

at

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Committee: Mitchell Thomashow (Chair), Meade Cadot, Averell Manes

Dedication

To Margaret McCauley (1960--2007) for her commitment to working land

Acknowledgments

I thank each of my committee members, Dr. Mitchell Thomashow, Dr. Meade Cadot, and Dr. Averell Manes for their help and advice. I am especially grateful to Mitch who stuck by me year after year—challenging and supporting my scholarship.

I thank all of the New Milford land use decision makers who generously shared their thoughts about nature and land use.

Abstract

This narrative inquiry, which draws on my experience as a land use decision maker, environmental educator, and scholar, examines the complexities of our human-nature relationship as we use and protect the life of the land in local communities. I began this research by interviewing seventeen land use decision makers representing a range of land use perspectives in New Milford, Connecticut, focusing on their views of land as a living community, their connections to land, and their sense of duty and responsibility.

Their responses led me to further inquiry and drew me into a process that transformed my views of both land use policy and environmental education. This dissertation focuses on four processes: using a narrative approach to address land use conflict in order to better understand differing aspects of our relationship to land; finding new ways to talk about land and land use, drawing on our connections with nature and our awareness of ourselves as part of a larger community; shifting land use conversations from individual interests to our role as citizens in a community in order to gain new perspectives and begin to define land as more than a personal asset; and extending our consideration to resident natural communities as contributing members of our community, while moving towards a relationship with nature that is a conscious and integral part of our land use decision making.

I conclude that learning and talking about our relationship with nature is integral to land use decision making as a democratic process. This knowledge and expression

enables us to consider what we value about our resident land communities and what interests we will uphold. Otherwise, by default we will continue to make human-oriented land use decisions where the life of the land is ignored.

Table Of Contents

Dedication	I
Acknowledgments	II
Abstract	III
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Walking With Bruce	1
Learning About Our Human-Nature Relationship	11
Chapter 2: Interviewing Land Use Decision Makers	24
Creating a Land Use Decision Makers Matrix	24
Choosing the Participants	32
Orienting the Participants	39
The Readings	41
The Questions	45
The Interview Process	47
Interpreting the Responses	49
Chapter 3: Framing a Public Conversation About Our Relationship to Land and Land Use	55
Abandoning the Group Discussion	55
Dissolving the “Other Side”	58
Deliberation and Everyday Talk	61
Conflict Theory and Narrative Approaches	64

Externalizing Conversations	71
Entitlement and Power	72
Entering the Conversation as a Thirdsider	75
Chapter 4: Land as Property	79
Land as Property	79
Defining Our Relationship with Land as Property	80
Consumer-based and Citizen-based Mindsets	85
Shifting Our Conversation	87
Approaches to Conflict	98
Chapter 5: Cultivating Our Connections	105
Defining Our Connection	105
Human Entitlement and Domination	113
Communicating with the Life of the Land	121
Connection and Land Use Decision Making	128
Chapter 6: Considering Our Obligations	134
Responsibility as an Expression of Our Moral Knowledge	135
Directing Our Responsibility Towards Nature	140
Nature as a Contributing Member of Our Community	145
Including the Life of the Land in Our Democratic Process	149
Chapter 7: Integrating Scholarship and Experience	156
Seminal Literature and Training	157
Extending the Conversation	167
Opportunities for Further Inquiry	174

Looking Forward	181
ENDNOTES	184
LITERATURE CITED	195
BIBLIOGRAPHY	199
APPENDIX 1	223
APPENDIX 2	236

Chapter 1: Introduction

Walking With Bruce

When I was the director of the local nature center in New Milford, Connecticut, I went for a walk in the nature sanctuary with one of the town's most active land developers. The nature center was considering a new road to gain access to recently acquired land, and I wanted to learn more about how to go about this.

Since this was his first visit to the land, I took him to one of my favorite spots, a large mown field with a view toward Mt. Tom, which is a high point in New Milford and a part of the nature sanctuary. We stood in the field and looked across the river toward the steep, wooded hillside just beginning to show its fall colors highlighted by a late afternoon sun.

This is a view I have enjoyed for more than twenty years and shared with numerous school children and other visitors. Looking at the mountain from this spot, I've asked people to imagine a mile-high glacier covering the top more than 10,000 years ago. We've watched soaring hawks and vultures along the ridgeline. I have pointed to the very top to say that's where we will hike to—on a winding trail through beech trees, maples, oaks, and tulips, old stone walls, chattering chipmunks, streams, and vernal pools.

But today Bruce and I stood silently in the field, enjoying the afternoon warmth, the sound of the river below, and the fall colors on the mountainside. Taking in the entire landscape he heartily agreed with me that this was a beautiful sight. Then it

occurred to me, although I don't know how I came to this conclusion, that this man was seeing houses—here where we stood and dotted along the side of the mountain. I was almost too shocked to ask him if this was true, but I did ask. He nodded yes, wouldn't it be lovely sitting right here on your deck watching the leaves turn colors? At first I was speechless. He must be kidding! I had never ever imagined this land as house lots, and I had never been with a visitor who dared to express these thoughts.

I quickly fell back into my role as land protector, indignantly reclaiming my turf, firmly reminding him this land had been designated a nature sanctuary and would never be developed. He acknowledged this, and the conversation ended. But as we tromped through the fields that fine fall afternoon, I continued to see how much he enjoyed being in nature. How could someone who bulldozes land show such appreciation for a protected natural landscape?

We walked over to where the nature center road was proposed. As I listened to his advice about constructing gravel driveways and wooden bridges, I saw him taking in the contours of the land, roughly calculating how it needed to be reshaped to create our road. His years of experience as a builder and earthmover were evident. I certainly didn't have that kind of expertise. I had to admit it was exciting to think about accessing our new land.

After he left I went back to my view of the mountain, trying to erase the image of houses dotting the hillside. I was still angry. Maybe he feels a connection to the land—but what about the fifty-year-old trees and the wildlife living on the mountain? How can he just bulldoze his way onto the land with no regard for their homes and

habitats? We may both feel a connection to the land, but there's a big difference between seeing this land as a nature preserve and seeing it developed.

Then I considered the new road and my desire to have an easier way for people to access the land on the other side of the stream. Where was my concern for the natural community that would be torn up and displaced by this project? Was this field less deserving of my protection? Would I consider bulldozing a road up the mountain if it connected me to another nature sanctuary? I felt infected by a land use mentality that went against everything I believed about protecting nature. I wanted to see this road project as an exception. I wanted to see Bruce's enjoyment of nature as a mere gesture—anything that would keep me on the side of land protection and away from the side of development.

After all, nature center culture is based on leaving nature alone. We tell people to "take only photos, leave only footprints." We want people to be vigilant about protecting the life of the land from human intrusion and impact. When we spend time in nature we must "leave no trace," because our experience can be spoiled by people who leave evidence of their presence. When I look at the mountain, I feel humbled by thousands of years of geological processes and the presence of other species who represent life processes far beyond my understanding. From this point of view, the idea of someone presuming to develop this mountain seems totally preposterous and small-minded.

I love being surrounded by nature. I want people to see nature enriching their lives. My inspiration comes from environmental educators such as Joseph Cornell, who encourages learning about our relationship with nature through direct experiences. He

says, “Go for a walk in the wild. Avoid categorizing the things you see; instead, focus on feeling a kinship with everything you see. Look at everything as though you are seeing it for the first time, with the eyes of a child, fresh with wonder.”¹

I feel effective as an environmental educator when people learn to be more aware of nature around them and when they feel a connection or take a special interest in something they observe. I want them to respect the functions of nature, such as a wetlands’ ability to manage the flow of water. I want people to take an active role in preserving and protecting our natural communities.

Nature center values focus on building relationships based on respect for the life of the land. As Cornell writes: “remember. . . that the earth is alive, and that all creatures deserve equal love and respect.” . . . “A grateful heart enables us to be ever more humbly in sympathy with other creatures.” We should understand that “our human desires should be tempered with willingness to defer to the needs of other living things.”²

Going down the path of love and respect helps me stand firm in my desire to protect land and warns me about the impacts of land use. But after my walk with Bruce, I realized our relationship with the life of the land encompasses much more than our desire to love and protect land. It also includes our desire to use the life of the land. Before the nature sanctuary came into existence, this wooded mountainside was pastureland for sheep. Previous natural communities on the mountain adapted to humans, who cleared the land for their farming activities and allowed it to grow back when the nature center was designated. Now I wanted to use this land for a road.

This history of change and adaptation is not apparent when you approach the land at the nature center as Cornell suggests, “as though you are seeing it for the first time.” Furthermore, when we caution visitors to “leave only footprints,” we create an illusion of nature left alone; but we fail to consider our relationship to the life of this land in terms of how we use this life. There is a huge mantle of human entitlement overlaying the life of this land. When a group of local people designated this land a nature sanctuary, they determined its current use. Granted, the resident natural community is protected from houses on the mountain. But even I, a person who cares deeply about the life of this land, felt entitled to use it for my programs and bring hundreds of people up the mountain every year.

It concerns me that nature protectors, myself included, readily talk about our desire to protect land but rarely discuss our desire to use the life of the land. We want to think of this human-nature relationship as one in which we live in harmony with the land and other species. When I ask people about their relationship with nature they usually say, “Of course I love nature. I can’t stand to see it spoiled by development.” It seems people include only their protective feelings when they use the word “relationship” while excluding other behaviors, such as buying lumber from trees cut down, and eating and wearing plants and animals. Granted, it’s strange to consider a relationship that includes taking, killing, using other life to sustain our own. However, while some people find this disturbing, others see our use of nature a matter of human entitlement. And far too many people could care less.

I believe that expanding our concept of relationship between humans and nature to include the diversity of response we have toward other species will actually strengthen our regard for nature as an integral part of our lives. I believe it is self-defeating for my friends to deny that Bruce has a relationship with the land. Even if our human-nature relationships are defined in different ways and even if we find these differences disturbing, we can all still claim a strong connection to the land. My greatest concern is with the people who have no connection to nature, because for them there is no human-nature relationship.

With this in mind, I began to see Bruce and me standing together as we faced the mountain. That is, both he and I were engaged in a cultural drama arising from our human experience. Up on the mountain, trees and other species were engaged in their own dramas as they went through their fall-into-winter changes. From nature's perspective it didn't matter if it was his foot or mine trampling the goldenrod as we walked across the field, his bulldozer or my noisy group of children tearing across the land. We were each a human presence, using and protecting land according to how our individual human-nature relationships defined our connection to this land.

I believe it's time to acknowledge the unique challenges and contradictions of our relationship with nature and give serious consideration to our obligations and responsibilities for the life of the land surrounding us. We don't kill and eat other people. But when we extend our consideration to other species, we do have to factor in one life supporting another, one life dead, another alive, energy flowing out of one form into another. For me, this is part of the intimacy I feel with nature. When I harvest my

garden, what could be more personal than eating that which I have carefully tended? When I consume other species, the connection I feel becomes literally a part of me. The timbers in my house, the clothes on my body, are all aspects of my human-nature relationship.

Environmental philosopher J. Claude Evans expresses his concern about our unwillingness to acknowledge our use of nature, by re-examining philosophical arguments calling for a shift from anthropocentrism to a biocentric view of the world. He believes that as a moral agent each of us is “not a disinterested spectator of the world of organic life, but an engaged participant in transfers of energy and nutrition—transfers of life itself—in the real world.”³ He believes we need to “respect both the inherent value of human beings as forms of organic life and the dignity of human appropriation.”⁴ Furthermore, when we consider our relationship with nature, we must realize that to “recognize and respect the inherent worth of something does not commit one to the *prima facie* obligation to leave it alone, to refrain from making use of it or consuming it.” Instead, we should focus on “what constitutes the morally respectful use and appropriation of the natural world and of the beings of inherent worth with which we share that world” while avoiding two extremes: “unlimited appropriation and domination sanctioned by traditional anthropocentrism” and “the ideal of zero participation in and appropriation of the natural world demanded by biocentric egalitarians.”⁵

I believe our relationship with the life of the land must ultimately incorporate both our desire to love and protect nature and our desire to use this life for our benefit. If we are willing to recognize and work with these seemingly opposing aspects of this

relationship, we will be opening ourselves to the land we inhabit in a more ecologically genuine way. Who are we to remain silent about our use of nature while claiming to protect all life around us? Life sustains life. It's part of the wonder and pain of our existence on this Earth.

With these thoughts in mind, I pictured Bruce and me each involved with the land through a complex human-nature relationship shaped by our life experiences. I was curious to know more about his experience, because there seemed to be aspects of his life that were similar to mine. I grew up in the midst of a large family-owned construction business. They built my school, my childhood home, numerous churches, office buildings, college dormitories, and parking garages. They also built a weekend home on a lake in Ohio, where I learned to fish, swim, and row around looking for snakes and turtles. My family loved being in nature, and no one was surprised when I ended up studying natural sciences and environmental education in school and became the director of a nature center.

My interests have led me to serve as a commissioner on the New Milford Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Commission. Based on potential impacts to wetlands and watercourses as defined by our regulations, we review applications and approve or deny permits for land use. One of my activities as a Wetlands Commission member is to visit land with engineers, developers, and other land use professionals. We follow stakes showing the centerline of a proposed road, house sites, and septic fields through woodlands that will soon be cleared. We review stream crossings, wetland disturbances, and detention basins. My duty as a commissioner and land use decision

maker is to consider the impact of this development on the life of this land, factoring in the landowner's right to use his or her property.

Given my upbringing, I found it increasingly difficult to deny Bruce's enjoyment of nature as part of his relationship with the land, even when he clears land for houses. And recognizing my role as a land use decision maker, I could no longer deny my interest in constructing a new road. Although there were conflicting aspects of our relationship with nature, seeing them in the context of our life experiences lessened the conflict and enabled me to consider the complexity of our relationships.

Still, Bruce's vision of houses on the mountain was an affront to my deeply held beliefs about protecting nature wherever possible. Land planner John Forester sees our beliefs and values as being "intimately connected to who we are and aspects of the world we cherish, whether they involve the sacredness of land and water or the sanctity of life or private property."⁶ He describes beliefs and values as "inherently personal, subjective, developed as a matter of tradition and socialization and not amenable to change by persuasion, rational argument, or even bargaining."⁷

Since early adulthood I've been strongly influenced by Aldo Leopold's views of a land ethic that "enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soil, water, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land."⁸ Leopold further asserts, "A land ethic of course cannot prevent the alteration, management, and use of these 'resources,' but it does affirm their right to continued existence, and, at least in spots, their continued existence in a natural state."⁹ Over the years, Leopold's views have become part of my ecological identity—defined by environmental educator Mitchell Thomashow as "how people

perceive themselves in reference to nature, as living and breathing beings connected to the rhythms of the earth, the biogeochemical cycles, the grand and complex diversity of ecological systems.”¹⁰

As both a wetlands commissioner and environmental educator, I see how the way we talk about the land and land use changes, depending on where we are and how we orient ourselves to the land. On a wetlands site walk we talk about impacts to the land and wetland boundaries—anything that can be rationally described, mapped and analyzed. At the nature center we talk about the trees, vultures, rock walls—whatever catches our attention and reminds us of our personal connections to the life around us. Generally, during wetlands deliberations we do not talk about our personal connections, and on a nature walk we do not talk about our land use interests. But even though we express our human-nature relationship in different ways depending on the situation, our beliefs and values are always there, guiding us and influencing the way we think and act. In this case I was protecting my view of the mountain, but I was also aware of having invited Bruce to help me with the road. I didn’t want our differences to prevent me from getting the advice I needed. But, they were preventing me from thinking about how each of us relates to nature. All I could see before me was a man who bulldozes land.

Forester talks about “the blinding power of cultural presumptions” that separates us one from another, especially when we come up against differing beliefs and values.¹¹ In my case I was blinded by cultural presumptions about this man who seemed to represent everything I opposed. Forester goes on to encourage people in this type of

conflict to consider learning “about other parties whom they really do not know very well, about values and value systems they may, or may not, share” in order to truly understand the differences they face.¹² All I wanted to do was erase the vision of houses on the mountain. It never occurred to me that our two different views of the mountain could be an opportunity to learn from each other. I presumed Bruce’s view of houses was just a social gaffe, so it seemed embarrassing to ask him to say more. Then I realized if he asked me to say more about how I saw the mountain, I would certainly have a lot to say and I would appreciate his asking. I could have asked him if he ever felt protective towards land or if he always saw houses when he looked at a natural landscape. In hindsight, I wished I’d asked these questions.

Learning About Our Human-Nature Relationship

I think about all the times people come together to discuss land and land use, each assuming the other person sees the land the same way they do. I wonder how many arguments and bitter fights over land use are due to misunderstandings about what each person is seeing when they view land. Even when we know other people see land according to their particular mindsets, we assume our view is “obvious.”

I remember learning an important lesson leading nature walks with children. They brought me leaves and sticks and other natural treasures exclaiming, “Look what I found!” More than once I commented enthusiastically on the beautiful color of the leaf or the interesting fungus growing on the stick, only to see the child toss it aside and walk

away from me. How could they lose their interest so quickly? Wasn't I encouraging their curiosity for nature?

One day an indignant child pushed her stick back in my face saying, "Not that, don't you see here where something's been chewing on it?" Sure enough, there were tiny teeth marks. Now we shared our excitement. Before that we were both looking at the same stick, but we were seeing completely different things.

Since that time I always ask first, "What do you see?" That simple question opens the door to a more satisfying conversation. When I assumed we were seeing the same thing, although I was encouraging the children to bring me their treasures, I was only recognizing my own interests. I didn't acknowledge what they were trying to show me. No wonder they walked away.

It occurred to me that, likewise as adults, if we are caught up in our cultural presumptions, then chances are we won't acknowledge what the other is seeing, and there will be little reason to continue our conversation. If we take the time to ask, "What do you see?" we may learn something valuable about both the other person and the land before us.

I realized I was beginning to formulate a method of inquiry for learning about our human-nature relationship, but I turned back to environmental philosophy to see how the beliefs and values emerging from our human-nature relationship fit into a moral and ethical framework. In traditional forms of environmental philosophy I encountered arguments about the inherent and/or instrumental value of other species. These views led to arguments about moral standing and about worldviews such as anthropocentrism,

biocentrism, and ecocentrism, each encompassing important differences.¹³ However, I felt constrained, both by these pre-determined categories and by having to pit one view against another. Unless I was willing to argue for and against these categories, there was little room for interpreting my own experiences and perceptions, which seemed to draw something from every category and therefore fit none.

However, another form of environmental philosophy, environmental pragmatism with its roots in Deweyan philosophy, invited me into a process of “doing” philosophy. Here I could begin with what I already knew about my relationship and build my intellectual understanding from there. Philosopher Ben Minteer, a follower of Dewey, believes an approach based on environmental pragmatism enables one “to focus more on the methods of inquiry, deliberation, and problem solving than on broad notions of moral considerability and the a priori authority of fixed principles.” It also “provides us with a way of conceptualizing the moral enterprise that engages rather than dismisses the multifaceted nature of moral problems.”¹⁴ Furthermore, he believes “this pragmatic alternative in environmental ethics generally accepts, if not celebrates, value pluralism; embraces an experimental approach to ethical claims about the natural world; and focuses much more seriously on the empirical and normative contexts of moral experience”¹⁵

I was drawn to Minteer’s form of environmental pragmatism for two reasons. He encourages us to use “inquiry, deliberation, and problem solving” as a philosophical methodology; and he emphasizes value pluralism, which I interpreted as seeing our differences as a way to fully understand our moral experience. Since I do not work

within an academic environment, my scholarship grows out of my experience--as an environmental educator, land use decision maker, active local citizen, and community intellectual--as well as my reading and contemplating the work of other scholars.

Minteer affirms my experiential approach when he asserts, "The pragmatic alternative, endorsing ethical pluralism as well as the provisional and instrumental nature of moral principles, thus frames ethical inquiry as a more creative and dynamic process, one in which discovery and invention play an important part in our moral deliberations over alternative claims and proposals."¹⁶

I see similarities between environmental pragmatism and my approach as an environmental educator. I encourage visitors to experience nature directly and allow their curiosity to guide the process. In this way they become more connected with the natural world. It's a playful approach that frustrates people who expect me, the expert, to tell them what they should know about nature. What they don't realize is how frustrated I am when, for example, I tell them the name of the tree and they walk on by without really taking a closer look. In my mind, knowing the name of the tree is important information, but when we indulge our curiosity about that tree, we end up knowing so much more. Although I value traditional environmental philosophy, it seems to me that it focuses on knowing the names of the trees, while environmental pragmatism encourages me to really look at the trees and interpret my own experience.

I decided to pursue my own ethical inquiry by interviewing a group of land use decision makers (including Bruce), asking them about their connections to land and their sense of duty and responsibility. I selected a diverse group of people who

consciously make decisions about land use, whether it be planting their garden, protecting open space, or developing their property. Unlike people who have no interest in the land around them, land use decision makers such as farmers, land trust officials, land use commissioners, civil engineers, real estate attorneys, and developers are connected to land through the decisions they make. Even though some, like Bruce, may see houses where I see trees, land is an important part of their lives. Just as environmental pragmatism sees value pluralism as a way to fully understand our ethical differences, I wondered if interviewing land use decision makers, focusing on their beliefs and values, knowledge and awareness of land and land use, would reveal different and important aspects of our collective human-nature relationship. I purposely chose land use decision makers with connections to land in New Milford, because when exploring our human-nature relationship, I not only wanted to identify the people, I also wanted to identify the land. As much as possible, I too wanted to feel a sense of connection with the places these people were talking about.

New Milford is geographically the largest town in Connecticut—64 square miles with only 30,000 human residents. Land in New Milford is part of the southern foothills of the Berkshire Mountains in northwestern Connecticut. When the glaciers melted over 10,000 years ago, they carved out a landscape of ridges and valleys. The largest valley contains the Housatonic River flowing down through New Milford from its source in Massachusetts to its outlet in Long Island Sound. The river's fertile floodplain soils have supported agriculture for thousands of years, including Native American corn, squash,

and beans, commercial tobacco and dairy farms, and fruits and vegetables for local farm stands.

Sand and gravel deposits in the Housatonic River valley that once supported a thriving mining industry now provide material for the construction of roads and buildings. New Milford's primary state highway runs along the valley, a broad floodplain that now supports homes, schools, industry, and commercial areas as well as a few remaining farms.

In the 1920's the utility company bought up thousands of acres of land between two ridges to create a lake supplying water to a hydroelectric power plant on the Housatonic River. Today Candlewood Lake is surrounded by summer cottages and year-round homes, town beaches, and woodland tracts.

Beyond an abundance of wetlands, watercourses, lakes, and ponds flowing down and through our hills and valleys, our resident natural communities have been shaped into a diverse and beautiful landscape of fields, forests, and farmland, often touted as part of the "quality of life" in New Milford. Because the land is a significant contributor to our town's identity, I believe our land use decision-making is shortsighted if we fail to consider the life of the land as a partner in our deliberations. The resident natural communities maintain the land we choose to preserve for its special qualities, its natural beauty, its diverse habitat, or its fertile soil. If realtors benefit from the sale of a house in the country, it's the resident land community—the trees, streams, fields, and wildlife—that create and maintain the country attraction.

Still, like so many New England towns, New Milford is fast changing as our growing human population converts this land into more houses, schools, stores, and roads. As a result almost every public land use decision in New Milford is transformed into a conservation and development issue. In fact, as soon as I created an actual list of land use decision makers to interview, I began to realize I would be talking with people who regularly oppose each other on land use issues—politically, professionally, and personally.

Nonetheless, the more interviews I completed, the more I discovered how much there is to learn from such a diverse group. Previously, when I talked with my conservation friends, our conversations tended to be very predictable. We complained about development, we shared our latest nature sighting, we strategized approaches to land use issues. Now that I was talking to people on the “other side,” I was exposed to different mindsets and learning to view the world from new perspectives. This exposure was enlightening and even refreshing.

Although I chose to interview each person individually, my original proposal called for bringing these people together for a group discussion to share and learn from one another. However, I soon discovered there was more conflict among members of my group than I originally knew about, and I reluctantly abandoned this idea as too confrontational and too distracting for my topic. At first I was angry, because once again conflict was interfering with my learning about our human-nature relationship. Who wants to talk about a relationship when there are big issues to discuss and important points to make? Left with a big hole in my research design, I turned to conflict

management, hoping to better understand my predicament and possibly find ways to deal with the never-ending presence of land use conflict.

I was drawn to a consensus building style of conflict management, which is often used with land use disputes. This is usually a problem solving process where stakeholders identify their interests, enter into a negotiation, and work together until they come away with their needs met.¹⁷ Stakeholders represent, defend, and promote their rights, their property, endangered habitats, greenways, and other land use interests and concerns. Although their individual beliefs and values undoubtedly influence their roles as stakeholders, this is not a process where stakeholders expect to learn more about each other as individuals. As in other public land use settings, legal, economic, and scientific forms of rational, objective expression dominate. Personal expression is not encouraged unless it serves to illustrate a stakeholder's position.

Then out of curiosity, I looked into forms of conflict management focusing on cultural difference, social interaction, and relationship building. Since land use disputes are rarely the focus of these styles of conflict management, I didn't expect them to be applicable; but I was drawn to their concern for relationship. When I discovered these approaches do have much to offer in terms of understanding the different points of view we come up against as land use decision makers, I became less interested in the problem solving approaches and more interested in how these cultural approaches draw upon our differing beliefs and values to build relationships even between people in conflict.

Law professor Michelle LeBaron defines cultures as “systems of shared understandings and symbols that connect people to each other, providing them with unwritten messages about how to express themselves and how to make meaning of their lives.”¹⁸ From this point of view, I see people involved with land use decisions, such as stakeholders, regulators, commission members, and attorneys, as part of a land use “culture.” Bruce and I may oppose each other, but we understand how to express ourselves through the regulations, the legal processes, and the scientific terminology that defines our land use system. I am reminded of this when, at almost every Wetlands Commission meeting, we have to guide local citizens through what for them is an unfamiliar and intimidating regulatory process so they can properly express their concerns. Bruce, on the other hand, faces us with confidence because he knows how the system works.

At the same time, even though Bruce and I are “insiders” when it comes to understanding this land use system, we clearly work within it in different ways. One might say I belong to a land preservation culture and he belongs to a development culture, although as this dissertation will show I don’t believe the lines are always so clearly defined. At any rate LeBaron sees each of us identifying with particular cultures that support our worldviews, as expressed through “social and moral, practical and material, and transcendent or spiritual” dimensions.¹⁹

LeBaron believes conflict occurs when “our identities and ways of making meaning fail to harmonize.”²⁰ Or, stated differently, “Conflict ensues when our starting points are different from others’, our need for security infringes on another’s territory, or

the meanings we assign to behavior or events are different from others’.”²¹ When I saw how perfectly this statement described my experience with Bruce, I began to see land use conflict as encompassing much more than stakeholder interests.

This became even clearer with LeBaron’s description of the three dimensions of conflict: material, communicative, and symbolic.²² The material dimension is defined by our interests, the communicative by our process of listening, questioning, and watching out for misperception and misinterpretation. These are both key aspects of problem solving approaches to land use disputes. The symbolic realm, however, which LeBaron describes as the “murkier realm of culture and worldview differences, made more opaque by a variety of personality preferences and distinct systems of meaning” is usually left out of problem solving approaches even though this is often where the conflict is seated.²³

Finding this definition of conflict was like finding the pieces of a puzzle that finally reveal the whole picture. Instead of being an obstacle to learning about our human-nature relationship or something to avoid, I now saw conflict as an integral part of our relationship. I began to see the benefit of entering into conflict not only as a way to solve problems but also as a way to learn about other worldviews and to use these worldviews to better appreciate the complexities of our human-nature relationship. Indeed, LeBaron sees conflict as having the potential “to generate learning, stimulate creativity, and deepen relationships.”²⁴

She sees us developing capacities of “cultural fluency, mindful awareness, and conflict fluency,” which can be “continually developed and deepened as we gather and

reflect on new experience” and can “help us adapt to complexities and shifting contexts with resilience and energy.”²⁵ I saw my interview process as more than a way to gather information. Talking with a diverse group of land use decision makers was helping me develop both a cultural and a conflict fluency, which would not have happened without taking the time to consider our human-nature relationship.

As it turned out, eliminating the group discussion gave me an opportunity to reconsider what I wanted to share from the interviews, and I realized it had as much to do with the process as the content of the interviews. In other words, my research methodology shifted from defining and describing our human-nature relationship to learning ways to appreciate and work with diverse worldviews. I believe talking about land and land use in terms of our human-nature relationship opens up an opportunity to reveal and express our worldviews in a way that invites respectful curious inquiry. It invites us to get to know each other differently, to risk publicly talking about our personal beliefs and values, and to see our differences as something to consider because we want to know more, rather than as something to reject. These conversations need not be facilitated discussions if we draw from our own curiosity and look for opportunities to reach out on our own. My hope is that eventually talking about our human-nature relationship will take its place next to talking about any relationship and in doing so the life of the land around us will be perceived as truly a part of our community.

I introduced this dissertation as an evolving process, because this is how I see our human-nature relationship revealing itself through our land use decisions, our

experiences in nature, and our differing worldviews. In the following chapters, I continue to incorporate environmental philosophy, conflict theory, and other disciplines to support my research and draw forth its intellectual significance.

In chapter 2, I discuss the interview process: how I selected the land use decision makers, determined which questions to ask, oriented the participants, and conducted the interviews.

In chapter 3, I examine practical and theoretical concerns that led to my decision to abandon my original plan to hold a group discussion. Since land use disputes among several of my participants were one of the primary obstacles to bringing the group together, I turn to conflict theory and narrative mediation to consider the role of conflict in our human-nature relationship as well as our interactions with other land use decision makers.

In chapter 4, I discuss the mindset of property ownership and how this influences our view of land. Thinking about land in terms of our own self-interests as a property owner often leads us to forget the community context of ownership, whereas focusing on property from a citizen-based mindset can moderate our sense of entitlement and enable us to consider how land contributes to the life of our community.

In chapter 5, I discuss the challenge of working within a human-dominated landowning culture while considering our connection and responsibility to all of nature. I advocate listening to different views and perspectives in order to gain a better understanding of the complexities of our human connections to other species, and

developing a dialogical relationship with nature in which we extend our awareness and consideration to the life of the land around us.

In chapter 6, I discuss responsibility as an expression of our moral knowledge, rarely acknowledged in our land use decision making even though we all come to the table with our own values and beliefs arising from our relationship with nature. Drawing from a philosophical essay about nature's intrinsic value, I discuss the difference between seeing nature from a use-oriented resource point of view and recognizing the plants and animals as having lives of their own. Finally, I discuss ways to include the life of the land in our democratic process by discerning nature's value and extending our consideration to other species.

In chapter 7, I summarize my research by reviewing the seminal literature and training that defined the course of my scholarship. Then I reintroduce the interview questions and the Land Use Decision Maker's Matrix as tools for further conversation, and present three outdoor activities designed to bring nature into a land use dialogue. Finally, I propose possibilities for continuing research and scholarship.

Chapter 2: Interviewing Land Use Decision Makers

I began my research interviewing a diverse group of land use decision makers in New Milford, Connecticut, to learn more about our human-nature relationship, particularly our desire to both use and protect the life of the land. To focus my inquiry on moral and ethical considerations, I decided to ask each person about their connections to land and their sense of duty and responsibility to it.

This chapter describes the interview process: how I oriented myself intellectually by creating a matrix, and how I selected the land use decision makers, determined which questions to ask, oriented the participants, and conducted the interviews.

Creating a Land Use Decision Makers Matrix

When I became aware of the complexities and cultural differences I was dealing with in terms of defining and expressing our relationship with the life of the land, I created a matrix to give me a frame of reference, a way to visualize the many aspects of our relationship with land and land use. This matrix represents my belief that the only way we can understand and appreciate the complexities of our human-nature relationship is to acknowledge not only aspects of land protection but also those of land development, in my mind both expressions of human land use. In addition, we must also acknowledge our cultural views of land, which range from seeing land as a living community to seeing land as property.

In terms of research methodology and analysis, using a matrix brings together several variables to see how they interact, to express an intellectual orientation, and to promote a holistic approach.²⁶ This matrix incorporates the views of environmental philosopher Holmes Rolston, political scientist Lynton Keith Caldwell, and research philosopher Kristin Shrader-Frechette.

Environmental philosopher Holmes Rolston suggests we think of ourselves as fulfilling three different roles when we consider our relationship to the land community—resident, consumer, and citizen.²⁷ As residents, we settle down in our homes and our community. We share the land not only with our human neighbors but also with other species surrounding us. Rolston asserts, “The landscape is crucially a ‘commons,’ a public good, and that not just for people but for all the residents of the biotic community, including nonhumans. Coyotes and warblers cannot be citizens, but they are residents on the same landscape as ours. They, too, are earthlings. The decisions we make as geographical residents, then, will have to consider the fauna and flora not simply as resources but as residents who count for the values they carry.”²⁸

As consumers, we take what we need and want from nature for our own use. We are not alone in this. All living things use others as resources for their needs. The bird consumes insects, trees consume water, and we consume other plants and animals. As interdependent species we use each other to maintain our lives and lifestyles.

As citizens, we consider our values and responsibilities as a human culture. Our view of land as either a living community or land as property, and our desire to either protect or develop land, are each part of the human land use system we have designed

to work within as citizens in our human communities. Rolston warns, “When we begin to think of ourselves primarily as consumers, and secondarily as citizens, and only rarely as residents, we are getting our values topsy turvy.”²⁹

I appreciate Rolston’s categories because they expand the meaning of land use in several ways. First, humans are not the only residents on the land. Even if we have a deed saying we own a parcel of land, we share this property with a resident natural community. Second, we all consume other life. No matter how adamant I am about land protection, I still eat food, buy building materials, and wear clothing provided for me by using the life of the land. Third, we are called upon as citizens to consider our relationship with each other and other species and determine our responsibilities as residents and consumers. We may see ourselves as free agents, but our lives depend on the lives of many others, including other species.

Given this perspective I see land preservation and development as defining a continuum of land use options rather than two opposing forces. As residents on the land, it’s not a matter of using or not using land. It’s a matter of different levels of consumption.

Then I considered the ways we look at land within our human land use systems. Political scientist Lynton Keith Caldwell and research philosopher Kristin Shrader-Frechette write about ethical concerns and conservation values applied to land economics, land use policy, and the law. They see land as “literally the base upon which all human societies are built” and land use influenced by two dominant concepts: economistic and ecological.³⁰

When we look at land from an economic point of view we see it as a financial resource, a commodity divided into pieces, bought and sold as property for financial gain. Land is valued according to its highest and best use, primarily measured in terms of economic return and land use decisions focused on maintaining the rights of the property owner.

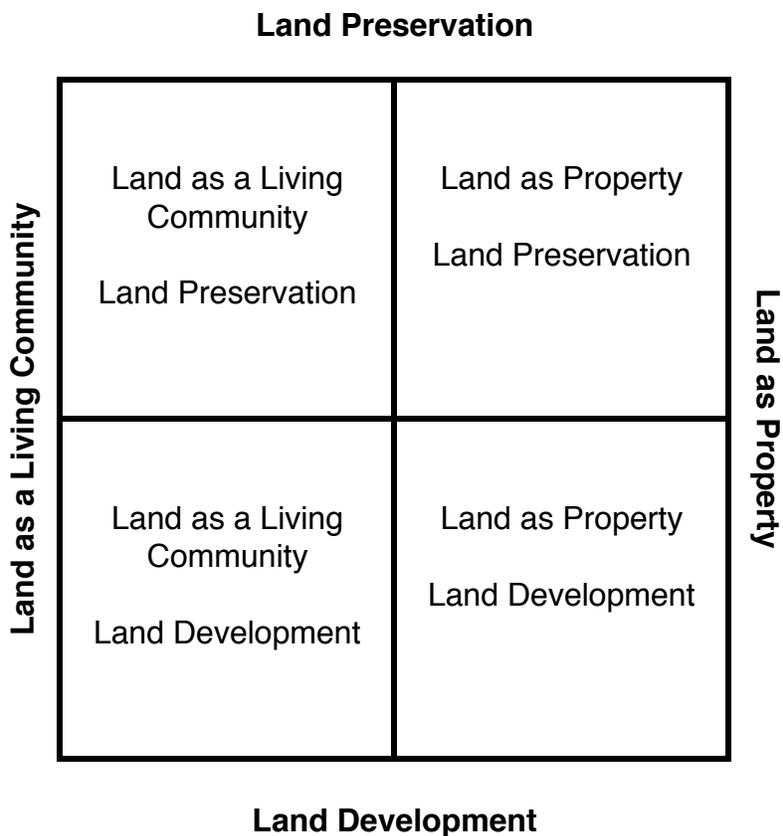
When we look at land from an ecological point of view, we see ourselves in relationship with the land—our human use is part of a “complex, interactive web of life for which the earth itself is the frame and indispensable support.” Land use is considered in terms of a systemic view of “land, earth, humanity, and the entire biosphere in a mode that is, or seeks to be, integrated rather than incremental.”³¹

More and more, Caldwell and Shrader-Frchette see our desire to maintain private property rights clashing with our growing knowledge of ecological interdependence and our desire to use land within an ethic of sustainability and responsibility as we continue to develop land use policy and legislation.

I see these conflicting economic and ecological views of the land as part of the complexity of our human-nature relationship. They are so ingrained in our culture that we draw from both when we are involved with land and land use, expressing values that range from relating to land as a living community and to land as property.

The matrix I created integrates these two land use ranges—one defined by land preservation and land development and the other defined by land as a living community and land as property:

Land Use Decision Makers Matrix



Each of the four quadrants identifies a particular orientation to land use decision making, but no quadrant represents a preferred point of view. In fact each quadrant is best viewed as one piece of a whole where no quadrant can be disregarded if we want to consider a complete picture of land and land use.

To illustrate, consider how my various roles and values as a decision maker are expressed in each quadrant:

Given my professional background and my interest in natural history and land preservation, I have a strong affiliation with the Land as a Living Community-Land

Preservation quadrant. I enjoy spending time outside observing the natural landscape. I limit my human impact as much as possible out of deference to the resident plants and animals. I feel a strong connection to certain natural communities.

Over the years I have enjoyed a hands-on relationship with the land, raising farm animals, gardening, trail building, maple sugaring. This puts me in the Land as a Living Community-Land Development quadrant. I actively use land but I feel a responsibility to maintain the capacity of the land community so it will continue to renew itself as a natural resource.

There are times when I have encouraged land protection by asking landowners if they would consider offering an easement or a deed restriction to protect a valued habitat. Here I am working with the land as property, so this orientation places me in the Land as Property-Land Preservation quadrant.

I participate in a family real estate partnership. The property we own includes a grocery store and parking lot serving a densely populated urban neighborhood in Columbus, Ohio. Here I see myself in the Land as Property-Land Development quadrant because I receive an economic benefit from the use of this land. This land is paved over and it primarily serves the human community.

When defined in this way, each quadrant highlights an important aspect of my relationship with the land community and my use of land. The matrix also serves as a reminder that our human-nature relationship is more complex than it seems when we are engaged in defending a particular point of view.

Beyond representing individual views, this matrix can also be used to describe a range of views encountered in land use decision making. For example, it can be viewed as containing all of our human land use interests. For instance, Bruce can see his interests represented in one quadrant, while my interests are represented in another, affirming our usual way of dividing land use interests into competing points of view such as conservation versus development.

I prefer to see this matrix representing another intellectual approach. This approach, which promotes a more inclusive way of considering our human-nature relationship, considers the merits of differing mindsets. Political philosopher Charles Taylor sees our differences as enriching each other. He believes our “lives are narrower and less full alone than in association with each other. In this sense, the difference defines a complementarity.”³² When viewed this way, each quadrant not only represents our differences in terms of conflicting views but also reminds us that land use is more than choosing between preservation or development. Our relationship with the life of the land is complementary in that we must take from the land in order to survive, but in turn we can choose to give something back. When we approve applications before the Wetlands Commission, we often ask for a mitigation to offset the impact of the land use requested. Complementarity implies, however, more than either “balancing” preservation and development or subscribing to a system of give and take. It implies a paired commitment to this relationship—if we take, we also give. When we give, we know we will also take. In this way, seemingly conflicting aspects become partnered expressions of life’s complexities. According to Taylor, “the fullness of humanity comes

not from the adding of differences but from the exchange and communion between them.”³³

Similarly, the more this matrix is viewed as representing a multi-faceted, ongoing relationship, the less each quadrant can be seen as separate from another. Instead, one quadrant draws from and influences another. Thinking about both protecting and developing land opens the door to considering the realities and responsibilities of resident natural and human communities co-existing together. Also, I believe if we focus only on one quadrant in this matrix and reject all others, we are denying our human-nature relationship in ways that disrespect the importance as well as the complexity of this relationship. As a land protector, it’s easy for me to feel good about preserving land, but it’s not so easy to acknowledge my use of land alongside that protection. I must recognize how I use as well as protect land if I hope to fully acknowledge my relationship with the life of the land.

Similarly, I see this matrix reflecting a moral pluralism at work in our land use decision making. Philosopher Andrew Brennan says, “There is no single theoretical lens which provides a privileged set of concepts, principles and structure in terms of which a situation is to be viewed.”³⁴ This defines a complexity—perhaps a complementarity—in which “one and the same case can be properly viewed in many different ways” and may lead us to an often ignored understanding that “being morally engaged with the world around us involves a multiplicity of perspectives and a value complexity.” Furthermore, if we don’t take in all these perspectives, we are only considering “partial accounts of the moral life.”³⁵ In other words, if we want to fully consider our land and land use

responsibilities, we must do more than defend our right to development or our duty to protect nature. In doing so we may find that, as Brennan states, “the business of living decently involves many kinds of principles and various sorts of responsibilities,” which call forth a moral pluralism that “recognizes that our feelings and responses to situations are drawn from many sources and cannot be simplified without distortion.”³⁶

Moral pluralism will be a recurring theme further explored throughout this dissertation. I introduce it here because I see this matrix as more than a descriptive tool. I see it as a way to map the complexities of our relationship and view our differences as part of a whole in which the relationship is not complete until all are seen and acknowledged together.

Choosing the Participants

This matrix also served as a guide to assure a range of views when I chose land use decision makers to interview. I selected people with dominant views represented in each of the quadrants.

I wanted to interview a diverse group of land use decision makers who owned or managed land in New Milford and had first hand experience with a specific land community. Land use decision making in Connecticut is considered a local initiative, with each town regulating land use within its own borders. Certainly there are distant landowners, public holdings, and state and federal regulations, but most land is held in private ownership subject to local decision making.

In New Milford land use decision makers are as diverse as the landscape. There are the citizens who serve on town Planning, Zoning, Wetlands, Conservation, and Economic Development Commissions as well as regional River and Lake Authorities. There are commercial farmers, a farm preserve managed by The Nature Conservancy, and a town farm project run by the Youth Agency. Citizens who are interested in conservation work with the local nature center and land trust. Others make a living building roads and developing land for future homeowners. Homeowners make decisions about their yards and gardens. Engineers, attorneys, and landscape architects work with all these people.

Land planner Timothy Beatley defines land use decision makers as “individuals faced with ethical judgments about land use,” such as “landowners, land developers, recreational land-users, citizens representing particular interests, elected or appointed officials, land-use professionals, resource managers, banks, homeowners, environmental and conservation groups.”³⁷

He considers all land use decisions matters of ethical judgment because we use our values and our sense of right and wrong actions to come to our decisions. For example, our moral values may allow land in residential areas to be used for churches but not adult video stores. Nowadays most people I know say it’s “wrong” to discharge pollutants into our lakes and streams and it’s “right” to offer mitigation when wetland areas are disturbed.

I agree with Beatley’s definition of land use decision makers and their decision making roles, including people he describes as land professionals who may consider

their role as simply technical. For example, an engineer designing a drainage system makes land use decisions when he or she visits a site and determines the best place to locate a detention basin. Engineering is “right” when it follows current best management practices.

Land use decision makers work on different scales—a homeowner chooses where to plant a tree, a developer plans a fifty-lot subdivision. Furthermore, people involved with land use often play more than one role as land use decision makers. For example, an attorney can represent a developer, serve on the board of nature center, and decide how to landscape his or her yard.

I used the Land Use Decision Makers Matrix to assure a fair distribution by choosing four people to represent each quadrant, with the exception of five in the Land as Property-Land Development quadrant. I chose the fifth person to replace another who later decided to participate. Instead of turning him away, I interviewed all five.

Although most people can see themselves in several quadrants, they usually find themselves in one dominant role as a land use decision maker through their profession, trade, or community involvement. I placed each person in a particular quadrant based on their dominant role as a decision maker and where I felt they were best suited to contribute to this study. I did not introduce them to the matrix or tell them which quadrant they represented. I had previous knowledge of all these people—watching them at public meetings, hearing them talk with other people, serving together on various committees—to make this presumption without consulting them. However, to confirm my assumptions, I did begin each interview asking the participant to describe

his or her self as a land use decision maker. I wanted to know about each person's perception of land use decision making. Sometimes this was an integrated part of his or her profession or livelihood, but often it came from the realm of civic duty and volunteer work. In Connecticut many decisions are made by elected or appointed citizens who volunteer endless hours on a town land use commission, the board of a land trust, nature preserve, or other land based organization.

Consequently, in this study some participants make a living by their decision making while others do it as concerned citizens. My desire was to work with people who have a clear understanding of their relationship with land and their decision making roles, whether they make money from their land or pursue a passion for land protection.

Following are the self-defined descriptions of the individuals at the time of the interviews organized by quadrant:

Land as a Living Community-Land Preservation Quadrant

1. An educator who is a nature preserve manager and organic gardener with eighteen years of experience as a land use decision maker.

2. A self-employed carpenter serving on the New Milford Conservation Commission, Aquifer Protection Committee, and an advisory group for the future use of deregulated public utility land, with twenty years' involvement as a land use decision maker.

3. A landowner with a particular interest in the wetlands on the property she and her husband have owned for eight years, who is also concerned about protecting greenways and has served on a local Habitat for Humanity board.

4. A plant nursery owner and biology teacher who serves on the New Milford Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Commission, has served on an Aquifer Protection Committee, Scenic Roads Ordinance Committee, and is an officer and founder of a professional gardeners group, with twelve years' involvement as a land use decision maker.

Land as a Living Community-Land Development Quadrant

1. A farmer serving on the New Milford Planning Commission for eleven years, and previously a lobbyist in the Connecticut Department of Agriculture.

2. A horticulturist, gardener, floriculturist, landowner, educator, county agent, retired vocational agriculture (vo-ag) high school teacher, and environmentally concerned grassroots organizer with thirty-eight years' experience.

3. An environmental consultant with degrees in engineering serving on the New Milford Town Council, who previously served on the Aquifer Protection Committee, and Sewer Commission with ten years' professional experience related to land use.

4. A youth service bureau administrator with twenty-one years of experience as a gardener, hiker, and maintainer of the Blue Trail, a sugarbush, greenhouse, and farm agricultural center.

Land as Property-Land Preservation Quadrant

1. A Nature Conservancy land preserve director who is also a gardener, and previously a conservation district educator with seven years' involvement as a land use decision maker.

2. An investment advisor serving as a local land trust officer with seventeen years' experience with land partnerships, conservation easements, and planning low-density development.

3. An architect and family landowner previously serving on an out-of-state Planning Commission and the New Milford Route 7 Committee, advising the town about land use planning, involved with land use decision making for thirty-six years.

4. A sales/marketing/real estate broker serving on the New Milford Planning Commission, Aquifer Protection Committee, Scenic Roads Committee, the board of the local nature center, and the Grassroots Coalition, with fifteen years' involvement as a land use decision maker.

Land as Property-Land Development Quadrant

1. An attorney previously serving as New Milford Town Attorney with twenty-four years of professional involvement dealing with issues affecting property and thirty-five years' personal involvement with land use decision making.

2. A professional civil engineer and gardener, serving as an officer of a homeowners' group water system, helping to interpret regulations before land use commissions, with twenty-three years' involvement as a land use decision maker.

3. An elderly-housing administrator serving on the New Milford Zoning Commission and Planning Commission for fourteen years, who has built single-family homes and is involved with historic preservation.

4. A consultant serving on the Economic Development Commission for one year.

5. A general contractor with thirty years' experience in development and home construction, who has donated two hundred acres of open space land to the town from his subdivisions.

Participants and the Land Use Decision Makers Matrix

		Land Preservation			
Land as a Living Community	Nature preserve manager	Land preserve manager			Land as Property
	Conservation Commission member	Land trust officer	Architect		
	Landowner	Planning Commission member			
	Wetlands Commission member				
	Farmer	Attorney			
	Retired vo-ag teacher	Civil engineer			
	Environmental consultant	Zoning Commission member			
	Youth service bureau administrator	Economic Development Commission member			
		General contractor			
		Land Development			

Orienting the Participants

I chose interviews as my method of inquiry because it was the most direct way for me to talk with local land use decision makers, but I wanted them to be very clear about why I was meeting with them so I designed a study guide to introduce my topic. In order to be on equal footing with each person, I asked the same questions and used the same interview style.

When I contacted each person, I described my research as focusing on the different ways land use decision makers view the life of the land and land as a living community. I told them there would be reading material to orient them to the topic. Then I scheduled a time for a one hour taped interview at their office, their home, or a private room at the public library. Since I too am a land use decision maker, and a familiar local person, I suspect several of them agreed to be a part of this study to “help me out” without really knowing what it was about. Using a study guide set the tone for a serious interview rather than a casual conversation. I have included the entire study guide in Appendix 1.

Drawing from scholarly writing, I chose passages that clearly explained the concept of land as a living community, including its historical evolution in American thought. I encouraged readers to think about their connections to the land, including

ways in which scholars address a growing sense of duty or obligation toward the land community through the concept of land ethics.

Although I am admittedly biased toward land protection, my goal in choosing these passages was to promote reflective thinking and honest consideration by land use decision makers who approached this study from a range of experience. I was more interested in eliciting a diversity of response than in advocating my positions.

I was aware that these people might harbor a resistance to philosophical or theoretical material, because it seemed irrelevant to their everyday concerns. Also, I was aware that these were busy people who probably would not be willing to read lengthy essays. Nevertheless, as an experienced educator, I trusted my ability to select evocative and interesting material, and I trusted my participants to give the process a fair chance.

The scholarly material I reviewed not only represents literature highly regarded in the academic world, but also literature that I found to be most informative, engaging, and useful in my own educational process. This is an emerging field of study within several disciplines and includes many newly published books. My challenge was to be alert to scholarship in environmental philosophy, land planning, property law, land use policy, environmental education, environmental history, and environmental economics.

When I searched for reading material, I looked for passages referring to ways people view land and land use. There are numerous books about land use planning, land as property, land based environmental issues, and connecting with the natural world, but only a few with specific references to land as a living community and land use

in an ecological context. I wanted scholarly writing oriented to the general public—informative, interesting, intellectually challenging, but easy to read. I chose descriptive passages written in a fair, receptive tone.

I wanted these passages to set the stage for how I intended to conduct the interviews. The ones I chose show how other people have given serious consideration to their topic from their own particular field of expertise without undue criticism of another point of view. In other words, I wasn't looking for responses based on criticizing other views, as so often happens when people are embroiled in land use issues. I wanted my participants to give serious thought to expressing their own point of view. I told them this is how they could best contribute to my study.

Finally, since we have a tendency to only think about our human-to-human relationships, I chose passages describing our human-nature relationship. I wanted my participants to think about how they would express their own connections to the land community by giving them examples of how other people talk about this.

The reading material defined the topic and presented a range of intellectual thought to consider. Before introducing the interview questions I asked each person to respond to the reading material so as to create a common ground from which everyone in this diverse group of land use decision makers could launch their views.

The Readings

The first reading came from Bounded People, Boundless Lands: Envisioning a New Land Ethic by Eric T. Freyfogle, a legal scholar who writes about our responsibility

for the land's health and future. The excerpt I chose, "Tales of Eden, Old and New," is from a chapter entitled, "Private Property and the American Dream."³⁸ In this passage Freyfogle talks about two views of land in American colonial times. In one, the New World was a Garden of Eden with abundant land and a wealth of food, fish, and forests. In the other, the New World was the wilderness Adam and Eve were banished to after being thrown out of the Garden.

Freyfogle works with these two themes by describing one view as land having value as it is—the Garden of Eden, and the other view as land gaining value only when it is worked—taming the wilderness. He refers to John Locke's argument that land has no value until labor is applied. Furthermore, in the New World, when labor was applied, land could also become one's private property. Then it could be tamed and transformed, in this case, into the familiar English countryside. Freyfogle also describes people who saw wild land as having an inherent value. Beginning with Thomas Jefferson's appreciation for the beauty of the North American landscape, continuing with John Muir's defense of the wild, Freyfogle describes an American desire to return to the wild, to preserve wilderness areas, and to protect land from misuse.

I chose this article because I see these views at work in the local land use disputes that often seem to stem from two different assumptions. That is, does land deserve consideration and protection for what it is as a land community, or does land gain value only when a human land use is applied?

The second excerpt was from Conserving Natural Value by Holmes Rolston III, a philosophy professor who writes about natural and cultural values including diversity

and complexity, ecosystem integrity and health, wildlife, and anthropocentric and intrinsic natural values. I chose two short passages from the “Natural and Cultural Values” chapter from sections entitled “Residence and Resource: Community and Commodity,” “Urban, Rural, and Wild,”³⁹ and one from a section in the “Ecosystem Integrity and Health Values” chapter entitled “Community.”⁴⁰

I referred to the first excerpt previously in this chapter. To review his key points, Rolston reminds the reader that all of life—people, plants and other animals alike—are residents on the land. We are all consumers and we all require resources to survive. Humans tend to think of themselves as the most important consumers and the only residents on the land. Unlike other residents on the land, humans have the ability to be citizens. In this role we can choose to regulate our consumption and make decisions that will benefit all residents, not just humans.

In the second section Rolston describes three ways humans see their environment. “Urban” is the center of human culture, “rural” is where nature is domesticated and used, and “wild” is where nature is not a commodity for our use but a place we go to recreate. The last passage offers a lengthy philosophical definition of a biotic community, listing qualities such as integrity, health, stability, future and past, plurality, and relationship.

I chose these passages because Rolston uses words, such as resident, resource, consumer, community, and citizen beyond their usual context. He invites readers to consider land as a commons for all residents including plants and animals, not just humans. Viewing land as urban, rural, and wild encourages readers to think

about all the ways we use land instead of focusing on one familiar or preferred land use. His definition of community expands the concept and use of this word to encompass more than the human community.

The final reading came from Policy for Land: Law and Ethics by Lynton Keith Caldwell, a political science and public and environmental affairs professor, and Kristin Shrader-Frechette, a research philosopher. They write about ethical concerns and conservation values applied to land economics, land use policy, and the law. The passage I chose came from the first chapter entitled “Reconsidering Land Policy: An Introduction” and a section “Economics and Ecology.”⁴¹

I referred to this passage previously, so to review: Caldwell and Shrader-Frechette describe two ways of looking at land use—economic and ecological. When land is looked at from an economic point of view, it is seen as a commodity divided into pieces to be bought and sold. When land is looked at from an ecological point of view, it is seen as an interrelated, integrated system. More and more, when we develop land use policy and legislation and consider the ethical use of land, our desire to maintain private property rights is clashing with our growing knowledge of ecological interdependence .

I chose this article because it focuses directly on land policy and decision making. Also, I wanted to acknowledge the economic use of land and land as property as part of our human-nature relationship. I wanted to see if the way the authors presented a growing rift between economic and ecological views of land made sense to

the land use decision makers in my study, regardless of their orientation to land conservation or development.

Overall, I chose Freyfogle's excerpt because of its focus on how land is valued. Specifically, does wild land have value or does land have to be worked to have value? Rolston speaks of natural as well as human residents on the land and asks if our responsibility as citizens extends only to people or to other residents in nature as well. The excerpt about urban, rural, and wild landscapes and his definition of community further describe an all-inclusive way of looking at land and land use for both human and land communities. I chose Caldwell and Shrader-Frechette's passage because it focuses on land use decision making and acknowledges the controversies that arise when land is valued both economically and ecologically.

Although I encouraged only brief responses because I wanted time to focus on my three key questions, everyone read these excerpts and many wrote comments in the margins and underlined passages. The excerpts definitely drew their attention and generated some thoughtful responses, but the readings were too short for any in-depth discussion. Their greatest value was just as I hoped—they helped define the topic and they served as an intellectual example by introducing serious thinking about our relationship to land and land use.

The Questions

Each interview included these three key questions:

1. What are your thoughts about land as a living community?
2. Do you feel a connection to land?
3. Do you feel a duty to or responsibility for land?

These questions did not appear in the study guide, but I found the readings prepared the land use decision makers to respond to them. I had these questions in mind when I chose my participants, and I purposefully chose land use decision makers who I thought could relate and respond to these questions. As an environmental educator, I often help people “discover” their relationship to natural communities for the first time by introducing them to enjoyable outdoor activities. In this case, I wanted to talk with people who already had well-established ties and first-hand experience with land and land use.

I chose each question to touch on a different aspect of relating to land and the land community. The first question gave each decision maker an opportunity to fashion his or her own response after focusing on the thoughts of other people. The readings served as intellectual examples, showing there are many ways to approach this question.

The second question called for a more personal response, a sense of relationship. I did not ask specifically about their connection to the land as a living community because, if someone saw their connection to land in terms of property, I wanted to allow for this response.

The third question was directed towards a sense of civic duty or citizenship. All of the land use decision makers in this study see themselves as community-minded

people. As such, they often spoke about their responsibility to land when they described their connection to land. Again, I didn't limit my question to the life of the land if people chose to talk about their responsibility to land as property.

These three questions yielded a wealth of responses, along with land and nature-related stories, and concerns and opinions about local land use issues. Also, as I transcribed each interview, I discovered more than simply answers to my questions. I will explain this in greater detail in following chapters.

The Interview Process

Having specific questions influenced the way I approached my research. Because New Milford land use decision makers are quick to cry foul if public procedures seem to favor one interest over another, I knew I wanted to talk with each person individually, asking everyone to respond to the same set of questions. To maintain my credibility, I needed to treat each person equally. At the same time I wanted my interviews to be conversational and familiar to allow for the possibility of this topic being further explored in the future, rather than its being only a one-time intellectual event.

Educational psychologist Steinar Kvale uses two metaphors to describe the interview process: in one the interviewer is a miner, and in the other he or she is a traveler. The miner is looking for "nuggets of data or meanings" where "objective facts and the essential meanings are drawn out by various techniques and molded into their definitive form."⁴² The traveler "explores the many domains of the country" and "asks

questions that lead the subjects to tell their own stories of their lived world.” With this second method “meanings in the original stories are differentiated and unfolded through the traveler’s interpretations.”⁴³

My interview process followed the traveler approach using a one-hour semi-structured format, tape-recorded with the person’s permission. Although I asked specific questions, every person had stories to tell and concerns about land and land use. I encouraged them to talk, to travel down their own roads. I used my three questions to bring them back to the main highway, but their detours showed me other ways to explore our relationship with the life of the land.

I did not engage in their conversation. I was a listener and facilitator. Their words shaped the journey, but there was never a lull in the interviews. I taped and transcribed each interview so I could work from their exact words. These land use decision makers were generous with their time and willingness to share. I wanted their statements to be accurate, but I have no illusions that my interpretation of this data is objective, nor is this a concern of mine. Instead of searching for “one true and real meaning” during the interview process, Kvale speaks of a “relational unfolding of meanings” in which the interviewer’s response to the interviews becomes part of the analysis.⁴⁴ If someone else reading the transcriptions or listening to the tapes interprets them in differing ways, Kvale sees this as an opportunity to create, not discredit, additional meanings.

This approach is no different from land use decision makers talking together, taking meaning from their conversations according to their own interests and concerns. When I go on site walks with other Wetland Commission members, we are all looking at

the same land but each person notices something different along the way. When we come together to discuss the proposed land use, each person adds their own comments based on their particular observations and concerns. It makes no sense to consider whose observations were the truest or most accurate. We depend on each other's viewpoints to create a full picture of the land and land use under consideration. This approach served me well because when the person I was interviewing worried about giving the right answer, I could say with no hesitation, "I'm looking for a range of views, so the right answer is however you choose to respond to these questions."

Interpreting the Responses

When the school bus pulled into the nature center, I often felt a moment of panic as sixty children clamored out the door chattering with each other. But the teachers always had a plan, and soon there were groups, each with an adult leader—a much more manageable situation.

My interviews yielded so much information that I felt a similar moment of panic faced with hundreds of pages of transcriptions. But I organized the interviews by quadrant so I could work with four (or five) interviews at a time instead of the whole group. Then I looked at the responses to my questions. Since the land use decision makers tended to repeat and revise their statements as their thought process evolved, I often ended up with several iterations. So I looked for statements that were the most articulate and inclusive of their thoughts. Then I created various response sets for each

quadrant and each individual, including their replies about 1) land as a living community, 2) connections to land, and 3) duties to or responsibilities for land. These response sets appear in Appendix 2.

Methodologically, choosing an interview process yielded much more data than I ever imagined. Not only were the participants generous with their responses, they seemed to enjoy the opportunity to talk at length and were often surprised they had so much to say. Moreover, I had the benefit of talking with a diverse group of land use decision makers, giving me the opportunity to hear a range of responses. After I organized their responses, however, I came up against what I called the “so-what” factor. That is, when I talked about these different responses with other people, their usual reaction was, “Yes, there were differences; so what?”

I was left wondering why these responses seemed meaningful to me but not to anyone else. I knew these responses were not words of wisdom, but they were important expressions. How could I draw out the meaning? I was heartened by these interviews because I learned something new and interesting from each person’s response to my questions. I saw how these responses revealed an abundance of thought, but I wanted them to be more than findings. I wanted these responses to become part of an ongoing conversation, a more thoughtful public expression, marked by a willingness to share and consider new perspectives about our relationship with the life of the land and our use of this life.

I realized that when I began my research I was seeing the life of the land as an intellectual concept, but during the course of the interviews I began seeing the life of the

land in terms of a human-nature relationship. As a result, my original approach of describing and classifying and comparing responses could not capture the dynamic qualities of a relationship. Relationships are not easily boxed or summarized. Being in a relationship is an ongoing, evolving cultural process. Because of this, the original boxed sets of responses are included in Appendix 2, but individual responses appear throughout this dissertation to lend meaning to each chapter.

Another realization was that when I began this research I saw myself as a researcher objectively gathering information. I anticipated a learning process, but I did not see myself being drawn into and subsequently transformed by the process, nor did I anticipate wanting to share this process as part of my research. After searching for a research methodology to help me integrate the content of my interviews with my own experience, I discovered narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry differs from traditional research in several ways. First, it often begins with a “research puzzle” emerging from the researcher’s experience rather than a research question arising from an intellectual pursuit.⁴⁵ In my case, a walk with a local developer led me to wonder about land use decision makers, their views of land as a living community, their connection to land, and their sense of responsibility for land.

Defined by educational researchers D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly, narrative inquiry is a way to study experience through “a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus.”⁴⁶ I collaborated with a diverse group of land use decision makers in New Milford, Connecticut, through both the interviews and the ongoing

interactions I had with them as active citizens and land use decision makers. Also, we all shared a common milieu, the life of the land surrounding us.

Clandinin and Connelly emphasize that narrative research is more than collecting, analyzing, and interpreting stories. “It is in the living and telling of experience that we locate what represents our sense of our experience as narrative inquirers.”⁴⁷ Furthermore, Clandinin and Connelly assert, “The contribution of a narrative inquiry is more often intended to be the creation of a new sense of meaning and significance with respect to the research topic than it is to yield a set of knowledge claims that might incrementally add to knowledge in the field.”⁴⁸ Doing research as a narrative inquirer did not end with analyzing and interpreting the interviews—that was only one side of the experience. The key to the success of my research, and what others could learn from my experience, was incorporating the story of my own intellectual journey and its effect on me as a researcher, scholar, land use decision maker, educator and local citizen. As the following chapters will show, instead of limiting my research to the knowledge claims generated by the interviews, I went on to work with theories of conflict and cultural difference, and, in order to bring greater meaning to my research, to integrate aspects of environmental philosophy into my views of land and land use and our human-nature relationship.

At one point there seemed to be a big disconnect between the interviews and where I was going in my research. It was as if I were abandoning the interviews and the people I interviewed (which made for awkward situations when they continuously asked me how the research was going). But then I realized the interviews had shaped my

research in important ways. I began to see the land use decision makers as having launched me in new directions with their honest, freely expressed responses, and now I was responding in kind. According to Clandinin and Connelly, “The narrative inquirer does not prescribe general applications and uses but rather creates texts that, when well done, offer readers a place to imagine their own uses and application.”⁴⁹ In other words, my job was to take this experience—content, process, and intellectual pursuit—and shape it into something we could all share and learn from together, scholars and land use decision makers alike.

Another important aspect of narrative inquiry, and one to keep in mind while reading the following chapters, is that in presenting research narrative inquirers tend to omit a specific literature review chapter. Instead, they weave “literature throughout the dissertation from beginning to end in an attempt to create a seamless link between the theory and the practice embodied in the inquiry.”⁵⁰ Clandinin and Connelly note there is often “a tension between literature reviewed as a structuring framework and literature reviewed as a kind of conversation between theory and life or, at least, between theory and the stories of life contained in the inquiry.”⁵¹

I am aware that literature review chapters define and confirm a scholar’s place and purpose in the academic world. For me, however, scholarly literature from many disciplines is also an important contributor to my work as a local land use decision maker and environmental educator. I turn to scholarship from many academic traditions to gain a deeper understanding of my own experience and to become a more effective and articulate leader, but I do not work within a specific academic community. And so, it

makes more sense for me, in the context of my own community, to integrate the literature throughout this dissertation.

In summary, I began my research focused on interviewing a diverse group of land use decision makers about their views of land as living community, their connections to land, and their sense of duty and responsibility. I saw myself primarily as a listener and observer gathering information that, upon analysis, would contribute to our knowledge of land as a living community and our use of land. As the interviews progressed, however, I began to see the responses, including my own, as a reflection of a complex human-nature relationship that encompassed not only our desire to protect the life of the land but also our desire to own and use land. So, my scholarship shifted from a narrowly defined analytical approach to a broader, more reflective inquiry into the meaning of this relationship in the context of using and protecting the life of the land in our local communities.

Chapter 3: Framing a Public Conversation About Our Relationship to Land and Land Use

In this chapter I examine practical and theoretical concerns that led me to abandon my original plan to hold a group discussion, even as I reconfirm the importance of public conversations about our relationship to land and land use as part of our deliberative system. Since land use disputes among several of my participants were one of the primary obstacles to bringing the group together, I turn to conflict theory and narrative mediation to consider the role of conflict, not only in our relationship with other land use decision makers, but also in our relationship with nature.

Abandoning the Group Discussion

My research design called for bringing interviewees together for a group discussion after I completed the interviews. Every land use decision maker was interested and curious about who would participate in the group, but to maintain confidentiality I couldn't name names. The interviewees told me what I was doing was "very interesting," especially if the "other side" were represented. One person was concerned that the group might be "antiseptic"—people might not say what they really wanted to say if they feared they would be misinterpreted or forced into a confrontation. Another person firmly stated he didn't want to be talked down to or cut off.

Although the interviewees expressed interest in hearing from the "other side," I was concerned about the ways they portrayed these land use decision makers. One

person perceived the “other side” as “not very thoughtful” “childish people” playing to win instead of looking to make the town better. Another saw them as “incredible powers” motivated by greed and taking resources they really didn’t need. One person saw himself as a “custodian” of land that would remain long after he was gone. He tried not to think of “us against them” but admitted to thinking about developers as being “them.” Another said that there are people out there who are proposing to “dismember the character of the land.”

When I first envisioned bringing these land use decision makers together, I saw group discussion as a way to enhance the intellectual process and expand our knowledge about land as a living community. I soon realized, however, what I called a group discussion they invariably assumed would be a debate with “representatives from both sides.” When I tried to emphasize my desire for discussion rather than debate, one person said debates were good because other people needed “convincing.” He didn’t think we could stay away from issues, because “everyone has their own agenda.” Another person thought a discussion would just turn into a disorganized debate unless we had a “constructive” group of people. One person suggested posing questions and inviting each side to comment without talking back and forth to each other.

For me, the most frustrating aspect of their response to coming together as a group was their assumption we would be debating land use issues, even though my interview questions were focused on talking about our connections to and responsibility for the land in our community. The closest the interviewees came to considering a discussion about our relationship with the life of the land was their expressing

determination to defend the land against rampant land use. As I thought about this group discussion, I realized one of my challenges was how to frame a conversation about our relationship with the life of the land in the midst of strong assumptions that talking about land meant debating land use issues.

It all came to a head one day when I overheard a public conversation where one of the people I interviewed happened to name another participant saying he didn't think he could stand being in the same room with the other person because they were on opposing sides of a bitter land use lawsuit. Both of these people were important to my research because they represented important aspects of conservation and development, but it never occurred to me their differences would end up in court.

I came to understand that no matter how carefully I framed the conversation, these land use decision makers would bring more than their views about the life of the land to any discussion I planned. There were complicated relationships among these people and a history of dealing with one another that would undoubtedly influence the conversation. There were assumptions about how we would be talking with each other. They were already dividing themselves into sides. I wondered what other issues might be revealed if I brought these people together without their knowing who else would be there.

Suddenly, my approach seemed naïve and risky. According to LeBaron, "Bringing adversaries together without awareness of relational dynamics and careful planning can worsen relationships and escalate conflict."⁵² When I originally conceived of this discussion, I didn't see these people as adversaries. But I ended up feeling I had

come to the brink of disaster and had fortuitously stepped back at the last minute. I knew it was unwise to continue in this direction without further consideration.

Dissolving the “Other Side”

When I reexamined my interview experience, I realized my initial approach was based on talking to the “other side.” But as the interviews progressed, I stopped thinking this way and discovered I was more interested in understanding the complexities of our relationship with land than monitoring the views of the “other side.” I came away from these interviews not only with a greater appreciation for our different views about land and land use but also with a desire to go beyond my own views and seek out these differences. I decided my research was best served by identifying and including these views rather than excluding or refuting them.

I was the only person, however, who experienced all these interviews. If we came together as a group I would be faced with people holding diverse points of view wrapped up in presumptions about debating “the other side.” Linguist Deborah Tannen is concerned about our propensity to define everything in terms of polarized opposites because it forces us to take sides and become argumentative and adversarial. We promote our point of view and discredit our opponent’s. Locked into a debate we become single-minded and lose track of any possibility that something can be learned from laying out our differences and taking a look at them all.⁵³ Land use issues are often

defined and discussed in terms of polarized issues, but talking about our relationship to land and land use is not an issue.

I was beginning to see how one of the greatest challenges to talking about our relationship with the life of the land is our cultural mindset where we place concepts such as land protection and land use in opposition to each other. When I tell people I am interested in learning more about our relationships with the life of the land, they usually reply, “Oh yes, I love nature. Isn’t it terrible how so much land is being ruined by development?” We romanticize our connections with nature while seeing land use as undesirable, thus putting ourselves into an oppositional mindset. That is, if we love nature, we cannot engage in development, and if we engage in development, we cannot love nature. This makes it difficult to explore ways in which we both love and use nature—to engage in one is to betray the other. As soon as we choose sides, we limit our ability to enter into the complexities of our human-nature relationship. If all we see when we look at land are issues and disputes, we narrow our ability to see beyond the confines of our own point of view and the assumptions we make about “the other side.” We look for enemies and behave defensively, losing our capacity to learn from each other about the complexities of our relationship with nature.

Also, when we are working with polarized views of land and land use, we often become so wrapped up in the arguments we completely forget about the life of the land we are considering. Even when we argue on behalf of the land, chances are our energy isn’t focused on the land itself but is focused on getting our point across and beating our opponent. Social scientist Michael Walzer sees debate as marked by the desire to win

by persuading the audience “that this position, rather than any of the alternatives, is the best one.”⁵⁴ He sees debate as a contest featuring “the exercise of rhetorical skill, the mustering of favorable evidence (and the suppression of unfavorable evidence), the discrediting of the other debaters, the appeal to authority or celebrity, and so on.” Other people are seen as “rivals, not fellow participants.”⁵⁵

I was angry when Bruce saw houses on the mountain. I wanted to confront him about his developer views and promote the protection of the nature sanctuary. But looking back on that experience, I believe the educator in me was not willing to go in that direction. I realized if I wanted to stay focused on learning more about our connections to the land, I would be better off exploring what each of us saw when we faced the mountain than debating our polarized positions as conservationist and developer.

I want to be clear that I do not oppose debate or taking sides on a land use issue or pursuing one’s own land-based interests. I will never hesitate to support or argue against an issue I feel strongly about. As a land use decision maker, there are times I argue with Bruce about his land use choices. But as an educator, my job is to invite him into the conversation and ask him to tell me more about what he sees.

I came to realize that I entered into the interviews in the mindset of an educator, but I saw the people I interviewed as land use decision makers. I even asked them to describe themselves as land use decision makers. I never considered how this might influence their approach to my questions. The role of a land use decision maker is to make decisions about land use. As obvious as this seems, it could certainly account for

some of the differences between our expectations for group discussion and shed some light on how we approach talking about our relationship to land and land use.

Deliberation and Everyday Talk

When I serve as a land use decision maker on the Wetlands Commission, I am engaged in a deliberative process that Walzer defines as “a particular way of thinking: quiet, reflective, open to a wide range of evidence, respectful of different views. It is a rational process of weighing the available data, considering alternative possibilities, arguing about relevance and worthiness, and then choosing the best policy or person.”⁵⁶

I realized the discussion I envisioned encompassed the first part of Walzer’s definition, that is, being reflective, open to and respectful of different views, but it did not include the second. In essence I wanted to fill up every quadrant of the matrix drawing from a wide range of views. I wanted to expand the views of my participants as mine had been expanded through the interviews and generate a greater awareness of the complexities of our human-nature relationship. Walzer’s definition, however, moves on to weighing, arguing, and making the best choice, which involves narrowing our views, minimizing difference, and seeking common voices as we work toward a decision.

I believe staying focused on our relationship with the life of the land involves highlighting rather than minimizing our differences in order to learn more about our diverse connections with the life of the land surrounding us—all the ways we use, protect, learn from and about that life. To this end Tannen suggests there are other

ways to work with differences such as “exploring, expanding, discussing, investigating” and exchanging ideas through dialogue.⁵⁷

In fact, the words Tannen uses to promote ways of working with our human differences—exploring, investigating, exchanging—are the very words I use as an environmental educator to describe my approach to learning about nature. As an educator, I see benefits to learning how to talk about, listen to, and learn from our differences without rejecting or judging them. But I knew these land use decision makers would probably not grant importance to an open-ended expansive conversation, even though I believe talking together will eventually lead to action, change, and new understanding in terms of how we consider land and land use. It's not just tossing around ideas.

Stepping back to consider a wider view, political theorist Jane Mansbridge identifies a deliberative system encompassing a range of formal and informal public forums, political talk with representatives, media talk, activist talk, and everyday talk in private spheres. Each of these help “people come to understand better what they want and need, individually as well as collectively,” which for her is one of the key components of deliberation.⁵⁸ In this system everyday talk “anchors one end of a spectrum at whose other end lies the public decision-making assembly.”⁵⁹

I see talking about our human-nature relationship as a form of everyday talk that can expose “some matters, hitherto thought too intimate for the public to discuss, or of so little importance that they did not need to be discussed by the public.” Bringing these matters into the public realm is important, because they are “matters on which the

collective, the public, ought to deliberate.”⁶⁰ Certainly, there are aspects of my relationship with nature that I hesitate to talk about in public because I resent being labeled a “tree-hugger” or a “nature-lover,” who can’t possibly make serious land use decisions. At the same time, I believe it’s time to acknowledge the contributions of our resident natural communities and consider our public responsibility for their continued well-being along with recognizing our human need to use and consume the life of the land around us. But in terms of public deliberation, this is a new conversation, one that needs practice and discussion to draw out its importance, to understand its complexity, and to find the words to express connections with the land that are often experienced but rarely talked about.

Mansbridge sees everyday talk as producing results “the way a market produces collective results, through the combined and interactive effects of relatively isolated individual actions,” in contrast to a decision making assembly that “produces results in concert, usually through the give-and-take of face-to-face interaction.”⁶¹ She asserts decision making needs everyday talk to help create and determine the public will on important matters. When land use decision makers fail to consider the impacts to resident natural communities, they are often accused of not caring what happens to the life of the land. This implies they see the life of the land and choose to destroy it anyway. I believe most people never even think about land as a living community; clearing it to build a house is simply creating a clean lot on which to pour a foundation. Talking about our relationship with the life of the land doesn’t guarantee we will make

land use decisions with less impact, but it does bring awareness of the land as a living community into our conscious minds and, over time, into our deliberations.

Placing these conversations into the deliberative system gives them an integral role. As a local citizen, I see how issues and concerns seem to take on a greater importance when they enter the realm of public discussion. Even though I abandoned the group discussion, I still believed our relationship with the life of the land would gain meaning if land use decision makers were given the opportunity to talk about it as a public as well as a private concern. Nevertheless, I still needed to address the conflict that inevitably arises when different views about land use are revealed.

Conflict Theory and Narrative Approaches

I turned to conflict theory to help me through this field of conversational land mines because I wanted to learn how to disarm conflict and move into the free-flowing expression I experienced during the interviews, but I learned that conflict theory is as much about entering the conflict as making it go away. It seemed one of the best ways to learn about conflict is to engage our differing perspectives, needs, and interests while remaining confident and optimistic about working together. Whereas deliberation tends to move us towards a common voice, conflict highlights our differences. Just as natural diversity is important to a healthy ecosystem, working with our own diversity seems equally important to a healthy community.

Initially I was drawn to various forms of mediation as a means to bolster my facilitation skills and my confidence in these conflict situations. I enrolled in workshops specifically geared to learning how to mediate land use disputes. I discovered a process where people come together to put their differences on the table, where conflict is engaged but does not impede or dominate the conversation. Land use mediation isn't a debate or an intellectual argument in which people compete to win their point of view and leave the room unchanged. It is a process where change happens and decisions are made based on everyone's input, hopefully to the satisfaction of all involved. I was drawn to the rules and procedures guiding the conversation that assure all are heard. I was drawn to the role of the mediator, who respects each party, encourages the conversation, and works with the conflict.

When I considered conversations exploring and defining our relationship with the life of the land, I realized I was actually describing a network of relationships: our personal connections with nature, our ties to land as a resource, our relationship with nature as a human species, and our relationship with each other when we enter into land use negotiations. Conflict is inevitable when we bring our differences into such a complicated web of relationships. Recognizing and working with whatever conflict arises is one way to understand more about our relationships with each other and with the land. But I couldn't see this taking place unless the participants were willing to reconsider their polarized views and engage their curiosity about different perspectives.

I was drawn to mediation because it starts with people entering the room with their own agendas, just as I would expect these land use decision makers to begin.

Then it moves through a process that not only draws out differences but also asks each party to consider these other views and concerns. I want to be clear—I am not focused on mediating land use issues, but I believe there is much to be learned from conflict theory and practice in terms of seeing conflict and difference as important aspects of our relationships, rather than obstacles, threats, or something to avoid. Because of their focus on maintaining and promoting healthy relationships in the midst of conflict, I was specifically drawn to narrative mediation as developed by narrative therapists John Winslade and Gerald Monk.⁶² Since land use issues will never go away, one of my interests is how to maintain and promote a healthy human-nature relationship in the midst of land use conflict.

A place to start is learning to set aside issues in order to talk in terms of a relationship. Winslade and Monk see language as “a meaning-making activity rather than a passive reporting function.” They believe when people talk they “are not only expressing what lies within but they are also producing their world.” They caution we must “take care to talk with an eye on the kind of world we are creating.”⁶³ When talking about land use issues dominates our conversations, I worry we are creating a world where the life of the land sinks into the background and loses its importance. When we talk about the life of the land as a part of our community, I am hopeful we are creating a world where our relationship with nature becomes an integral part of our lives.

Another factor that affects our conversations is how we deal with conflict when it arises. Narrative mediation focuses on the role of relationships in conflict situations. As well as solving the problems that brought them together, people engaged in a narrative

approach are seen as participating in a social interaction in which different realities come together, influence, and possibly change each other. They come away holding new perspectives or new ways to think and talk about their relationship with themselves and others. By contrast, land use dispute mediation is primarily a problem-solving approach in which participants tend to be viewed as self-contained individuals or stakeholders coming together, each expressing his or her needs, interests, and demands with no expectation of changing his or her point of view. The greater concern is resolving the problem and coming away with needs met. Stakeholders may take turns listening to each other's concerns about the land, but there is no social interaction. They are there as individuals representing a particular point of view. On the other hand, when people are engaged in a narrative approach to land use conflict, they may spend time describing the land and telling stories about their connections, thus drawing the life of the land into the conversation.

As a Wetlands Commission member I experience these contrasting approaches when I consider an application. Although most of our deliberations take place in the hearing room, site walks are an important aspect of our decision making process. The surveyor stakes out the land showing us where the proposed land use activity will take place. Site walks are where we see potential impacts to the land that are never apparent looking at maps in the hearing room or listening to various expert reports. By walking the site, we actually see the wetlands we are entrusted to protect by our regulations and view the functions they perform as part of our community.

Unencumbered by formal rules of conversation, I can freely express my wonder at

spotting a little red eft or a pileated woodpecker, while hearing about the applicant's hopes and dreams for this land. As our conversations about the life of the land and the desired land use mingle, one influences the other. With this narrative approach, the land has an opportunity to tell its story and the applicant's representatives, as well as commission members, see firsthand how the proposed activity will impact this land community. Asking an engineer to move the road to protect a vernal pool teeming with salamander eggs and noisy spring peepers makes sense when experienced on site, whereas making this request in the hearing room is often viewed as one more engineering problem to be solved.

Frankly, I am rarely happy seeing land developed, but I do feel a certain satisfaction approving an application when, using a narrative approach, we work together—applicant, engineer, attorney and commissioner alike—to accommodate the resident natural communities as well as the human activity. This approach enables our human-nature relationship to play a part in resolving the conflicting aspects of this application.

Nevertheless, I have learned that just because someone agrees to protect a vernal pool doesn't mean this person sees the pool as I do. It may be a matter of simply accommodating a nature-loving commissioner to move the project along. Winslade and Monk see conflict as much more than an expression of our individual needs and interests. Their narrative view of conflict "emphasizes the enormous variation in how people live their lives due to the quite different discursive contexts that surround them." There is "great diversity in the ways we make meaning in our lives" resulting in many

different perspectives. When these perspectives clash, people engage in power struggles to see “whose meanings get to be privileged.”⁶⁴

For me a vernal pool represents a complex natural system easily destroyed by human activity. As a wetlands commissioner, my responsibility is to protect the functions of this water-filled depression, and I can’t help experiencing a sense of wonder whenever I come upon these life-supporting pools. But, because the regulations also allow for the reasonable use of one’s property, there’s another meaning to consider—the applicant’s desire to develop this land and fulfill his or her aspirations for this property. This power struggle is played out in the hearing room where our different perspectives are expressed through the deliberative process.

As a local citizen, I see land use issues grow and move throughout various interest groups in the community according to what people say and how they say it. Granted, each individual in the conversation adds his or her views about how things are or how things should be, and some people seem to have more influence than others, but the issue evolves as a group process. In the end, all of us have created the course of land use in our communities. It’s easy to point the finger at our opposition, but from a narrative point of view we all carry a responsibility for the world we create from our public discourse.

Our relationship with the life of the land and land use places us in situations where at times we are faced with both protecting the land we love and using this land to support our human lives. Winslade and Monk see us as “multiply positioned subjects,” not simply individuals with one identity. They say, “People’s lives are complex and com-

posed of the multiple identifications and subject positions that are offered to them” and as a result “people take on multiple identities.”⁶⁵ “Ambiguities, contradictions, and internal conflicts are always emerging from our exposure to the multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings of events around us.” Complexity is an ally because it “increases the range of possibilities for how things can develop,” and “multiple identities increase the range of resources that people can bring to bear on a situation.”⁶⁶

Within ourselves there are multiple identities and multiple voices. This is also true for others. Acknowledging these multiple selves is difficult in a culture in which we are encouraged to take a stand as individuals, assert our personal views, and stand up against the opposition. It means deciding when to assert our individual views and when to consider our role in and our affect on a larger whole.

Most public conversations about land or land use take place in a particular context (a hearing, a nature walk, a real estate negotiation) with a particular set of rules or procedures (regulations, trail etiquette, legal protocol) designed for a particular outcome (issuing a permit, seeing wildlife, getting a good deal). One reason we surround our land-related conversations with context, rules, and procedures is to manage the cultural complexities we’ve created in our relationships with land. One moment we are landowners trying to manage the value of our property, another moment we are nature lovers connecting with the life of the land. In a public hearing we express our relationship in terms of its scientific, economic, and legal aspects. On a nature walk we open ourselves to discovering new connections. If we speak from a context different from the other people in the conversation, such as when Bruce talked about houses on

the mountain, our words and their meaning can not only be misunderstood, but they can also ignite conflict and passionate responses, particularly when we have strong connections to land and land use.

Externalizing Conversations

Instead of focusing on each other as the source of conflict, narrative mediation uses “externalizing conversations” to work with conflict and misunderstanding.⁶⁷ These conversations draw the focus away from the people involved and focus instead on the problem itself as the source of conflict for all parties. For example, if I am fighting with my neighbors about their son’s trespassing on my land with his ATV, I would direct my anger to the damage caused by the ATV instead of focusing blame on the parents or the son. Talking about the damage to the land allows me to express my sense of connection to nature and to direct my outrage at the destruction of this land, while enabling my neighbors to consider how they will repair the ruts and deal with their son’s actions, instead of needing to defend themselves from my attacks. Taking this approach leaves the door open for a continuing relationship as neighbors because we are all working together to address the problem.

In a similar way, in my role as a Wetlands Commission member, I can participate in externalizing conversations when I am considering a request for land use. During the course of my deliberations, I am expected to separate my views of the landowner from the land use under discussion in order to freely express my concerns or my support. If I

am unable to do this, I step out of the discussion and abstain from voting. Engaging in this form of externalizing conversation encourages all parties to participate in the discussion and discourages disparaging remarks or power plays that may shut down cooperation or new understandings.

However, separating the problem from the person or the land use from the landowner is only one way of engaging in externalizing conversation. I see talking about our human-nature relationship as another form of externalizing conversation in which the challenge is learning to separate oneself as the land's owner from the life of the land. Land has a life apart from our own, but we often see land only as an extension of ourselves. We talk about "my" property or "my" need to develop this land or "my" interest in protecting "my" land when, in fact, this land is also living and growing and changing regardless of our actions. When we are negotiating a land use, I believe we must recognize that most of the time we are considering our own needs or interests as a landowner and may or may not be considering the actual impact of this proposed land use on the resident land community. One way of drawing our attention to the impact of our human activity on the life of the land under consideration is to use externalizing conversation. In so doing, we are able to recognize that land is a party in these land use deliberations, with interests and needs of its own, separate from our human desires.

Entitlement and Power

Our willingness to engage in externalizing conversations as an expression of our

relationship with land and land use is highly influenced by the power, the privilege, and the entitlement we attach to landownership and our use of property. This is reinforced by rights-based economic, legal, and political systems. We feel entitled to use our property, manage our land, and see land as a means to happiness, satisfaction, and wealth. According to Winslade and Monk, “Patterns of entitlement emerge from within a complex network of power relations and societal narratives.”⁶⁸ They see “conflict as a contest over entitlements rather than over interests or needs.”⁶⁹

Conflict often arises when parties feel entitled to receive consideration or to receive a particular outcome by virtue of their position or because of certain rights and privileges. Although we tend to see land use conflict as a clash of needs and interests, it can also be defined as a clash of entitlement when we are working with power and privilege as it presents itself in a particular situation. We often assume power and privilege are predetermined elements of our land use culture, such as our right to build on our land and receive a financial benefit or the right of developers, because of their economic power, to do as they wish with the land. Narrative mediation sees power and privilege shifting with the context. For example, when Bruce and I are facing the mountain at the nature center, I hold the power of protection. But when I am on his land, he holds the power of landownership, unless I am visiting his land as a wetlands commissioner. In that context I hold the power of regulation.

Winslade and Monk see conflict arising when we have an overdeveloped sense of entitlement and see ourselves as having inalienable rights and needs, never to be subject to negotiation or modification. When we are considering our relationship with the

life of the land around us, an overdeveloped sense of entitlement may overshadow our ability to consider, as the landowner, our duties and responsibilities to support and protect a resident land community. Land use negotiations usually focus on the rights and responsibilities of a landowner in terms of how the property will be used, and the impact of this use on neighboring human property owners. As far as considering the life of the land, we often assume that the animals will find another home when our property is developed and that the trees can serve us better as firewood, rather than remaining part of our land.

Entitlement is of great concern in narrative mediation because it influences the process. Some voices may dominate while others are silenced, and the conflict cannot be fully addressed until all parties are heard. In New Milford our beautiful landscape is cited as one of the reasons people move to this area. Our most contentious disputes often arise when proposed land use changes impact a beloved ridgeline, farm field, or mature forest. It seems the only way we know how to talk about this dilemma is in terms of human entitlement, arguing the rights of the landowner or the community's need for farmland. Rarely do we look at that land in terms of nature's contribution to the life of our community. When we see the land itself as having no presence, there is nothing to fight about. When our human voices dominate the conversation, the voice of the land is silenced. When we are fighting amongst ourselves to determine who will be privileged by virtue of entitlement to the land, we may not view ourselves in conflict with that land. The conflict will not be fully addressed, however, until we focus on the land itself and consider our responsibilities as both landowners and citizens to assure the land's

continuing presence as a viable and important contributor to the quality of life in our community.

Entering the Conversation as a Thirdsider

Addressing conflict through a narrative approach enables me to see land use disputes as an expression of different meanings and perspectives, as well as an expression of stakeholder interests. In the context of relationships, conflict highlights our differences, giving us an opportunity to better understand our connections, including our connections to land and land use. But working with conflict in this way is a choice. I began this chapter with a concern for bringing together a group of land use decision makers who assumed their differences would be worked out through debate, persuasion, and even a previously declared lawsuit. This is a far cry from choosing to see our different perspectives as a way to learn more about our relationship to land and land use. I do believe, however, that there are ways to initiate this discussion provided the participants are willing to make a clear distinction between talking about land use issues and considering our connections to the land.

The following chapters expand on concepts introduced in this chapter and serve as conversation starters by focusing on key aspects of our human-nature relationship: seeing land in terms of property and entitlement, extending our consideration to the life of the land, and using our everyday talk to include the life of the land in our land use

deliberations. To set the stage for free-flowing exploratory conversations, I close this chapter by describing a third-party approach to talking with each other.

As a researcher based in my own community, I found it difficult to maintain an uninvolved, objective stance. I'm more suited to active participation than passive observation. I've always been open to and curious about other perspectives, but throughout my research I never had a way to acknowledge or describe this approach until I began to consider aspects of narrative mediation and the role of a third party. A third party is someone who not only listens to all sides but also works with all sides, someone who can go between people and appreciate something about each of them, and, for me, someone who brings together different voices so as to fully understand the complexities of our human relationship with the life of the land. LeBaron sees third parties as fulfilling countless roles. "They are listening ears, agents of reality, balancers of power, and designers and managers of process. They steer a course between building rapport and maintaining perspective, between impartiality and caring."⁷⁰ Furthermore, I discovered there are several ways to compare the work of third parties to the work of environmental educators. LeBaron talks about third parties modeling a leadership style in which we invite people "to access expansiveness and energy through connection and deep listening." She talks about shifting "cherished viewpoints to an attitude of inquiry" and "personal agendas to a willingness to be surprised."⁷¹

From my point of view as an environmental educator, I believe she could just as well be talking about bringing people on a nature discovery walk where the leader

encourages participants to connect with nature through listening and to engage their curiosity and their willingness to be surprised by new discoveries. In fact, I wonder if cultivating our abilities to approach nature in this way could help us approach people with the same spirit of openness and curiosity.

I see a new leadership tool for land use decision makers and for other local citizens who are open to considering other perspectives and interested in extending their consideration to the life of the land—learning to be a thirdsider.⁷² As social anthropologist William Ury describes it, a third-side perspective recognizes that “the truth of each competing point of view can be appreciated. Shared interests often come to loom larger than the differences. People remember that they all, in the end, belong to the same extended community.”⁷³ Although Ury focuses on the human community, I believe we could expand his meaning to include natural communities.

Ury also talks about being an inner thirdsider—listening to “the voice that urges us to heal old grievances” and develop “the capacity to listen to the other side and show empathy.”⁷⁴ Healing grievances and showing empathy are key to being able to see our differences in terms of how diverse points of view can define and enrich our relationships. Land use conflicts do create serious grievances, but sometimes we have a choice between maintaining a grievance and letting it go. When Bruce saw houses on the mountain I was truly insulted; but now I’m grateful I took the time to interview him.

Winslade and Monk see listening to people’s stories as a way to “help us understand complex human intentions and interactions.”⁷⁵ If we are willing to engage in a “curious exploration” of new perspectives or make a “respectful inquiry into a person’s

assumptions,” there is much to learn from one another’s perspectives in terms of shaping and understanding our connections with the life of the land surrounding us in our local communities.⁷⁶

We can’t always be a thirdsider, but having the ability to choose a third party stance is a valuable skill whether it’s helping people on a nature walk discover their connections to nature or being the land use decision maker who reaches out to “the other side.” Choosing to be a thirdsider fosters our openness, curiosity, and willingness to reach out and connect with other life and other people.

There is a big difference between entering a conversation as a thirdsider and coming into a discussion ready to defend a point of view. Although debate will always be a part of land use deliberations, talking about our relationship to land and land use is a new conversation, one that needs practice and discussion to draw out its importance, to understand its complexity, and to find the words to express our experience with nature. Whereas debate is tough, concise, and competitive—just the thing for identifying key issues; third-side approaches are gracious, encouraging, and inclusive—well suited for new conversations.

Chapter 4: Land as Property

Land as Property

On a winter site walk to consider an application before the Wetlands Commission I came across a network of mink tunnels in the snow along a stream. Mink are rare around here. If I saw mink tunnels on my land, I would feel very rich indeed. The landowner knew about the mink, but he wanted to subdivide his land. He reassured me his land use wouldn't disturb them, but his response felt like a condescending pat on my head. Given his desire to subdivide his land, neither the mink nor my concern seemed to figure very heavily into his plans. Economic entitlement and property rights always seem to dominate land use conversations and diminish the importance of other concerns, such as protecting a mink colony. Wetlands regulations, however, direct me and other commission members to consider the protection of wetland habitat during our deliberations; paying attention to the well-being of minks is part of our public responsibility. In my regulatory role, I represent public interests, one of which is protecting wetland habitat for the benefit of wildlife. The landowner's role is to represent the self-interests of an individual property owner.

Despite the power of the economic mindset, our challenge is to recognize how it affects the way we think about land and how we can step outside this mindset to think about land in different ways. The economic mindset is limiting. Seeing land as property often traps us in a consumer-based mindset that makes it difficult to see land as something we share or as something with a life of its own requiring our consideration.

Thinking about land in terms of our own self-interests leads us to forget the community context of our ownership. In contrast, when we focus on property from a citizen-based mindset, our sense of entitlement is moderated and we are able to consider our land in the context of how it contributes to the life of our community.

In this chapter I discuss the mindset of property ownership and how this influences our view of land and our ability to extend our consideration to the life of the land. I give examples of how interest-based and citizen-based views of property are evident in local land use decision making. Drawing from a cultural perspective, I identify two different approaches to conflict and show how their application can help land use decision makers and other concerned citizens avoid misunderstandings and become more perceptive participants in land use conversations when different mindsets and points of view are brought together.

Defining Our Relationship with Land as Property

When I first considered the questions I wanted to ask land use decision makers, I decided to stay away from conversations about land as property. I feared responses to questions about property would take over the conversation, dominating any talk about the life of the land. But I knew if I wanted to encourage a range of responses from these land use decision makers, I couldn't ignore our connection to land as property.

Therefore I decided to focus on land as property in some of the readings I chose for the study guide, but to orient my interview questions toward considering the life of the land.

As my research progressed, I became more confident in facing up to the powerful relationship we have with land as property and more interested in what the decision makers had to say about property. Since I didn't ask a direct question about land as property, most comments about this arose from various contexts in the readings. Since my intent was to use the readings as a lead in to the questions, I did not ask the land use decision makers to elaborate on their responses. Most decision makers simply pointed out passages that caught their attention, such as this quote from Caldwell and Schrader-Franchise's excerpt: "Emergence of ecological ethics has aroused counter ethics based on exaggerated individual rights to possession and use and defended as the American way of life."⁷⁷

Bruce was an exception, wanting to take the time to spell out his own views of property after reading passages he interpreted as a "Biblical view," meaning "we all own the land, given to us by God . . . as if it was given tenants-in-common to all of us." He goes on to explain, "That is, I can't sell my half without you selling with me, we can't split it up." But "that contradicts how we deal with land today. We don't own the land collectively. You own your parcel; I own my parcel."

He disagrees with these "Biblical views" in that "You can't think the Bible said that is our land, our water, our trees, our rocks, our everything, and it was given to us by God, and then have the state or the law or the government say this is the law of the land, this is how land is to be dealt with." He sees people in New Milford "using this in a way as a tool to say you know we all own the land. It's my ridge like it's your ridge. It's my valley like it's your valley. It's my river like it's your river." He identifies this as a

citizen's view of land use, whereas as a developer he holds a consumer's view. He continues, "I might take a piece of land that you as a citizen would love to drive by and look at and enjoy its beauty, and yet I'm going to change that."

Drawing from a controversy about ridgeline development, he says, "People who live up on the ridge that look down have this gorgeous view. Their land is worth more than the people who live in the valley. But the people in the valley, their rights are infringed because they want to look up and not see any change. So whose rights are being violated? Those who want to look down or those who want to look up?"

He concedes there is "merit to both arguments," although "people who own the property should not be deprived of their value." He sees this as "an interesting topic because emotionally a lot of people could move towards the Biblical sense. And then on the other side [there is] the capitalistic society [where] land is viewed more as a value in a monetary sense."

When Bruce describes the ridgeline controversy, he acknowledges the land's presence in terms of enjoying its beauty and having a gorgeous view. He also acknowledges a citizen's right to defend the land against change. But if his land is worth more, he sees himself as having the right to change that view. Ultimately, his sense of entitlement comes from the law of the land and our capitalistic society. He calls other views, which would challenge his, "emotional."

I chose this statement because Bruce describes the conflict we live with as both citizens and consumers of the land. We have a strong connection to our land as property, yet as citizens we often feel a strong connection to land in our community in a

way that seemingly ignores the rules of individual ownership. Although Bruce tends to play down this view of land in which we are “tenants-in-common,” I believe in order to fully understand our relationship with land as property, we must acknowledge both viewpoints as aspects of ownership.

Frankly, despite our differences as land protector and land developer, I can identify with Bruce’s strong defense of his property. My land borders a local trout stream, and it’s not unusual to see a stranger cut across my land to get to one of the deeper fishing holes. Sometimes people come to my door and ask if it’s ok to be there, but most just walk across and start fishing in my backyard. Since I consider the river a public resource, it doesn’t bother me to see someone along the stream bank. But there’s a part of me that wants him off my land—I get to say who enters my property. Without my permission, people have no right to trespass.

Legal scholar Mary Ann Glendon calls this expression of individualism our “rights talk.” She believes individual rights have taken on an “illusion of absoluteness” in our American culture. She uses property ownership as one example of when we stubbornly hold on to our vision of absolute dominion over our parcel of land.⁷⁸ Even though we all submit to local zoning or wetland regulations, we often see this as more of an intrusion of our rights than a civic duty to our community.

Another characteristic is our “extraordinary homage to independence and self-sufficiency.”⁷⁹ When we are surrounded by our property, we see ourselves as essentially independent, self-determined beings. As separate individuals, we have no

connection to others, human and other species, until we invite them into our lives or allow them on our land. We enforce laws against trespassing onto our property.

Glendon is concerned about the way our legal system has evolved, taking us in the direction of seeing ourselves as solitary beings surrounded by a sphere of protection and privacy, rather than as social beings drawing strength from each other.

Furthermore, she is concerned our American ideals of self-determination and self-sufficiency may actually limit rather than enhance our democratic ideals. Culturally, we expect people to work towards self-sufficiency; we are hesitant to support dependency. As a result, we find it difficult to think about and support the needs of our interdependent relationships such as families, communities, and other social connections. Even though we cannot thrive as individuals or as a society without these relationships, we still see ourselves as primarily self-actualized beings.⁸⁰

When I am at home on my property, I thoroughly enjoy my privileges of ownership—my right to privacy and protection from trespass or intrusion and my economic security. It's easy to slip into a comfortable illusion of self-sufficiency, self-determination, and entitlement. Seeing land as property hones our ability to be exclusive, to protect our own, to set boundaries and enforce rules of trespass and protection—to see others in terms of who belongs, whom we will recognize and allow, whom we will keep out, whom and what we own and use.

But as Bruce points out, there are times when we look at land, such as the undeveloped forested ridgelines in New Milford, as a landscape defining the rural character of our community. Our sense of individual property rights gives way to a

citizen's view—wanting to protect that ridgeline from clearing and house-building despite the ridgeline landowner's desires. Because these views conflict, we tend to pit one against the other, seeing them as competing land use interests. Taking this approach, however, overlooks our dual responsibilities as individual property owners and citizens in a community.

Consumer-based and Citizen-based Mindsets

Environmental policy scholar Mark Sagoff is concerned about our focus on satisfying and managing our individual desires when it causes us to lose sight of our public values. He wonders, "Should we base environmental policy on the interests individuals may act upon as consumers or on the values that they may agree upon as citizens?"⁸¹ He believes pursuing our individual desires as consumers is different from joining with others to determine our goals as citizens. In contrast to defending our personal interests as individuals, when we come together as citizens, new ideas arise about how we see our community. Sagoff explains, "The ability of the political process to cause people to change their values and to rise above their self-interest is crucial to its legitimacy. Political participation is supposed to educate and elevate public opinion; it is not, like economic analysis, supposed merely to gratify preexisting desires."⁸²

In other words, when we are focused on our individual concerns as property owners, we tend to base our decision making on a way of thinking influenced by economic principles. Calculating impacts to our land in terms of quantifiable criteria

(e.g., property value), weighing decisions using a cost-benefit methodology, viewing land as a means to satisfy our consumer desires—all these are expressions of a consumer-based viewpoint. When we are focused on citizen concerns, we fall into a more open-ended deliberative decision making mindset, taking in the views of other people as well as turning to “virtues like open-mindedness and a willingness to consider ideas on their merits.”⁸³

Furthermore, Sagoff says, “Economic analysis tends to limit conflict to those parties who have something at stake for which they are willing to pay. This approach would prevent the socialization of conflict that is crucial to the functioning of a democracy.”⁸⁴ Applying this to the conflict about ridgeline protection, taking an economic approach focuses the conversation on the rights and interests of the effected property owners while excluding the concerns of other local citizens who consider the ridgelines a part of their community but have no direct economic ties to that land. In terms of our human-nature relationship, although the ridgeline forest community is at the center of this conflict, when our thinking is economically-based, nature’s presence is overshadowed by property concerns, and its worth as the provider of value is not even acknowledged.

Sagoff says, “The genius of democracy, however, is to let the conflict spread to a larger audience.”⁸⁵ In this context, he sees the decision making process as “a kind of public good, since it allows everyone who participates in it the feeling of relevance, importance, and community-consciousness flowing from that participation.”⁸⁶ Returning to his question about how we approach public policy-making, Sagoff sees environ-

mental regulations as striving “to make the conditions under which people live and work cleaner, safer, more natural, and more beautiful, because these goals reflect public values and represent a shared conception of what we stand for as a nation.”⁸⁷

And so, talking about our ridgelines as if we were “tenants-in-common” is much more than an “emotional” response to land and land use. These conversations enable us to expand our consideration beyond the limitations of economic analysis, to bring our public values to the forefront, and to learn more about ourselves as citizens in our communities. I believe the more we engage as citizens, extending our awareness outward beyond our self-interests as property owners, the more we will see and acknowledge the contributions of our resident natural communities as well.

Shifting Our Conversation

Shifting a land use conversation from individual interests to our role as citizens in a community may be one way to gain new perspectives and refocus our awareness so that we include a consideration of the life of the land in our conversations. When we see ourselves as part of a community, there is something beyond “yours” and “mine.” Land use conflicts often challenge our sense of entitlement. The land I own or defend is “mine.” It’s my economic investment, my trees, my garden, my land to protect from your development. Seeing land as “ours,” belonging to everyone and subject to community deliberation, draws from a different mindset, which creates the possibility for a different conversation. According to Sagoff, “A community is not an aggregate of individuals or a

set of preferences to be satisfied; people in communities know purposes and aspirations together they could not know alone.”⁸⁸

Seeing myself as both a self-interested property owner and a citizen in my community has changed the way I approach land use conflict. When I cease to see Bruce as solely representing the self-interests of a property owner, I wonder about engaging him as a citizen and asking him to talk more about his connection with natural communities. I still line up with my conservation friends when it comes to protecting land, but instead of joining with them to rally against development, I think about initiating new conversations. Instead of using our time together to blame the other side as the cause of all problems, we talk about our own impact to the land, our needs and desires as consumers and property owners, and our concerns and ideas about accommodating more people while protecting our natural communities. Ultimately, I would like to see among people new associations with less polarization, the result of our learning to recognize and work with the consumer and citizen within each of us. Since these mindsets are already a part of our culture, I believe it's more a matter of redirecting our awareness and shifting our conversations than adopting new philosophies or changing our point of view.

For example, at the nature center we had a tradition of building lean-to shelters and sleeping in them overnight during our pioneer village summer camp. The children divided into small groups and went off with their teenaged junior staff to collect leaves and branches to lash onto larger trees in a white pine grove. Each group was assigned a spot, which they immediately marked off as their territory. This was a big event. Some

children were sleeping outside for the first time. Most had never built their own shelters. The activity was fraught with so much excitement and anxiety we had to lay down strict rules. If we didn't show the junior staff which saplings they could cut, they would rampage the woods with their lopping and hacking. If we didn't designate shelter sites war would break out over who had the best spot. But still, there were always fights about who got to sleep where inside the shelter, arguments about who got the best branches, and other issues of trespass and property rights.

Somehow it all came together by the time their parents came to help them roll out their sleeping bags. The children proudly showed off imaginary kitchen areas, doors, rock chairs, and other special features. They did it! They took a bunch of sticks and leaves and made their own home for the night.

When I was involved with this activity, my intent was to recreate a pioneer experience where campers found what they needed from nature and used their own ingenuity to survive—a lesson in self-determination and self-sufficiency. Although I protected parts of the land from our impact and consumption, I now realize this activity had little to do with the land itself. It was a lesson in living with other property owners and respecting each other's rights. All that mattered to these children was completing their own shelter. They carried out their project with little consideration for anybody or anything beyond their own group. They set boundaries and defended their territory.

After the sleepover the shelters were abandoned. They fell in a heap at the base of the tree until someone cleaned up the debris. The children had a wonderful experience in nature. Now I see it was also a lesson in entitlement—acquiring and

defending your property, taking what you need from the land with little regard or appreciation for the source of material. Even at the nature center we were caught up using land as our property, and we lost our focus on the land itself. We were working with natural materials, but the life of the land just didn't seem very important.

In hindsight, it shocks me to see that so much of my thinking throughout this activity was influenced by our cultural views of land as property and land use as a means to fulfill our needs and desires as consumers. It never occurred to me to consider the values I was promoting in terms of our connection to and responsibility for the land in our community. Given that ownership of land is part of our human-nature relationship, I do believe this activity was worthwhile because it gave the campers an opportunity to experience a simple form of habitation in contrast to their high level of consumption at home. But I never asked the counselors and campers to come together as citizens of this land, to tell me how they viewed "our" land and our pending land use. I set down rules but never asked them to consider their connection to and responsibility for the life of this land. Given their enthusiasm for getting on with this activity, I'm sure these campers and counselors would have resisted taking time for a discussion, but I regret I never made the conscious effort to give them the opportunity to experience, especially at a nature center, their land use as citizens in a community. It could have been a lesson in seeing the life of the land as a partner in this activity. Instead, throughout this experience we all remained consumers acting out our various land use interests. To this point Sagoff asks the question, "How do we keep faith with the values of the citizen while recognizing the power of the consumer?"⁸⁹ My lesson learned is how

easy it is to fall into the mindset of a consumer and allow this point of view to predominate our human-nature relationship. Although shifting to a citizen-based mindset may take a conscious effort, it will enable us to focus on our impact to the land and our stewardship responsibilities in ways that are often overlooked when we are caught up in a consumer-based mindset.

I see a growing awareness among land use decision makers by virtue of their work with land as property and their love of nature. The land trust officer I interviewed identifies himself as a capitalist, but he has ethical concerns about land as property. He says, "I personally don't think of land as being a commodity. . . . Land is not particularly renewable and once it has been adversely impacted it's very difficult to restore to its original state." That said, as a capitalist he recognizes "the value of private property," although he differentiates land from other financial assets such as stocks and bonds for "which really a person doesn't necessarily have the same level of stewardship responsibility." When people own land, they "owe much more direct control and effect on how land is treated."

This land trust officer is concerned that commercial developers are not "giving proper weight to the best way for the community." He doesn't "begrudge them a profit" but believes they are "accustomed to being unregulated" and getting "unconscionable high profits from their activities." He believes "developers can make a reasonable profit and still do things properly, do the right planning, and have a relatively modest negative impact on our community." He says, "It's pretty egotistical for people to think that they can do anything they want on their land and not consider how it's going to effect, not

only the current generation, but future generations as well.” Then he asserts, “Land is such an important resource that we really do need to make that effort to maintain quality of life.”

As a capitalist, this land trust officer doesn't deny the land's monetary value; but unlike other assets, he believes landownership comes with ethical responsibilities. Property owners are also land stewards, who must look beyond their own profits and consider the impact of their land use not only on the land itself but also on the human community now and in the future. I admire this land trust officer for his ability to work with both consumer and citizen-based values in his view of landownership. He creates a new category for land as a form of property that incorporates stewardship as one of the responsibilities of ownership and admonishes developers to reconsider their use of land for profit. In this way, he remains true to his beliefs while recognizing the inevitability of land use.

Consumer-based and citizen-based values are evident in our approach to local land use issues. Recently the local water company in New Milford sold off one of its reservoirs and adjacent land for residential development. There were those who thought the town should have purchased this land for open space. The sale came, however, at a time when property taxes were rising to pay for new schools, roads, and other municipal expenses, so there was little support for laying out more money. When another reservoir came up for sale and it seemed this parcel would also end up as house lots, a group of local residents proposed a municipal golf course as a way to maintain the land as open space, while paying back the purchase price from golf course revenues. When

they came before the Wetlands Commission, I knew the people presenting this project were conservation-minded, but, in their enthusiasm for creating a golf course, they seemed to have lost their awareness that reshaping this property represented huge changes for the resident natural community. Although the maps showed the land before and after construction, the reservoir was just a large blank oval in the middle of all the activity. There were plant and animal surveys for the land, but none for the reservoir. From their point of view, there would be no impact to the aquatic habitat, so there was no need to bring it into the conversation. Looking at the large blank oval on the map, I was annoyed they seemed to see the reservoir as disconnected from the project, as having little to do with the rest of the land. The more they promoted the benefits of a municipal golf course in terms of keeping the land open and creating recreational opportunities for the town, the more I took up the interests of the reservoir. When we asked them to come back with more information about the reservoir, it seemed we were going against their project. What did knowing about this aquatic habitat have to do with building a golf course? Why were we delaying their project? As it turned out, other problems arose and eventually the golf course project was abandoned.

Then a group of local residents began to promote using this land as a town park. In contrast to the golf course proposal, the reservoir became the focal point for fishing, walking, picnicking, paddling, and nature study. The rest of the land would become a nature preserve with hiking trails. Residents who already used the land for horseback riding and walking took up the cause, the land trust joined in, and even local developers pledged their support. The purchase was overwhelmingly approved with funds to come

from local contributions, grants, and tax money. It didn't seem to matter that the land would not generate tax dollars for the town. Preserving this land for our use and dedicating it to outdoor recreation was most important.

Although both of these projects were brought forth as benefiting town residents, I see the golf course proposal illustrating a consumer-based mindset in which individuals come together representing various interests, needs, and desires; and the town park proposal a citizen-based mindset in which the focus is on "our" land in terms of what it represents and what we want for our community. The residents proposing the golf course were unquestionably community-minded people, but they were also avid golfers. From their point of view, a municipal golf course, with special rates for town residents, would be a recreational as well as a financial asset and would protect this land from residential development. As a wetlands commissioner, I latched on to the reservoir as my interest. I wanted that body of water to be recognized, represented, and protected. The golf course was "theirs," the reservoir was "mine." Although we could all say we were working on behalf of the town, we were also defending our own interests.

In contrast, the residents promoting the town park created a vision of protecting the land as it was—woodland, reservoir, streams, ravines—open to anyone in the community to explore and enjoy, with nature always a strong presence. This was to be our land to use and share, a community investment maintained by tax dollars. Although I am still drawn to the reservoir and concerned about its protection, I now see it as part of our community rather than my individual interest to defend. In other words, when our consumer-based mindsets come together, we are an aggregate of interest-bearing

individuals, defending our rights, competing to prevail. We may also see nature as having rights and interests, and we may choose to defend these on nature's behalf, but our connection to nature tends to be self-serving. I had a vision of preserving that reservoir in its pristine state and an expectation it would always stay that way for my enjoyment. What if a beaver moved in and totally changed my landscape? Caught up in my own interests, I forgot about the land having a life of its own capable of making its own changes.

Community-oriented mindsets moderate our actions as individuals and temper our sense of entitlement. Because this mindset must take many points of view into consideration, it is less oriented to upholding individual rights and more focused on discerning public values. Certainly as citizens we may choose to relocate the beaver to serve our collective interests, but the decision would be subject to community awareness and discussion, a different process than one individual setting a trap.

I want to note that decisions we make as citizens about "our" land are not always associated with land conservation. Long ago, land along the major highway in New Milford was zoned for commercial development to serve the needs of the community. Now, as a result of this decision, there is concern about the farmland covered over with shopping centers and parking lots. At the same time, a wealthy landowner in New Milford, with a personal interest in perpetuating local agriculture, decided to give his farmland near this major highway to The Nature Conservancy. Now our community is benefiting from his gift of farmland. The consumer-based mindset and community-based

mindset represent two distinct approaches to land as property and, in terms of land use decision making, they can lead us in many different directions.

Another way community values interact with consumer interests is through our land use regulations. Although most people see commission members as merely enforcing a set of rules, I see my role as representing the values and standards we as citizens have adopted because of a growing public concern for and understanding of the function of wetlands in our communities. When applicants come before us representing their interests as property owners, it's often difficult for them to see the wetlands on their property as more than a deterrent to their desired land use. A key aspect of our decision-making process is emphasizing the importance of these wetlands to the well-being of both human and resident natural communities. Because our regulations also uphold the rights of property owners to use their land, we rarely deny an application, but we often ask for modifications and some form of mitigation to minimize the wetland impacts. Sagoff says we are always in the position of adjusting our environmental policy-making goals to "economic, legal, scientific, and political realities," but we should never lose sight of the "ethical and aspirational nature of our objectives."⁹⁰

Bruce says he is more conscious today of damage done to land than he was years ago. He concedes, "Environmentalists have made government more cognizant so that's how laws have been created, and there's nothing wrong with that. It's all for our benefit—you know, protecting our resources." He does believe "we tend to over-regulate because we had no regulation and it's the old pendulum. You go from nothing to too much so you need to . . . be a little more centrist so that you get the objective

and it doesn't become a burden or an expense unnecessarily." He continues, "It has a lot to do with our own education. I mean we didn't know thirty years ago what affected us from a health perspective." He sees the regulatory process as "just a byproduct of all that education. It creates a law so that you learned about all those environmental issues. Now we've got a law, so we have some guidelines."

Although Bruce sees himself as a consumer, a person who benefits from land use, he acknowledges regulations as guiding his community obligations and raising his environmental awareness. I suspect his statement was influenced by my presence and the role I play in our community as both a regulator and an environmental educator—a further illustration of the interplay between consumer and citizen-based mindsets. Sagoff is concerned about our economic self becoming "the source of all value" overshadowing our public self. As a result, our exercise of power becomes focused on satisfying our personal preferences, and we lose the ability "to join with others in effective political action to define and pursue collective values and shared aspirations."⁹¹

There is no question that economic concerns, the self-interests of landowners, and the needs and desires as consumers tend to dominate views of land as property. But if we all value land as part of our community and shift to a citizen-based mindset where we join with other people to consider "our" land use, we will be able to broaden our understanding of land ownership and acknowledge how the land itself contributes to the life of our community.

Sagoff sees an important role for policymakers, which in my mind includes land use decision makers in public roles: "to balance what we believe in and stand for as a

community with what we want and need to achieve as a functioning economy.” He sees a need to “devise some way that we can relate to one another as members of a community in search of common ideals and . . . compete and cooperate with each other in a market to satisfy individual interests.” He goes on to say, “It is not just a matter of balancing interests with interests; it is a matter of balancing interests with morality and balancing one morality with another morality.”⁹²

When I make decisions as a wetlands commission member, I struggle with balancing my duty to consider the economic interests of property owners and my moral belief that wetlands are an important part our community deserving our protection and consideration. I’ve come to realize that part of the difficulty discerning interests and morality is that each requires a different way of discerning and thinking about the information before me. One reason I focus on consumer-based and citizen-based mindsets in this chapter is to better understand the internal conflict I feel in my own decision making. Although I may consider piles of maps, reports, and testimony along with the regulations, it’s not just the content I am considering; it’s also the way I think about and interpret the material.

Approaches to Conflict

When Sagoff calls for balancing interests with morality, he is not only asking us to address the issues at hand, he is also asking us to work with different mindsets. I believe that in order for this conversation to succeed, each decision maker must enter the discussion with the awareness that, in addition to diverse viewpoints within the

group the person sitting next to them may be drawing from a very different mindset from their own.

Anthropologist Kevin Avruch studies the influence of culture in conflict resolution. Because we live in a complex culture with many social groupings—family and ethnic groups, social classes, political interests, occupations, and professional groups—each of us reflects and embodies multiple cultures.⁹³ Each of these groups places us in a different experiential world, which we internalize. Some we internalize superficially, others we invest in deeply. Since we live in and embody multiple cultures, conflict within ourselves and with other people is inevitable.⁹⁴

When I see Bruce in terms of multiple cultures, he becomes more than a developer. I see him not only as someone who envisions houses on the mountain but also as someone who walks through the fields enjoying his time in nature. And I wonder how these two aspects of his relationship to the land influence his land use decisions. Given my upbringing in a development family and my strong ties to the life of the land, I have certainly internalized many conflicting values, which interact with each other and influence my relationships with other people as well as the land.

As an educator and concerned citizen, I believe there is much to learn from our differing viewpoints. The more willing we are to consider each other's perspectives as well as those within ourselves, the more we will understand our complex relationship with the life of the land. Similarly, as a land use decision maker, I want to bring every aspect of our relationship to the table and consider what each has to offer.

But all this tends to be tossed aside when land use becomes an urgent issue and we find ourselves competing for the right to decide how that land will ultimately be used. As we search for ways to gain an upper hand over the opposing parties, considering each other's differing perceptions and beliefs seems irrelevant to winning the final outcome. Avruch identifies two approaches to conflict that shed light on why this occurs. One approach focuses on scarcity and power, the other on perception and belief.⁹⁵

Drawing from post-WWII international relations theory to illustrate the first approach, Avruch identifies a form of realist thinking in which countries are seen as competing units of power, each trying to maximize their material interests by laying claim to scarce resources while maintaining a balance of power in the world. In this way of thinking, all parties, allies and enemies alike, are presumably operating from the same rational mindset that sets the standard for living together in the world.⁹⁶ Similar dynamics can be seen in land use conflict. When we view land as a scarce resource and identify interested parties as competing units of power, then as members of a civil society we enter into a decision making process based on well established economic, legal, scientific, and regulatory standards. If everyone buys into this system, then there are no perceivable cultural differences because we are all following the same rules. Culture is not our concern; our focus is on using whatever power we hold to win resources.

Avruch's definition of cultural difference, however, reveals the limitations of this kind of thinking. Avruch says we inherit our view of the world from and learn from people

who serve as our models in how to deal with problems . When two people meet “who have different models for recognizing and dealing with these sorts of problems, and when their respective models are backed up in their eyes by some special authority, authenticity, or feeling of rightness that may range all the way from ecclesiastical or sacred morality to self-evident common sense, then we may begin to speak of cultural difference.”⁹⁷ In other words, I was shocked when Bruce saw houses on the mountain because my nature center mindset was telling me everyone sees trees when they look at the mountain. After all, trees are a physical reality on that hillside. It never occurred to me that someone might see this mountain in a different way. Seeing houses just seemed wrong.

As a Wetlands Commission member, I often listen to neighbors’ pleas to turn down a proposed development. Just as I was shocked to imagine houses on the mountain, they stand in disbelief that the land next door to them will soon be a subdivision. It never occurred to them that this field where they observe deer and turkeys and an occasional fox, would be anything different from what it’s been for the last twenty years. Now the land has been sold, and the current landowner has his own vision for its use. I understand their impassioned pleas; I also want that land to remain a field. But land use regulations allow the landowner to build houses. He paid money for this land; he wants to get a return on his investment.

In the hearing room, the life of the land is considered in the context of procedural rules, regulations, and scientific facts. Although the overriding power of economics cannot be denied, this is not to say the neighbors have no power in this situation.

Emotional pleas to consider the resident wildlife carry little weight under this system. But if their concerns are backed up with factual or empirical information pertinent to specific sections of the wetland regulations, their arguments can be very persuasive.

When we view land use in the context of scarcity and material interests, our actions are constrained and guided by the authority of realist thinking. As a wetlands commission member, I find it very reassuring to work within a prescribed set of rules. Bruce also uses the regulations to guide his land use. Seeing land as an economic entity brings us into a consumer-based mindset. Legal and economic systems govern our actions as property owners. Nevertheless, despite its dominance in our land use decision making processes, I know this way of thinking is limited when it comes to considering the connections we feel with nature, our concerns for life of the land, and its importance in our community. If these concerns are made to seem irrelevant, instead of retreating from public expression we must shift into a more responsive mindset.

Unlike the first approach to conflict that operates on the assumption that we are culturally similar—all following the same rationality where any expression outside the bounds is irrelevant—Avruch's second approach to conflict focuses on identifying and working with different perceptions and beliefs. Participation is based on communicating and negotiating our way through diverse cultural assumptions.⁹⁸ In this approach obligations to the life of the land can be freely expressed, compared, and considered. This way of viewing conflict supports different perceptions (how we define our relationship with nature) and different beliefs (how we view our duties and

responsibilities to the land). Here is where we can explore the richness of each other's views in order to better understand the complexities of our human-nature relationship.

There are similar challenges between choosing this approach and shifting to a citizen-based mindset. Land use decision making privileges rational thinking and consumer-based mindsets. If, however, we are to become more conscientious about the impacts of land use in our community, we will benefit from entering into public conversations in which we can talk about "our" relationship to land in the context of opening ourselves up to and extending our consideration to differing perceptions, beliefs, and cultural assumptions. Just as talking about "our" land forces us to look beyond our own self-interests and see ourselves as part of a community, this approach to conflict forces us to look beyond our own assumptions and see our views in the context of many.

In the previous chapter I advocated a thirdsider perspective as a means to fully understand the complexities of our human-nature relationship. In this chapter I call on land use decision makers to be mindful of how we approach our relationship with land as property as both self-interested individuals and community-minded citizens, and to draw on both rational, economically-based ways of thinking as well as culturally-influenced beliefs and values in our land use conversations and everyday talk.

I began this chapter describing a site walk with a local property owner and our discovery of mink tunnels. I know this man would never turn over his land to these

animals, but I'd like to believe that if he considered his obligations to this land he owns, he might willingly take it upon himself to protect their habitat. Once he sees his land as serving the needs of the community as well as his own self-interests, he may be more open to considering all the life his land supports. This perspective is not something I can dictate through the regulatory process or force on him with moral persuasion. But standing in the snow looking at the mink tunnels, perhaps I can initiate a new conversation, drawing from our different perspectives of the life of the land before us.

Chapter 5: Cultivating Our Connections

In this chapter I focus on connecting with land in local communities drawing from scholarly perspectives, the responses from my interviews, and my own experiences as a land use decision maker and environmental educator. I discuss the everyday realities of our human-nature relationship where our challenge is working within a human-dominated landowning culture while considering our connection and responsibility to all of nature. I advocate listening to different views and perspectives in order to gain a better understanding of the complexities our human connections to other species, and developing a dialogical relationship with nature in which we extend our awareness and consideration to the life of the land around us. Finally, I discuss how our connection to land is part of the moral and ethical standards we bring to land use decision-making.

Defining Our Connection

There is a land use expression I find very telling about our relationship with the life of the land—vacant land—land available for human use. It doesn't seem to matter that most vacant land is filled with life; the assumption is that if it's not human life, it doesn't count. Several years ago I stopped mowing a portion of my front yard. Now I have a large meadow along the road. Recently there's been talk about a new road that could possibly go across this meadow. When I spoke to a town engineer about this, he wondered why it would be a problem for me since I don't use this part of my land for anything. Apparently, from his point of view, letting my yard grow into a field means it's

now available for other uses. From my point of view it's being very actively used by local wildlife, much more than when it was mown grass.

I know it's possible to acknowledge the life of the land in land use decision making—that's what we do on the Wetlands Commission. When we visit an applicant's property and look for the wetlands and watercourses to better understand their function on this land—habitat, flood control, drainage—we see nature at work. From this perspective the human use staked out on the land—driveway, house, septic system—becomes an area of disturbance. Any human activity within 100 feet of a wetland or watercourse is part of our regulated area—our area of review. Nowadays developers stay out of a regulated area as much as possible to avoid our review process. This also gives nature a little breathing room. It's far from a perfect system. We work with land divided up into parcels based on economics and personal desire that has little regard for natural systems. There is no similar review for the impact of development on fields and forests. But every time we come together—commission members, applicants, town staff, and concerned citizens—we are working at making land use decisions that include an awareness of both the human land users and at least part of the natural community on that land.

When I asked the land use decision makers I interviewed about their connection to land they all had an awareness and appreciation of the life of the land around them. This was extremely gratifying to me as an environmental educator, but their differing responses lead me to realize awareness and appreciation is only one aspect of our connection. Connection is about relationship, in this case our relationship to other

species. Just as we have a range of relationships with other people, so do we also with the land, seeing it in different ways.

Land use decision making often makes a division between protected land and developed land. For example, new subdivisions in New Milford set aside land for open space to compensate for the development, and every town in Connecticut is required to have “A Plan of Conservation and Development.” But from a bird’s eye view, around here people and nature live together in various degrees of separation, with some plants and animals living far from human contact and some people living away from nature in urban communities. Still, in terms of land use decision making, we often make a division where the focus is either on conserving land for nature’s benefit or developing land for people, little attention is paid to land as a place where humans and nature live together. In fact, when land is developed, my conservationist friends often say it’s “gone” or “spoiled” as they move on to protect another threatened parcel. At the same time, builders complain when they have to set aside land or limit their impact for the sake of nature because it takes away from or “locks up” the use their property. I am concerned that compartmentalizing our land use thinking in this way makes it difficult to fully experience nature living amidst our human activity, and humans living within nature’s activity—all of us connected to the same community.

Restoration ecologist William Jordan III identifies three ways we tend to define our relationship with natural landscapes, which I find similar to the way we view land in terms of conservation and development.⁹⁹ The first way of thinking is based on a colonial relationship where nature is a resource providing goods and services for our

human benefit. Although this idea may foster stewardship of resources, Jordan sees its focus on human benefits allowing little consideration of “species or natural ecosystems for their own sake.”¹⁰⁰ That is, even though land may be seen as having special qualities well worth protecting, chances are the land’s value is described in human terms, such as “wooded lake front property with beautiful views.” There may be little sense of sharing this land with other resident species especially when the land is cleared for human inhabitation.

In the second way of thinking nature is seen as a sacred place inhabited by plants and animals with a “value in and of themselves that transcends economic or other purely human interests.”¹⁰¹ This idea “brings to environmentalism a clearly articulated sense of the value of other species,” but idealizes “the pristine, untouched landscape as nature at its most natural” and “confines humans to the role of visitors—at best admirers and at worst consumers and vandals—in the natural landscape, fostering a dispiriting sense that humans don’t belong on the earth at all.” From this viewpoint there is “a limited repertory of ways to engage nature” such as scientific research, hiking, birding, and limited land management activity.¹⁰² Indeed, when I entered the nature sanctuary with a group of school children I counseled them to stay on the trail, to put things back where they were found, and to refrain from picking live plants. In this way, they learned to be well-mannered guest observers in nature’s home, but had few opportunities to interact with other plants and animals and learn about their use of nature.

Jordan sees each of these ways of thinking being “at opposite ends of a spectrum of responses to the nature-culture question—one end granting humans preeminent status, the other denying them any special value in the polity of nature.” He sees a third category “which falls somewhere between these other two and combines elements of both” incorporating “the idea that the relationship between humans and the rest of nature is best defined in terms of membership in a community.”¹⁰³ This provides for “a relationship between ourselves and the landscape that is both engaged and participatory and at the same time respectful of nature for its own sake, and not merely as a resource.”¹⁰⁴ Jordan sees this view as being largely shaped by Aldo Leopold, who saw “a loving association of members” with “humans being cast in the role of ‘plain members’ of the larger biotic community.” Jordan believes: “Its great value has been that it has provided a way of thinking about ‘nature’ and the natural landscape that includes humans and insists on a principle of respect and responsibility that reaches beyond our own species.”¹⁰⁵

This third view is evident in three responses I received from these local land use decision makers when I asked them about their connection to land. In this first response the youth service bureau administrator talks about our responsibilities to land because “it is a living thing” and it makes a “very silent contribution” to the community:

Everybody has an incredible responsibility because it is a living thing. Our actions need to be scrutinized. . . . Not just whether it’s encroaching on a wetland, but what does that impact have to the greater community? What are we taking away? Is it really worth ripping out the old growth forest for five more homes? . . . Another area that people drove by and went, . . . those trees are absolutely gorgeous. It makes people feel good. It has a very silent contribution that it gives to the community.

In the second response, the land preserve director acknowledges a land community, but sees land and the land community as separate entities.

I think of land as almost like a host site. I don't see land as a community. I see it as the place on which communities live. I see land as inorganic, and then the community is the organic life that is in it, and on it, and through it. We have the capability of protecting the life that is in it, and on it, and through it. We also have the capability of destroying it, until all that's left is the inorganic part like the subsoil.

In the third response the architect (drawing from Rolston in the study guide), agrees with an expanded concept of community to include other species but is concerned about how we can hold this in our conscious as we use land.

The concept which I think has to be understood today is that land as a living community includes all the citizens of that land, everything from bugs and beetles to coyotes, deer, and everything else that makes our local ecological environment a community. . . . How do you broaden our concern and our understanding of the land to instinctively understand it as a community, so that when we attempt to affect the land by either building on it or crossing a stream, or cutting a woods, or mowing a hill, we have to be extremely conscious of exactly how we're affecting the community? That is not an instinctive issue in our world at the moment and I think that's where we have to go.

Similarly, Jordan sees aspects of community that are often ignored, such as how both humans and other species use and consume other members, create and suffer from radical changes in our landscape, participate in the "hegemony of predator over prey," and exclude as well as include various members of the community.¹⁰⁶ He sees environmentalism shifting "uneasily, unproductively, and often even destructively between the poles of an alienated preservationism, and a resource-oriented conservationism" to the extent that we have become "incapable of inhabiting the middle

ground where community is achieved as selves confront each other, first to acknowledge and then somehow to transcend the irreconcilable differences between them.” He sees environmentalists as arguing for community, but making “little progress in the task of strengthening the human community, much less expanding it to include other species.”¹⁰⁷ I am drawn to Jordan’s concept of middle ground. As I have expressed throughout these chapters, I too am concerned about our unwillingness to acknowledge the difficult aspects of both our human-nature relationship and our land use decision making.

Just as I see my land use decision making on the wetlands commission as far from perfect—given my limited knowledge of how we are truly impacting the life of the land and our protection of property rights—Jordan sees his work as “shameful” because land restoration involves “killing and a measure of hegemony over the land.” He also sees restoration efforts as “presumptuous and never fully successful.”¹⁰⁸

Yet Jordan pursues restoration as a way to upgrade landscapes, learn more about natural processes, engage nature on a more intimate level, and create a sense of community between people who work with the land and the land itself—all in all, becoming “a positive, self-sustaining force for environmental renewal.”¹⁰⁹ Similarly, I see my land use decision making as a way to dig deeper into the connection I feel with my community, bringing me face to face with the everyday realities of our human-nature relationship and, with every decision I make, showing me where I stand on Jordan’s spectrum between land as a resource and land as a sacred place. I too see many of my

decisions as “shameful,” but I also see this as part of an evolving, learning-filled, intimate relationship with the life of the land.

Asking the land use decision makers I interviewed about their connection to land helped me see how they regard land as a part of their community, and themselves as a part of the land. In the following example, the landowner has entered into a relationship with her land in which she is learning how to live with other species. She supports their lives as she perceives their needs, and they support hers by remaining present and occasionally visible for her pleasure and learning. It’s a somewhat mutual relationship where everyone goes about their daily activity as members of a community with each adjusting to the others presence. She says:

Around the property we leave the wild raspberries to grow because the birds like them and the animals like them. So, where they don’t encroach on our own garden we leave them where we can see them. And we leave some dead trees because the woodpeckers love them and we love the woodpeckers. I think we have a compromise. Our yard isn’t entirely wild, but it’s wild around the edges, and we still have some yard that we have control over.

True to our culture of ownership, she sees this land as her property having a yard and garden she “controls.” But she leaves part of her property wild to feed and attract birds and other animals she enjoys watching. She calls this a compromise, which I understand as trying to find a way they can all live on this land together. She’s staked out her territory and defined the rest as “wild around the edges.” Has she intruded on this natural community? Yes, and some would say this land is now spoiled. To think of her land as “wild around the edges” is presumptuous; nature is essentially relegated to what’s left over after the house, yard, driveway and septic field—indeed the whole

subdivision—are constructed. Land use planning still assures that people get first pick of the land with other species adapting to our changes. At the same time I am drawn to the way she factors in other residents on the land as she provides food, space, and housing options for birds and other animals that she likes. She is a property owner who shares her land with a resident natural community.

Human Entitlement and Domination

When I consider my own connection to land, I prefer to see myself as someone who cares deeply about nature while taking from and giving back to the land. I feel entitled to use the property I own but, like the aforementioned landowner, I leave some of it to nature. Environmental philosopher Val Plumwood believes human-centeredness is built into our human culture in such a way that we dominate nature no matter how caring we see ourselves.¹¹⁰ Reluctantly, I have come to see myself as someone who dominates nature, often to the detriment of other species.

Plumwood describes one characteristic of our human-centeredness as a walling-off. Instead of seeing ourselves as a part of nature, we see ourselves existing outside of nature.¹¹¹ We dominate and exploit nature from a “master perspective.” We develop conceptions of ourselves “as belonging to a superior sphere apart, a rational sphere of exclusively ‘human’ ethics, technology and culture dissociated from nature and ecology.” As a result, we have lost touch with ourselves “as creatures who are not only cultural beings but also natural beings, just as dependent on a healthy biosphere as

other forms of life.”¹¹² Plumwood adds, “The economic rationality of capitalism” also plays a part “by maximizing the class of other beings that are available as ‘resources’ for exploitation without constraint.”¹¹³

Plumwood believes the farther away we move from seeing ourselves as a part of nature, the more we see our relationship in terms of a dualism, that is, “a sharp, ontological break or radical discontinuity between the group identified as the privileged ‘centre’ and those subordinated.”¹¹⁴ In other words, we begin to see ourselves as superior and all others as subordinate. Indeed, throughout these chapters I make reference to a human-nature relationship that sets up a distinction between humans, human culture, and the rest of nature. I differ from Plumwood, however, in believing there is always a sense of otherness because each species is unique unto itself. Furthermore, all life forms engage in some form of self-preservation by virtue of maintaining their life at the expense of others. Our human awareness, however, includes the capability of seeing ourselves as a part of nature, one species out of many, each serving the other. In terms of land use decision making, our challenge is to work within a human dominated land-owning culture while considering our connection and responsibility to all of nature.

Plumwood goes on to describe five patterns of human-centered belief characterizing our human dominance.¹¹⁵ I am drawn to these patterns because they not only illustrate ways in which we separate ourselves from the rest of nature, but they also shed light on many of the land use decision makers’ responses about their connection to land and land use.

In the first pattern of belief, “radical exclusion,” we separate nature’s activity from our own and treat nature as something inferior—a lower order that needs to be mastered or managed. The more we see ourselves as different from the rest of nature the more “we may lose touch with that which we share with other species,” which Plumwood sees as “constitutive of a truly human identity.”¹¹⁶

Plumwood’s first pattern of belief is illustrated in the comments of the general contractor, who practices radical exclusion by virtue of treating the land as a commodity under his economic control. Nevertheless, he’s becoming more sensitive about how he treats the land as he sees it becoming more scarce:

When I use land in the economic sense that might freak people out. You know, if I’ve got a bulldozer up there, people just don’t understand it, don’t like it. It’s change. You treat land a little differently today than you did years ago. It’s a commodity that’s not getting replaced. It’s a commodity that’s getting scarce. You see its value, in a monetary sense, by not devastating it, because you know the client you’re going to sell it to sees that value. So you lay in more capital. It all equates economics. . . . I can’t build a house with a tree going through the center, but I’m a little more sensitive to that today than I was years ago.

In his second response, the contractor reveals his connection to the life of the land, still in the context of buying it and making it his own, but he also talks about surrounding himself with nature and protecting its special features.

I like the trees and I like the open space and I like the brooks and I like the land I build on. I own a lot of it. It has value to me in a lot of senses. Do I like my privacy? Do I like to have land around me? Absolutely. I mean I see it as a different value. Then I build it, too. I’m from the school of thought that you don’t obtain it by not buying it. I see it more than just the economic sense. . . . I have a beautiful waterfall behind my home. Gorgeous, probably a fifty foot cascade. It’s really pretty. Stuff like that should be protected. . . . I have a connection to land other than building. Of course, we all do. Because I’m a builder people see me as the big bad wolf of the north, but it’s not the case.

Although possessing and using land is clearly important to this contractor, he also says he has “a connection to land other than building. Of course, we all do.” He protects the waterfall behind his house. He surrounds himself with nature where he lives. In my mind, as he practices “radical exclusion,” he seems to see himself as a benevolent master of his land, but gives little consideration to the land having a life of its own.

The second pattern of belief is “backgrounding and denial”: “nature is represented as inessential and massively denied as the unconsidered background to technological society.” In terms of decision making, “nature’s needs are systematically omitted from account and consideration.”¹⁷ I see this when engineers describe their designs for detention basins and septic systems as if human technology is solely responsible for making these systems work. In truth, their success depends on a partnership with vegetation, which holds the soil along the sides of the basin, and with bacteria, which move into the leaching fields to process our human waste.

The comments of a retired vo-ag teacher shows a changing awareness from plowing a garden without acknowledging nature’s role to engaging with soil as a living entity with importance to other species beyond our own.

Mycorrhizas, the fungi that helps tree roots assimilate nutrients, remember that? It’s only been twenty years since that concept entered my being or my understanding. You start to look at the dirt that you’re kicking up and you say, what are you really kicking up here, because, as you know, I could put a plow under the ground and plow in the manure and create a garden that will be productive for them’s that use it. Yet it would be just as well to leave it if you could get your food from someplace else.

In essence, this decision maker is expressing a connection to land that brings nature from the background to the foreground. In doing so, he is faced with deciding between his needs and the needs of the life of the land around him.

“Homogenization and stereotyping” is the third pattern of belief, in which “nature is conceived in terms of interchangeable and replaceable units, (as ‘resources’, or standing reserve) rather than as infinitely diverse and always in excess of knowledge and classification.” This can lead to a “serious underestimation of the complexity of nature...”¹¹⁸ Take a look at any land use map showing property boundaries and it’s clear dividing up land into individual lots has little to do with the life of the land. Land seen as parcels is generally interchangeable with other tracts of land. We buy and sell vacant land with only a few adjustments in value, such as reducing the cost when there are steep slopes that cannot be developed or adding dollars when there are exceptional views of the lake.

Once again, I draw from the general contractor to illustrate this pattern of belief, and then contrast this with a response from the land trust officer. The contractor recognizes other beings on Earth and acknowledges their role as resources. But he also points out our human needs and our dependency on the capitalistic environment as well as on the natural environment—all of which must be kept in balance:

We are not the only beings on Earth. They are all part of what is called resources. They are all part of our ecosystem. We need to protect that, no doubt about it. It doesn’t mean you can’t build homes, doesn’t mean you can’t build bridges, doesn’t mean you can’t build roads. Everything has gotta be done with a balance. . . . Can we protect the ecosystem, the ridges, and all the resources and yet have the capitalistic environment that we need for all of us to survive?

Because, there are a lot of jobs created by what happens on the land, from farming all the way up to house building.

In contrast, the land trust officer describes his encounter with a mole and a beaver and how that experience confirmed a sense of interdependency, which he is eager to protect:

I can recall sitting on a log watching a beaver on top of a dam. I once read in a little mammal book about a star-nosed mole. I thought I would never see one of those in my life because they are pretty rare and they don't like human beings. I saw a motion down by my foot. There was a little hole where my foot was and out popped this star-nosed mole. It was a wonderful experience watching a beaver stripping a fern leaf for a snack, and then having this other creature come out. Unfortunately, I don't do that very often, but when you have an experience like that you get to have a sense of how all these things are interdependent. . . . I feel really fortunate that is available. That's part of the land we put in easement and hopefully someday will donate to the land trust.

Although the contractor's description of other beings as resources would seem to confirm Plumwood's concern about underestimating nature's complexity, his response does factor in the complexities of our human culture, which must be considered in land use decision making. At the same time, when the land trust officer specifically acknowledges the mole and the beaver as an important to his life and puts forth his determination to include the welfare of other species in his land use decision making, he draws forth nature's presence and considers it in ways the contractor's response never touches.

The fourth pattern, "incorporation and assimilation," views nature as having no life of its own. Nature exists only as it is incorporated or assimilated into our human-centered needs. According to Plumwood, "The intricate order of nature is perceived as

disorder, as unreason, to be replaced where possible by human order..." Unless there is a clear reason why nature's order should be preserved, "nature is available for use without restriction."¹⁹ The meadow in front of my house, which I see as wildlife habitat, is clearly just an overgrown field in the eyes of the town engineer, who sees no reason why it shouldn't become part of a new road to accommodate our growing town's traffic.

The following responses from a farmer seem to contradict this pattern of belief but I see them as building on its complexities. The farmer begins by saying land has a right to exist on its own away from human impact, unencumbered by human ownership. He sees the land as a friend instead of a resource:

Land has a right to exist on its own in an unspoiled state and it's not about cost. It's a philosophical thing. All land doesn't have to be owned. It doesn't have to be property. Some land doesn't even have to be common property owned by all citizens of a country. It should be recognized as being apart, separate, alone, and not susceptible to the whims of a legislature or the special interests of the logging industry or anything like that. . . . I do as best I can to be a good steward and to recognize the land as a friend as opposed to a resource or part of my living.

In his second statement the farmer describes our dependency on the land in terms of a symbiotic relationship, a mutual incorporation of needs, which calls on him to be a steward of the natural world. Finally, he says that when he works the land, he becomes a more complete person, essentially using and incorporating nature as a part of his life:

We are a product of the land. . . . I think we're completely dependent on a symbiotic relationship with the land. There's no way we can survive exclusive of it. And I think that we are all supposed to be stewards, in our own capacities, of

the natural world. . . . I just happen to be a happier person when I'm working it, so I have a selfish motive as to why I like to work the land. It just makes me a more complete person.

In terms of land use decision making, both the farmer and the town engineer are in the business of working land to fulfill a set of human needs. The difference is the farmer sees himself as part of a human-nature relationship in which he must be a steward to the land he uses, but the town engineer, who apparently discounts nature's use of land, sees my land as vacant and thereby available.

Finally, in "instrumentalism," the fifth pattern of belief, nature possesses value only as it serves as a means to our ends. Plumwood says, "Nature's agency and independence of ends are denied, subsumed in or remade to coincide with human interests, which are thought to be the source of all value in the world"¹²⁰ Nature is outside the realm of ethical consideration, so we only need to be concerned about our human actions in terms of how they impact other people. When we see nature as only instrumental to our needs, we "distort our sensitivity to and knowledge of nature, blocking humility, wonder and openness in approaching the more-than-human."¹²¹

A member of the Economic Development Commission justifies land use decisions that favor endangered habitats and maintain the health of the land when they are important for the quality of life of our human community, such as preserving open space and enhancing the value of our property. What is unclear is whether he is in favor of protecting endangered habitats for the sake of those plants and animals and their quality of life as well.

I have no problem with decisions that have been made regarding endangered habitats. I think the health of the land—the terrain, and the wetlands and watercourses— is certainly a valid aspect of land use. And it's been not as well considered as it should be. . . . It's important for quality of life. . . . A key element of quality of life here is sufficient open space. You can make a pretty good argument that it's in current land owners' best interest to preserve as much as possible, because it maximizes the value of their existing properties.

Because land use decision making is so often based on economic considerations that view land instrumentally, it's difficult to see the life of the land as a part of our community, contributing to our quality of life as well as its own, by virtue of its function and presence.

Plumwood presents these patterns of belief to illustrate our human-centered approach to nature in which we are the dominant species and nature is subordinate to our needs. As illustrated by the land use decision makers' responses, I see human-centeredness as part of our connection to land. At the same time I also see an awareness of the life of the land as well as a sense of responsibility arising from their connection to land. As I see it, there are two challenges: How do we work with both our human-centered needs along with our consideration of other species and their other-than-human worlds? How do we work with each other given our different perspectives about connecting with and using land?

Communicating with the Life of the Land

Plumwood asks us to be aware of the blindspots our human-centeredness can produce. When we see ourselves as a self-contained species, "we are encouraged to

be unaware of the way other organisms support our lives.” When we subjugate and deny the role of other species, we limit our understanding of nature and our need to create “life strategies of mutual benefit or mutual need satisfaction.”¹²² Furthermore, because we are insensitive “to the intricate patterns and workings of nature,” we continue to maximize our use of land and fail to see the limits, because nature is seen as “an infinitely manipulable and inexhaustible resource.”¹²³ The more we see ourselves apart from nature, the less we are able “to situate ourselves back in nature and frame our lives ecologically.”¹²⁴

Plumwood calls for “new mutualistic and communicative models . . . for both our own and nature’s survival in an age of ecological limits.”¹²⁵ To this end, I believe that in connecting with nature we have an opportunity to learn about and communicate with nature in a mutualistic way—that is, if we make a conscious effort to focus our attention on the life of the land before us.

Most children visiting the nature center went on guided “discovery walks.” I’d introduce the activity by saying that even though I was the leader I needed everyone’s eyes and ears to find interesting things along the way. Sure enough, when we reviewed the walk at the end of the trail, we could always make a long list of discoveries—deer tracks, chipmunks scurrying into a stone wall, ant hills, woodpecker holes, beetle trails chewed into an old log. The children’s curiosity always revealed an abundance of natural activity wherever we walked.

We take the same approach on Wetland Commission site walks. Everyone present has his or her own interests—economic, legal, ecological, engineering—

depending on who is there. But, unencumbered by parliamentary procedure, people speak more freely on site walks. They are open and cordial; everyone seems to be happy to be out of the office. I can't explain it, but talking in the presence of the land seems to put us on our best behavior. The Wetlands Enforcement Officer takes notes, and by the end of the walk he has a long list of concerns, questions, and observations.

Site walks are important to my decision making. I can only learn so much from looking at a map of the land and listening to various experts describing the project. I need to see the land itself and learn from other people's observations as we're walking around. A site walk is an opportunity for the land to introduce itself to us. We always make discoveries—chewed beaver logs next to a pond, big old trees along a stonewall, pileated woodpecker holes, pristine vernal pools, impenetrable thickets of multiflora rose.

Site walks are an opportunity to communicate with the land as well as each other. When we discover something in nature, we are bringing it into our awareness and responding to it. The dictionary refers to communication as an exchange of information. I can't say a beaver is sending me a message when I find a chewed log, but I do receive the information that he's been there. I can't say the beaver is lurking in the underbrush to hear my response, but I know he will sense my human presence when I leave. In this way, we are communicating with each other. This information is important to me as a land use decision maker, because it helps me define the wetland habitat and identify the species I am bound to protect as a Wetlands Commission member.

Plumwood sees interspecies communication, like mine with the beaver, as key to expanding our ethical relationships with the natural world. She says we must be “able and willing to hear the other, to encounter them dialogically and not just in terms of economically cooptable concepts such as value as presences, as positively-other-than, as subject rather than object, and to consider their welfare, as both individuals and communities, in all that we do.”¹²⁶

In other words, it's not enough to say I value the life of the land I encounter on my site walks. I must be willing to see that life as something I can actively engage, both individually (one woodpecker) or as a community (a wetland habitat). Having a dialogical relationship with nature includes the possibility of direct communication with other species, such as the conversations we have with our pets; but I believe, when considered in a broader context, it has greater meaning for land use decision makers.

Dialogue goes beyond words and language. If I stop and watch, wait and listen, allow something to catch my attention, or react to something in nature, I am opening myself to a dialogical relationship. For example, when I take the time to really see a wetland community, the first thing I'm drawn to is its diversity. I may not be able to identify every plant or animal, but I see different shaped leaves and flowers, bushes and trees. I swat at insects and listen to birdcalls. I'm taking in information. I'm influenced by what I see and I want to learn more. I'm motivated to consider the wellbeing of this community in my work as a wetlands commissioner. Obviously, I can't say the wetland community is responding to me likewise. In human terms, the conversation is one-way.

Nonetheless, I am extending my awareness beyond myself to other species, taking in and responding to the life around me.

Children on a discovery walk don't have any great knowledge of the things they see, but they are curious and receptive. Similarly, land use decision makers need not be nature experts to open themselves to a dialogic relationship with the life of the land.

Two New Milford land use decision makers shared their experiences. We hear first from a Planning Commission member, and then an architect:

We had an absolutely enormous, enormous ash tree, and like many ashes it became diseased. But it just seemed so integral to the property, it was heartbreaking. I couldn't be home when they actually took it down. It really was very upsetting to me. I never thought I could have cared that much about a tree. . . . We tried planting a little tree and it was just so pathetic. . . . We went out and bought a dozen birches and essentially planted a grove and at least that helped fill in the space. . . . So I've seen the cycle and it's just a different awareness. It's a respect for it.

I can get up in the morning, look out my window at the river that goes by, and essentially rekindle my connection with the land every time I wake up—which I enjoy, which is very important to me. To me there's no question that the land is an essential part of my makeup and that my understanding and respect for it grows daily. I've become more and more sensitive to the dangers and the potential for the dismembering of the land around me.

The Planning Commission member was surprised at her response to the removal of a tree. The tree had a presence that was difficult to replace. Her connection to the life and death of this tree gave her a different awareness and respect for nature. When the architect connects with the river each day, he too experiences a greater understanding, respect, and concern for the land around him.

Plumwood says openness and sensitivity to other species and communities allows us “to be receptive to unanticipated possibilities and aspects of the non-human other, reconceiving and re-encountering them as potentially communicative and agentic beings with whom we ourselves must negotiate and adjust.”¹²⁷ Both land use decision makers came away from their experiences with a new awareness and respect for the land around them. Being receptive to nature gave them an opportunity to extend their consideration to the life of the land.

What about the times we are not open to nature? When I consulted with Bruce about bulldozing a new road at the nature center, I didn’t feel any connection with the land in this location. I just focused on where the road should go. These are times when we are engaged in monological relationships. Plumwood says, “Self-maximizing modes of interaction are monological—the other is not encountered as an independent other but is encountered reductively as a reflection of self and self’s needs, as a resource or shadow.”¹²⁸ When I was considering the new road at the nature center, I saw the land impacted by the road as a location not a land community. My goal was greater access to the nature center for human visitors. As a Wetlands Commission member, I am faced with stacks of maps and reports corresponding to all of the applications we receive and consider. I take my responsibilities seriously, but I have to admit to skipping over things such as printouts of drainage calculations. Rows of numbers don’t mean much to me, but I know they are an important source of information for the project engineer. Our relationship with the land holds the same complexity—what’s meaningful to me may not be meaningful to you.

Land use decision makers bring much more to their negotiations than maps, plans, and calculations. If we are bringing a dialogic relationship with the land into our land use consideration, chances are we are working with the life of the land. Then, when the proposal calls for land clearing, we see more than human interests at stake; there's a resident natural community to consider as well. If someone has always seen land in terms of raw material or economic value, it may never occur to this person that this land has more to offer.

As a land use decision maker, I think it's important to listen to everyone's concerns and interests, including the life of the land. I see it as part of our democratic tradition to extend, not limit, my range of consideration. So I am drawn into dialogic relationships with the land around me, and I look for ways to extend my consideration to include resident land communities. But when it comes to people in general, my experience as an environmental educator has shown me we each connect with nature in different ways. Some people want to know the name of every tree they see, while others look for animal tracks. I'm confident that if land use decision makers follow their own curiosity, they will find their own relationship with the life of the land. Some people measure their relationship with nature in terms of how much they know—how many trees or flowers they can name. I have a whole shelf full of nature guides, and I enjoy keying out an unknown plant. But establishing a relationship involves more than correct identification. Asking someone their name is only one aspect of getting to know him or her. If you want to develop a relationship you need to spend time talking and doing things with this person. This is how I see my relationship with the land. It grows and

changes over time. There is land I enjoy and land I avoid, certain species that attract my curiosity and others I could do without.

The challenge for land use decision makers lies first in becoming more aware of our own relationship with the land; then, in considering how to bring this relationship into our land use negotiations. We need to learn how to work with each other's differing values and beliefs, including to what degree we are willing to bring resident land communities into our awareness and into our land use negotiations.

Land use decision makers respond to the land community based on their own interests, awareness, and relationship with the land. For instance, when I am looking at an overgrown field of pricker bushes, I often find myself more willing to see them bulldozed out of the way for a new house—more willing than when I am looking at mature oak and maple trees. On the other hand, I've visited overgrown fields of pricker bushes with farmers who see ways to restore this land into hayfields and pastureland—a different land community, a different human-land relationship. And I've visited mature woodlands with foresters who see ways to harvest trees and still maintain the woodland habitat. Again, a different relationship, a different way of seeing the land.

Connection and Land Use Decision Making

When I look at a set of land use maps for a particular property, it usually begins with one labeled "Existing Conditions." I see topographic lines showing the contours of the land and natural features such as streams, wetlands, forested areas, stonewalls, and fields. Then there are overlays, each showing new topographic lines where the land

will be reshaped with cuts and fills for the road system, house locations, septic fields, lines showing the limits of construction, wetland boundaries, and final landscaping.

When the project is presented before a town land use commission, each map comes with an expert. Engineers produce the road drainage maps, landscape architects present the landscaping plan, lawyers review the lot lines, and environmental scientists review the wetland boundaries and the existing conditions. Each person describes this land according to his or her particular area of expertise.

I've come to see these overlays as representing the range of views and values we bring to our relationship with the land. When we are dealing with land use, it seems we are all focused on the same land, but we tend to forget the overlays. If I'm looking at existing conditions and an engineer is looking at the road system, the land we see before us is not the same.

Even the "Existing Conditions" map is only a representation of what we consider the important features of this land as property. We can look at the contours, pick out wetland areas, streams, and other natural features, but we have to go on a site walk to really see the life of the land—the plants and animals, the resident land community.

I think about all the times people come together to discuss land and land use, assuming the other person sees the land the same way they do. I wonder how many arguments and bitter fights over land use have to do with misunderstandings about what each person is seeing. We know other people see land according to their particular overlay; at the same time, we assume our view is obvious to everyone else.

Thinking about land use decision making as involving a series of overlays reminds me there is a range of expertise to consider. Everyone contributes to a bigger picture, and no one can lay claim to the full story. Sometimes experts come with big egos and persuasive tactics. But in my mind, when we engage in land use, we are engaging in a democratic process—everyone deserves our consideration, including the land community buried under all the overlays.

Another way land use decision makers can learn to identify and talk about different views of land use is to consider a range of acceptable land use. A developer might say he's open to considering a range of land use for a particular property. However, if I suggest preserving the land as a nature sanctuary, he'd probably say that was not a viable alternative: there would be no economic gain and the land would be useful to only a few people. If he suggested an office building with a paved parking lot over the whole property, I'd probably say that's not a viable alternative because there would be no habitat protection. Covering a resident land community with asphalt offends my values of land protection; not developing this land offends his right to use his property. My view extends consideration towards the land community but limits my consideration of acceptable human activity. His view extends consideration to human activity, which provides economic gain, but clouds his consideration of the life of the land.

As adults we have long ago established our ways of working with the land and with each other, but these ways can change. That said, I believe land use decision makers who feel a connection with land are well positioned to talk about this change

when they are out on land with colleagues and property owners. We can all be educators just by telling other people what we see on the land and by expressing our respect for the resident land community.

Seeing our connection to land as a dialogical relationship, through which we take in information from the land and allow ourselves to be influenced by what we see, positions us to extend our consideration to resident land communities. It also adds another layer of complexity when we are engaged in land use decision-making. Extending our consideration to the life of the land involves negotiating our own, as well as other people's, range of beliefs and values; becoming keen observers of the resident land community when we are on site walks; and seeing ourselves as part of a larger community.

If we all see and value land in different ways, how are we to make land use decisions acceptable to all concerned, the life of the land included? Certainly land use regulations, laws, and policies serve to guide our decisions, but these have little to do with how we relate to the land and the moral and ethical standards we bring to our decision making. One of the reasons I am so willing to uphold the wetland regulations is that, for me, protecting wetlands is the right thing to do, not only for our human benefit but also for the benefit of our resident land communities. At the same time, I know other people willing to go along with the regulations, whose underlying belief is that protecting property rights from too much regulation is the right thing to do.

Environmental philosopher Andrew Brennan sees economic rationality always pushing us to submit our values and preferences to an agreed upon concept, or guiding

principle, in order to decide which values to uphold and which to set aside.¹²⁹ For example, when neighbors protest an application because they are concerned about the resident wildlife living on that land, the property owner's right to use his land usually outweighs any perceived rights these animals may have. In this case, the principle of a landowner's right to use his or her land becomes our guiding rationality. But this way of thinking encourages us to look for ways to "reduce complexities about value to simple principles and single measures."¹³⁰

Brennan offers moral pluralism as another approach that "allows that the business of living decently involves many kinds of principles and various sorts of responsibilities. It recognizes that our feelings and responses to situations are drawn from many sources and cannot be simplified without distortion."¹³¹ Philosophically, moral pluralism "maintains there is no single theoretical lens which provides a privileged set of concept, principles and structure in terms of which a situation is to be viewed."¹³² In other words, "One and the same case can properly be viewed in many different ways" so that "the business of being morally engaged with the world around us involves a multiplicity of perspectives," with each perspective serving to describe a "partial account of the moral life."¹³³

I would never discourage a neighbor from speaking their concerns, even when it seems inevitable that the project will be approved, because I believe their concerns represent important information. Indeed, this type of testimony has often caused us to modify the proposal or seek some form of mitigation to limit the impact of development.

Granted, this is not the same as protecting that land from any development, but it leads to more decisions that include consideration of the life of the land.

As this chapter illustrates, there are many ways to express our human relationship with other species and many concepts of connection that extend beyond issues of conservation and development, use or non-use. Learning to be receptive to a dialogic relationship with nature, as well as engaging moral pluralism in our deliberations, can help us see that our differing perspectives shed light on the complexities of our human connection to land and land use. Even though our human-nature relationship is marked by human-centeredness and domination, if we so choose, we can extend our consideration to the life of the land and work with nature as a contributing member of our community.

Chapter 6: Considering Our Obligations

In this chapter, I discuss responsibility as an expression of our moral knowledge. Land use decision-making appears to be grounded in rational thought, but we all come to the table with our own values and beliefs arising from our human-nature relationship. Because we tend to rely on our scientific knowledge to guide our deliberations, our moral knowledge is rarely expressed in our land use conversations, even though it is well formed through our connections with nature and through our professional obligations.

Drawing from a philosophical essay about nature's intrinsic value, I discuss the difference between seeing nature from a use-oriented resource point of view and recognizing that the plants and animals, in addition to creating resources, also live as part of our community with lives of their own. In terms of responsibility, this raises questions about conserving natural resources solely for our use and about giving other plants and animals the land they need to thrive for their own benefit as well. I describe both nature's ability to manage land in our community and our obligation to consider these vital functions in our land use decision making.

Finally, I discuss ways to include the life of the land in our democratic process—discerning nature's value, extending our consideration to other species, and internalizing each other's interests—recognizing the importance of engaging our moral knowledge to enable this process.

Responsibility as an Expression of Our Moral Knowledge

When I go on site walks with other wetlands commissioners, lawyers, and engineers, each of us is there to represent our own set of interests and carry out our duties and responsibilities as best we can. Engineers argue they need to maintain proper grades and drainage standards. Lawyers watch out for their client's interests, pinpointing potential snags in the permitting process. Commissioners have an obligation to protect wetland habitats. Furthermore, we each bring with us our own particular view of nature, our own way of seeing the land before us. It's a well-worn argument that we must be objective and back up our land use decisions with rational thought. But we all come to the table with values and beliefs that guide us through our relationships with other people and other species and set the stage for our decision making. Sometimes these values and beliefs are grounded in the ethical standards of our professions; other times they come from personal experience and upbringing.

When I asked the land use decision makers if they felt a sense of duty or responsibility toward land, they responded emphatically that they do. In fact, after telling me about their connections to land, they often began talking about their sense of responsibility even before I asked the question. It seemed to be something they wanted me to know. Yet, I was struck by how rare it is to hear these statements as part of a land use conversation.

Environmental policy professor John Martin Gilroy sees decision makers starting from a “theoretical paradigm with which they attempt to understand human nature and

human conflict, the nature of society, and humanity's place in the natural world."¹³⁴

He is concerned, however, that "an inherent austerity exists in the discourse and analysis of environmental policy." He calls this a moral austerity, "a lack of complexity in the terms of ethical debate over what is right, what is good environmental policy, and what responsibilities, duties, and obligations we have to both humanity and nature."¹³⁵

Even though the following responses, each representing one of the four quadrants in my matrix, focus on different aspects of responsibility, I see each as a starting point for further discussion that could generate the moral complexity Gilroy calls for in our public debate. In the first statement the attorney focuses his responsibility on avoiding "reckless" land use, which he defines as using property "without regard to the guy next door or the guy downstream." He believes if we succeed in prohibiting reckless behavior wildlife is hardy and adaptable enough to "survive right around us:"

It's a question of degree to me. . . . We can't be reckless on how we use our property. We can't use our property without regard to the guy next door or the guy downstream. Where we've come to that recognition, the living community—the fish, the birds, all that—to some degree have improved. . . . In the sense that we have prohibited each other from being reckless, you're also not only protecting the guy next door, you're also protecting the habitat for the wildlife. . . . The will to live and the ability to adapt seems to me to be so great, that, especially in this kind of environment where there is a lot of rain, a lot of water. It's not dry. The soils are pretty good. It doesn't take much for wildlife to survive. I think wildlife can survive right around us.

In the next response, the youth service bureau administrator also shows a concern for "improper use" of land, but he focuses more on the land itself, describing it as an interconnected "living thing" where "everything has its specific purpose." He

believes if we treat land irresponsibly, we “disturb the chain which holds the entire community.” It is important to “cherish each one of these little pieces.”

Every time we do something outside, whether it’s destroying habitat, whether it’s creating erosion, whether it’s just improper use of pieces of land, there is a reaction, because it is a living thing. . . . Everything has its specific purpose, whether it be a rock, whether it be a tree, whether it be something that’s fallen on the ground. By disturbing it, you disturb the chain which holds the entire community. . . . You remove a rock, somewhere down the line it’s gonna have an impact. So it’s very, very important to cherish each one of these little pieces.

Taking a broader perspective, the land trust officer views his responsibility as using land “reasonably”: providing good stewardship by avoiding any actions that may “spoil” the land or have “an adverse impact on other land around it”; and taking into consideration “how it’s going to be passed on to future generations.”

I feel a sense of duty and I think everyone else should—that their relationship to the land is a relationship of stewardship. Whether they own it or not is not the issue. If they own land, they have a responsibility to use it reasonably, and we owe to society living in a reasonable way. . . . I think that we have a responsibility to provide good stewardship for the land and that may not be a hundred acres, it may not be fifty acres, even if it’s a couple of acres. I think we should try to do what we can not to spoil it, not to have an adverse impact on other land around it . . . and to consider how it’s going to be passed on to future generations as well.

Finally, the Conservation Commission member talks about responsibility in a very personal way, describing how he senses the life of other species around him. He sees himself taking on a nurturing role, cutting trees to let in more air and create a healthier forest:

There is always a feeling for me of the land being alive. Not just because of the wildlife, but in the spring there’s a rebirth and in the fall it’s dying off. The species come, the species go. . . . It’s living, it’s breathing. You watch trees being born, you watch trees die. . . . If I had a hundred acres I’d be out there every summer cutting trees, just dropping them to let more air into the forest, and I’d be nurturing my forest so it would be a healthier forest.

Gilroy envisions a more inclusive public process in which “moral knowledge and scientific knowledge will be genuinely engaged.” Furthermore, he calls upon policymaking “to be more than a technical exercise, science valued, but not conferred with such special intellectual status that it is rendered more prone to blind spots and arrogance, and value analysis elevated from the realm of mere opinion and mindless relativism.”¹³⁶

Even though these four land use decision makers are drawing from their moral knowledge when they talk about their sense of responsibility, land use decision makers, myself included, tend to be practical-minded people who choose action over philosophical discussion. Nevertheless, I can relate to Gilroy's concern about science being given special intellectual status and value analysis being reduced to mere opinion. When an engineer describes his bridge construction over a stream, I tend to give way to whatever he needs in order to satisfy public safety concerns and engineering standards. If I express my concern about the project's impact on the life of the stream, he usually refers to the limits of construction, e.g. only thirty feet will be disturbed. That doesn't really speak to my concern. Should I push the issue and ask for more ecological information about the stream? What is my obligation to protect the plants and animals creating this wetland? These questions draw on my moral knowledge, but bringing them up doesn't seem to fit the discussion at hand. In the end, I usually look at the agenda and see there are still eight more projects to consider; so, in the interest of time, I go with "mindless relativism"—only thirty feet will be disturbed.

Silently, I end up apologizing to the land community for my lack of consideration and my lax decision making.

Am I suggesting we should prolong our decision making process to include more deliberation about our responsibility to this land? Perhaps, but if we bring our moral knowledge into the discussion, we must be clear about what we believe and be able to articulate it so others can understand. When we scientific knowledge is brought into the hearing room, it is well defined. Engineers don't struggle with the calculations, while we sit waiting for their response—they do that back in the office, using their results to explain their position. The same thing applies to our moral knowledge. To benefit from this knowledge throughout our decision making process it must be well defined before we enter the hearing room. Frankly, I am not clear about my obligations to other species. I feel the importance of this obligation, but I am still struggling with the words that will help me be more articulate when I express my moral knowledge.

At the same time, I do see evidence that our moral knowledge is serving both the decision making process and the public interest. I feel gratified when engineers come into the hearing room and tell us they moved a proposed house ten feet to the north, because they agree with a commission member's concern that protecting the big oak tree is important. Protecting one tree won't take away the impact of house construction on the rest of the land community. So, why do I feel satisfied with this decision? First, a commissioner valued the life of that tree and was willing to assert, "Why does the house have to go right here? Look at this magnificent tree. It's healthy, at least 75 years old. Why cut it down?" Until he shared his strongly held beliefs about tree protection, this

tree was just part of the landscape. After he spoke, we all looked at the tree and gave it our consideration. One could argue moving the house had more to do with winning the commission's approval than saving a tree. Either way, the commissioner's moral knowledge provoked a decision centering on re-engineering the location of the house to give this tree room to live and grow. Our land use decision making will take on new dimensions, and our public process will be greatly enriched, as we become more aware of our values and our relationship with the land, and more capable of expressing our moral knowledge.

Directing Our Responsibility Toward Nature

Another essay by Gillroy, "A Practical Concept of Nature's Intrinsic Value," helped me understand the deeper assumptions that define and direct my sense of obligation to nature.¹³⁷ He argues we need preservation policies based on seeing nature as deserving protection beyond its perceived resource value. There is "a profound difference between valuing nature instrumentally and valuing it intrinsically." Although we establish conservation policies to protect natural systems, "our overuse continues unabated and our efforts to consider nature a priority in our economic decision making has been piecemeal at best." This overuse may be evidence "we value nature merely as of instrumental value to us."¹³⁸ Gillroy believes "unless we recognize that [nature] has independent status as functioning life, we will have neither a basis for respecting it as an end in itself, nor a policy standard that will respect its capacity and provide for its flourishing in our collective decision making."¹³⁹

These statements challenged my thinking. I realized I do tend to incorporate land preservation into land conservation, because I see conservation as a protective form of land use on the other end of the scale from development. At the same time, I see other species having an intrinsic value, a life independent of our use. But, as Gillroy points out, when I think of preservation as a form of conservation, am I not seeing nature from a use-oriented point of view instead of recognizing its intrinsic value? I began to wonder how I account for nature's intrinsic value in my land use decision making, which brought me back to seeing other species as contributing members of our community—that is, a community where nature and humans reside together. I thought about how we try to be inclusive by saying how important our natural resources are for our town. But even when we name them and add them to our inventory of valued assets—the Housatonic River and its tributaries, Mt. Tom and its adjoining ridgeline—they remain a geographic area not a living presence. And, we rarely talk about our community other than in human terms.

I began to see a pattern of thinking in which we see nature as a resource, without focusing on the species who are that resource. Furthermore, when we do focus on other species, we talk about their value as a resource without simply respecting their presence in our community. As an environmental educator, to emphasize their importance, I often fall into listing all the ways plants and animals benefit people, but focusing solely on usefulness does not assure their continuing presence. I thought about Gillroy's argument that we need preservation policies arising from a concern for nature's intrinsic value, because conservation policies, being based on seeing nature as

a resource, do not take intrinsic value into account. In fact, if we see wetlands only in terms of carrying out a necessary function, our decision making may lead us to substitute an engineered drainage system to replace that function—then the wetlands' presence is no longer needed. Similarly, seeing land as a resource rather than a particular community of plants and animals may lead us to substitute other land to maintain a resource value, while freeing up the parcel we desire for our use.

So when we talk about responsibility, to what or whom are we directing our responsibility? If we see land as a resource, we may focus on upholding a set of land use standards and principles. If we see land as a living presence, we may direct our responsibility to protecting the resident plants and animals. Looking back on the interviewee's responses, I see the attorney and land trust director primarily focused on principles of responsible use, while the youth bureau administrator and Conservation Commission member are focused on the life of the land and natural systems. I believe it's important to make this distinction, because it deepens our understanding of the assumptions that influence our decision making.

Gillroy believes we must move toward a decision making policy that assures “the flourishing of whole natural systems be considered of value independent of use and therefore be given full status as an end in itself in policy deliberations.” He argues, “Only by conferring this status on nature will we move past our treatment of the natural world as a mere resource and grant basic consideration to the persistence and flourishing of natural as well as human systems in democratic discourse.”¹⁴⁰

In New Milford, setting aside land to protect it from development seems to be our primary strategy to promote “flourishing.” I have concerns about this approach, because it often limits our thinking to, “I can do as I please over here as long as I don’t disturb nature over there.” Similarly, on wetlands site walks, it’s tempting to pass up seeing the wetland when the proposed activity is out of our regulated area. But when we ignore the wetland, we are also passing up an opportunity to better understand its contribution to this land and its connection to the proposed land use.

I’m interested in integrating nature into our land use decision making, because I see nature as having a role to play, instead of being relegated to the sidelines or viewed as part of a landscape plan. I realize this confuses Gillroy’s argument about seeing other species as having value independent of their perceived resource value. I will address this more directly later in this chapter. The point I’m making here, however, is the importance of seeing nature in its role as a contributing member of our community—a resource to be sure—but more than a function. I am talking about plants, humans, and other animals, and natural and human-engineered systems working together for the benefit of our community.

In the New Milford wetland regulations, there is a section listing everything we must take into consideration during the course of our deliberations. One paragraph explains “the environmental impact of the proposed action,” which refers to the wetland and watercourse’s capacity to carry out important functions—supporting fish and wildlife, preventing flooding, supplying and protecting surface and ground waters, controlling sediment, facilitating drainage, controlling pollution, supporting recreational

activities, and promoting the health, welfare, and safety of the public.¹⁴¹ This list demonstrates how very important are nature's contributions.

In terms of my responsibilities as a land use decision maker, I see two ways of looking at this list, the second offering me the greatest challenge. On one hand, if I see wetlands and watercourses as a natural resource representing important functions, I will surely direct my responsibility to protecting those functions. On the other hand, if I see plants and animals providing these functions to our community, I will not only direct my responsibility to protecting these functions, I will also consider giving them what they need to maintain their capacity to carry out these important functions. Am I prepared to see other species working together, competing, using each other, reproducing, and carrying on in ways similar to the functions we assume and carry out as a human species? Am I prepared to assure these other species a place in our community?

With so much scientific knowledge available to confirm the work of other species, it seems obvious we should be giving them all the support they need. But our moral knowledge has yet to grapple with the implications of doing this. As humans we tend to overstep our bounds and interfere with natural systems, as if we don't quite believe these other functions are really that important. Or perhaps we believe nature will recover from our impact or we can recreate these functions elsewhere. After all, if they are not here or if we have used them up, natural resources can be imported or found elsewhere. Or maybe we just don't want to think about it, because our human desire for land use is so compelling.

Instead of seeing nature as a dispensable, second-class resource existing to serve our human activity, I believe we must develop a conscience as well as a consciousness so we can see and support nature's presence in our community. As I look out my window, I see trees growing on the steep slope next to the town road in front of my house. These trees cost us tax dollars when town crews are sent out to trim their branches away from the road. But their roots, tightly entwined with the soil, act as a natural retaining wall, and their leaves and branches provide housing, food, and shelter for other resident plants and animals. We rarely acknowledge this "public" service. But, in fact, all we have to do is look around us anytime, anywhere, to see everyday examples of nature's work in our community—for us and for other species. When local citizens are encouraged to "do their part" to support the life of our community, every reasonable effort is appreciated and considered important—we say every vote counts in an election regardless of an individual's wealth or abilities. Somehow we expect more from nature. Rare, highly valued or useful plants and animals gain our protection, while all others are considered expendable, even when each is "doing its part."

Nature as a Contributing Member of Our Community

Construction plans in New Milford are filled with engineering details pertaining to issues of steepness, drainage, and erosion which occur when land is opened up and reshaped to accommodate our desired land use. But I think, during the design stages, there are missed opportunities for considering how nature is currently managing the land. Where nature is doing a pretty good job maintaining a stream, our responsibility

becomes engineering a road and stream crossing that allow nature to continue managing that stream. This may include constructing drainage so that road salt or lawn fertilizer goes through a bio-filter before runoff reaches the stream, or replanting trees cut during construction so that fish and other water creatures have enough shade on hot summer days, or adding extra sedimentation protection during construction—even avoiding a stream crossing altogether.

As a commission member, I often struggle with wanting to accommodate landowners' hopes and dreams for their property. I attribute this to my human loyalties. But I also have strong beliefs about our obligations to other species and our responsibilities as landowners. Many landowners buy their property thinking about the house they want to build with little awareness of nature's presence. But as soon as they become the owners of this land, I believe it is their responsibility to maintain the natural functions of their land. They may have bought their land thinking about their right to clear away trees for a view of the lake. But they also bought a hillside and a waterfront entailing certain responsibilities to assure the plants inhabiting the hillside are given all they need to hold the soil and to filter runoff into the lake.

Gillroy believes preservation, viewed as a moral principle, "affects our consciousness of nature" and "has unique explanatory power in describing nonuse value in a way utilitarian policy from a principle of conservation does not, and it is better able to suggest a range of policy alternatives aimed at respecting nature's integrity as a functional system."¹⁴² In previous examples of human-centered land use, I have called for "respecting nature's integrity as a functional system," with nature making most of the

accommodations. Even when we modify our plans, we assume that land use will occur. If we truly respect the presence of other plants and animals based on their non-use value, then there must be times we back away from human land use to enable them to continue residing on the land without our interference. This will always be a difficult negotiation, because no matter how altruistic we are towards nature or how conscious we are of nature's contribution to our welfare, we will always find ourselves negotiating conflicts among our individual desires, our sense of human entitlement, our needs as a human community, and the needs of other species.

I have experienced this conflict as an advisor to a farm preserve owned by The Nature Conservancy. There are fields on this land maintained as grassland bird habitat for bobolinks, an increasingly rare species in Connecticut. When local farmers take hay from these fields, they must wait until the young birds are out of their nests and able to fly away from the mowers. This means the hay they are cutting has often "gone by." As a firm supporter of local agriculture, I feel a conflict. Are these birds so important that acres of land must be set aside just for them? Farmland is at a premium around here. Why should these birds be given preference? Bobolinks don't serve any important function even though I receive pleasure from their presence. On the other hand, why shouldn't we support their presence? After all, The Nature Conservancy's mission is "to preserve the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive" (see www.nature.org).

Who deserves to use this land more—the farmer or the bird? Is there any way they can coexist? I have to admit it seems strange to defend a bird. Am I saying this bird

is more important than the farmer? It may come down to that. But before I jump to that conclusion, I want to explore the situation. As a result of this haying policy, are there other species protected as well as the bobolink? What other options are there for the farmer? I see these questions shifting the conversation from competing interests to a concern for the life of the land and a consideration of how or if we will give other species our regard. We can call on plant and animal specialists to understand the needs of other species, just as we turn to engineers, attorneys, and soil scientists for their recommendations.

However, as much as science can provide information about protecting habitats and limiting our human impacts, we need our moral knowledge as well. Gillroy's preservation principle challenges us to consider to what degree we are willing to include other species as part of our community. Moreover, when we use land, do we create an obligation to nature, a debt in return for something given—or are we entitled to our use of nature? Do our property rights release us from obligation, or do they give us more responsibility? As property owners, do we consider how nature contributes to the value of our land or do we view nature as simply there to serve our needs?

There will always be a tendency to see nature as a competing interest and to limit our decision making to determining which stakeholder is more deserving. After years of sitting through public meetings, I anticipate many objections to bringing nature's interests into our decision making process. A few objections come to mind. We are already in competition with land for space and other natural resources—do we now have to compete with other species as well? Whatever nature gets is one less thing for

us. What does nature really do for us anyway? Our responsibility is to focus on human concerns and let nature take care of itself.

I see a different form of consideration in which we acknowledge all the communities involved—humans as well as other species—and decide how the land can be shared, who will be accommodated, and what will be gained or lost by this land use. Gillroy suggests, “with the principle of preservation, a new ‘natural systems approach’ to management might be fully integrated as a competitive argument to the resource efficiency and multiple-use reality of our environmental and natural resources law.”¹⁴³ In other words, if we want to protect nature, we need to see our land use policy as not only including the conservation of natural resources but also the protection of other species, giving them the space and resources they need to thrive as part of our community.

Including the Life of the Land in Our Democratic Process

In a democracy one of our responsibilities is to decide who is included or excluded in our decision making process. Political philosopher Robert E. Goodin advocates including the “mute” interests of nature. Nature cannot offer vocal input during public deliberations, but it is ultimately impacted by our land use decisions.¹⁴⁴ He points out that when we follow the tenets of participatory democracy, those who “participate actively and productively...ought to be included among those who are valued, and rewarded, by society as a whole.”¹⁴⁵

I believe the life of the land is a productive and active participant in our communities. But we have a long ways to go when it comes to acknowledging the

contributions of other species. As I have previously stated, developers readily put in place erosion control systems, but trees and vegetation receive little credit for their ability to hold the soil and manage rainfall and receive even less consideration for the space and resources they need to in order to continue providing these services to a land use project or remain a presence on the land.

If we were to recognize the life of the land as an active part of our community, how would we include nature's interests in our deliberations? Since I can't ask directly, I don't have a clue what the woodland on the mountain really needs or wants, even though my scientific knowledge enables me to make an educated guess. In fact, it seems absurd to think this way. But Goodin says, "In so far as natural objects have objective values that can properly be construed as interests, those ought to be politically represented just as any others." He believes "to deny them representation merely on account of whose they are would be as unacceptable as it would be to deny other interests representation because of whose they are. It would, in the contemporary phrase, amount to sheer 'human chauvinism'."¹⁴⁶

In other words, just because it sounds crazy to invite a tree into the hearing room doesn't mean that tree's life shouldn't be represented in some way. It may be less a matter of guessing what the tree wants and more about discerning the tree's value as a part of our community. To this end, learning more about our relationship with the life of the land becomes an important aspect of our democratic process, because it generates the understanding and knowledge we need to consider where we stand, what we value, and what interests we will uphold. Otherwise, by default, we continue to make human-

oriented land use decisions that ignore the life of the land. Also, I believe the more we focus on our relationship with the life of the land, the more open and receptive we will become to learning from the land itself.

Furthermore, philosopher Roger Paden believes we must be clear about what is meant by the “nature” we are preserving.¹⁴⁷ He offers two interpretations, one referring to “the set of all natural entities” (however many we might wish to include in it), the other to “the long-term historically specific processes that produce those entities.”¹⁴⁸ The first interpretation leads to a “products preservation policy,” such as the Endangered Species Act protecting various species and their habitats. The other leads to a “process preservation policy,” such as allowing naturally occurring forest fires to burn, even when other species are affected. Although both of these policies are directed toward preserving nature, they may work against each other. On one hand, protecting individual species directs our responsibility toward a hands-on policy that maintains and insures the survival of “distinct parts of nature.” On the other hand, protecting natural systems directs our responsibility toward a hands-off policy to avoid “human interference” in a natural process.¹⁴⁹

In other words, we must be clear not only about how we interpret nature but also about how we approach its protection. Paden draws a comparison between viewing a human community as either a collection of independent individuals or “a tradition of related institutions, practices, and shared meanings that is evolving through history.”¹⁵⁰ Similarly, the biotic community may be viewed according to an individualistic model or a holistic model. If we focus on the individual, we might be concerned with the stability of

nature, therefore maintaining the wellbeing of species and their habitats. If we focus on natural processes, we might be concerned with nature's integrity, with the result of maintaining nature's ability to carry out its functions as they naturally evolve.

Goodin asserts, "While people (and others cognitively similarly equipped) *have* interests, objective values *are* interests. Equal protection of interests, democratically understood, ought to extend to the interests as such rather than merely to the people who are their mere carriers." He sees democratic theory as "interest-regarding, rather than merely want-regarding."¹⁵¹ When applicants come before the Wetlands Commission, they tell us what they want to do on their land. Our mandate is to consider their application and base our decision on the regulations representing the state's environmental interests, which may differ from the wants of an individual citizen. Just as we have created regulations to uphold the environmental interests of our state, we might choose an approach that values and wants to protect the objective value of all trees or woodland systems, rather than an individual tree. Goodin cautions us to remember we do not create nature's value.¹⁵² Value is inherent in the life of the land. When that tree hatches out of the acorn, it carries a value of its own. It's up to us to discover and benefit from that value, just as we discover and benefit from each other's inherent value in our human relationships.

Goodin believes we should think about democracy "as a process in which we all come to internalize the interests of each other and indeed the larger world around us."¹⁵³ As a Wetlands Commission member, I see evidence of people internalizing interests beyond their own: when lawmakers vote to make wetlands laws more stringent; when

scientists do research to learn more about natural communities; and when local people adapt to the rules and become less resistant to following wetland regulations. In particular, Goodin says it is important “that mute interests be internalized, somehow, by people who are in a position to play a real role in political decision-making.”¹⁵⁴

Towns in Connecticut are encouraged to complete natural resource inventories to aid in land use planning. These inventories bring nature into our awareness through a series of overlays showing forested areas, wetlands, watercourses, farmland, open space, and other natural features, along with critical habitats and locations of known endangered species. In the past, this information was not easily available, but now local citizens can access town-specific natural resource databases online and create a baseline inventory that can be added to or modified as land use changes. Choosing to create these inventories and adding this information to other land planning databases, such as areas of development, road systems, and zoning maps, is evidence that we are moving toward internalizing nature’s mute interests—taking one more step towards including nature as a part of our community and our land use decision making process.

At the same time, natural resource inventories open up the life of the land to greater public scrutiny and invite comment from people who may not feel any connection to nature. And, by virtue of being called a “resource inventory,” conversations may focus on how this land is to be used or conserved, now or into the future, with little concern for protecting other species as local residents. Also, even though I believe it’s time to bring nature into the democratic process, I feel protective toward nature. There are times I want to keep my relationship with nature to myself,

instead of stepping into an arena where I am easily put on the defensive or dismissed because nature is disregarded. As a land use decision maker and environmental educator, I see opportunities to talk about nature's contribution every time land use is considered. But if I truly see other species as part of my community, there comes a time for me to step away and allow these species stand on their own. For me, this means being optimistic about our human capacity to internalize the value and importance of other species and incorporate their presence into our land use decisions. My interviews taught me to look for all the ways a person may feel connected to nature. Just because a person is involved with development or sees nature differently from me does not mean he or she has no connection.

Speaking from the context of narrative mediation, Winslade says, "Meaning is achieved in a social context—in this case, in a conversation. If we take this idea seriously, we can set ourselves the goal of creating significance out of a piece of information where it did not previously exist. Thus, unstoried experience can be granted significance through its incorporation in a storying process."¹⁵⁵ In the context of land use decision making, it may not seem very important for Bruce and me to stand before the mountain and tell stories about what we see. But I believe the more we talk, the more we will understand one another, find meaning in nature's presence and create significance where it did not previously exist. Thus, the groundwork is laid for sharing our moral knowledge and considering our responsibilities.

When I first began thinking about land as a relationship, it seemed too philosophical—interesting yes, but far from practical in terms of land use decision

making. Then I realized how much our connections to land, our sense of responsibility, and our ability to understand each other influence our decision making. I still believe it's important to remain grounded in practical efforts—continuing to extend our consideration to other species through our land use regulations, policies, natural resource inventories, and land-based organizations. But the only way we can truly consider the role of nature in our community and our decision-making process is through our moral knowledge—learning to express and work with the beliefs and values that define and give meaning to our human-nature relationship.

Chapter 7: Integrating Scholarship and Experience

As an environmental practitioner I started my research drawing on a wealth of experience, but it soon became apparent that one of my biggest challenges was learning to draw on and integrate scholarship from many different disciplines into my intellectual process. Although disciplines such as environmental philosophy and land use theory helped me focus my inquiry, when I began this research, I was most interested in gathering information from the land use decision makers and comparing it to my own experience. As I transcribed the interviews, I began to wonder about their meaning. It was here I turned to literature to help me better understand the questions arising from my research. While writing each chapter, I discovered scholars who clarified, described, and deepened my experience, therefore creating an interplay between my experience as a land use decision maker, my growing awareness of the complexities of our human-nature relationship, and the theoretical aspects of environmental philosophy, land policy, and conflict management.

In terms of relating my research to other scholarship, I believe my greatest contribution is my ability to interpret and communicate lines of thought, such as environmental philosophy, in ways that enrich thinking about land, land use, and the land use decision making process. Satterfield and Slovic explore non-economistic expressions of nature's value in narrative literature. In a world where nature's value is for the most part talked about in monetary or scientific terms, they suggest that narrative forms provide "an opportunity for introspection or reflection, a process through which the

audience comes to know (i.e. construct) something about their world view through the act of monitoring or observing their reactions to the story.”¹⁵⁶ I believe my dissertation, given its narrative form, encourages readers to reflect on their own worldviews and become more perceptive when differing worldviews are expressed in land use conversations and deliberations.

Finally, these chapters represent a learning process that has transformed my own approach to land use decision making. As each chapter came into being, I saw my expression influenced and enriched by the deep thinking of other scholars. This narrative inquiry began with my experience, but, given the nature and purpose of dissertations, it evolved into a scholarly document incorporating many lines of thought from the literature I read, reviewed, and consulted.

In this concluding chapter, I summarize my research by reviewing the seminal literature and training that defined the course of my scholarship. Then I reintroduce the interview questions and the Land Use Decision Maker’s Matrix as tools for further conversation, and present three outdoor activities designed to bring nature into a land use dialogue. Finally, I propose possibilities for continuing research and scholarship.

Seminal Literature and Training

After I completed the interviews and saw how conflict over land use issues would prevent my bringing these land use decision makers together for further conversations, I decided to learn more about land use conflict and dispute settlement. Previous coursework in mediation and my work as a local land use commissioner enabled me to

participate in two intensive courses sponsored by the Lincoln Land Institute and the Consensus Building Institute. Based on a mutual gains approach to negotiation, “Mediating Land Use Disputes” and “Advanced Course on Mediating Land Use Disputes” gave me practical experience in land use mediation. It also introduced me to CBI’s consensus building and conflict assessment literature.¹⁵⁷ I was particularly drawn to Susskind and Field, who focused on some of the most difficult aspects of land use conflict, such as angry outbursts, emotional appeals, debate, and rights talk, all of which halt and hinder conversations.¹⁵⁸

After taking these courses I looked for other scholars working with public conflict. Dukes helped me to see the importance of public conflict in a democratic society, and the value of possessing skills in conflict management. Conflict is inevitable. We can ignore it and fight against it, or we can work with it and learn from it. Dukes speaks of creating dialogical forums and building our capacity for working with public conflict.¹⁵⁹ Forester’s approach to handling value differences through deep listening, learning, and storytelling introduced me to seeing land use conflict as a narrative process.¹⁶⁰

Land use mediation gave me direct experience with land use conflict, but I knew the conversations I was most interested in facilitating were not about specific land use issues. In fact, people often assume talking about land use means talking about land use issues. Furthermore, land use issues are about conflicting human uses of land with very little reference to other species inhabiting the land in question. Even issues incorporating land conservation seem to describe conservation as it benefits people—open space, passive recreational areas, or protected land, i.e. land protected from

development. After hearing the responses to my interview questions about connection and responsibility, I wanted to talk about our relationship to land and land use, focusing on the impact of human land use on other species. Many of the responses included stories about encounters with other species and the importance of having nature as a presence in our human lives. I began to look at land use mediation and wonder why stakeholders were always human. Theoretically, if other species are residents on the land, shouldn't they be stakeholders, too? Why did it seem preposterous to pose this as a serious question? As an educator, I wondered how I could help both myself and other land use decision makers expand our view of land use to include the use of land by other species.

I turned to environmental philosophy to explore these questions. My challenge was moving beyond scholarship, focusing on ethical principles, such as deep ecology or biocentric literature. Both of these approaches support my concern for other species, but have little to say about the complexities of our human-nature relationship. In particular, I wanted to focus on our need and desire to use *and* protect the life of other species. In the end, my search ended up encompassing political and social philosophy as well as traditional environmental philosophy. Just as the interview conversations about connection led to talking about responsibility, the literature about the value of other species inevitably led to arguments about moral consideration.

Instead of seeing nature as an "object," a material resource, Katz sees nature as a "subject" entitled to moral respect.¹⁶¹ Evans sees other species having both intrinsic and instrumental value, and this view leads to moral deliberations about serving our

human needs, while living with nature in appropriate ways.¹⁶² Hayward writes about overcoming our human chauvinism by developing our ability to consider and respect the lives of other species.¹⁶³ For Gilroy, all species are moral agents having intrinsic value independent of their use value, which gives nature an “independent status as functioning life.”¹⁶⁴ Lastly, Rolston views nature as not only having value but also producing value.¹⁶⁵

These philosophers impressed me with the depth of their thinking and helped me enter into the complexities of our relationship with other species. As both educator and land use decision maker, I began to see how far our conversations could go if we were willing to explore and give serious consideration to our own relationships with nature. Gergen’s views of social construction helped me see these conversations as generative discourses, through which we could reinterpret, redefine, and give new meaning to our relationships with other species.¹⁶⁶

To learn more about working with value difference and transformative narrative processes, I attended courses at the Public Conversations Project, an organization dedicated to addressing conflicts relating to values and worldviews. My coursework included workshops in dialogue facilitation, such as “The Power of Dialogue: Constructive Conversations on Divisive Issues” and “Inquiry as Intervention: Crafting Questions with Purpose and Impact.”¹⁶⁷ Seeing land and land use in terms of our diverse human interests as well as our connection with other species certainly draws out conflicting worldviews and values within ourselves as well as other people. These workshops explored public conflict through conversation and dialogue rather than

through forms of negotiation. Learning these dialogue skills was key to working with land use decision makers holding diverse perspectives. When I searched for land use literature focusing on value differences, Forester's guides for land planners¹⁶⁸ and Beatley's principles of ethical land use planning and policy helped me see how value differences bring out the moral and ethical aspects of land use decision making.¹⁶⁹

My work with conflict and dialogue took on another layer of meaning when I began to see land use conflict and value difference through a cultural framework. LeBaron helped me see land use decision making as a cultural process influenced by the beliefs and values we grow up with and by our personal and professional relationships and the cultures they represent. She emphasized the importance of using narrative forms such as storytelling, dialogue, and conversation as a bridge to greater understanding and cultural fluency.¹⁷⁰ Then I discovered narrative mediation, which led me to pursue further coursework with John Winslade through the Peace and Conflict Studies Program at the University of Waterloo in Canada. Winslade views conflict as a socio-cultural process arising through the different meanings, assumptions, perspectives, and worldviews that we express in our relationships. Narrative processes can help us deconstruct our conflict-saturated stories and create new ways to be with each other.¹⁷¹ I find this approach extremely applicable to building new relationships between land use decision makers and discovering new connections with nature and our use of land.

Avruch brought all this together by defining two approaches to conflict resolution, one focusing on the distribution of scarce resources, the other working with cultural

difference.¹⁷² This was an important distinction. I saw how land use dispute mediation was oriented toward the distribution of resources with little concern for cultural difference, while the narrative approaches focused on cultural conflict arising from differing beliefs and assumptions. Furthermore, land use mediation works toward satisfying the needs and interests of individual stakeholders, while the other approaches share a concern for building community, relationship, and understanding between participants. As an educator and facilitator, being able to distinguish these two views gave me important insights into the way land use decision makers approach conflict. In deliberations where land is viewed as property, conflict resolution is all about the distribution of resources. But when we are connecting with the life of the land, conflict resolution often shifts to working with our beliefs and values. In some ways this seems obvious, but it gave me important insights into why testimony from concerned citizens about protecting the life of the land is often dismissed as an emotional appeal in public hearings. It's not their testimony that is unimportant; it's our inability in our deliberation process to switch between the two approaches to conflict, or find a way to incorporate both approaches.

I began to see that how we view the land influences our approach to land use conflict. Viewing land as property results in an individual interest-based process. In contrast, when we see land as a living community, the result is a cultural process of exploring value differences. Aldo Leopold, who has long influenced my intellectual culture and my scholarship, views land as a living community in which humans are just one among many species.¹⁷³ Freyfogle, drawing from Leopold in a more contemporary

way, writes about conflicts between our strong ties to individual property rights and our growing need to treat land as a public commons.¹⁷⁴ Sagoff distinguishes between our role as consumers satisfying individual needs and interests, and our role as citizens in a community aspiring to a greater good. He also points out the difference between deliberation as an aggregate of individuals and deliberation as each person contributing a larger community.¹⁷⁵ Glendon focuses on how our property-rights culture limits our sense of responsibility for public discourse.¹⁷⁶ Similarly, from a psychological perspective, Winter points out that our individuality limits our awareness of the complexity of our relationships between humans and the natural world.¹⁷⁷ Gray views humans moving away from an atomized self-important existence, ranking ourselves as the most important species, toward an attunement with other species and a willingness to consider our existence in more interconnected ways.¹⁷⁸ I believe humans are to be considered part of a land community; yet, our culture has a built in orientation favoring individual rights. So, there will always be conflict about our relationship to land and land use. Land use decision making is not about pitting one view against another; It's about learning to work with both. As an educator, I advocate pairing rights with responsibilities, individual interests with the needs of a larger community, and views of individuality with visions of greater connection between humans and other species.

One of the complexities of working with individuality and connection is understanding our differences as key to knowing about ourselves as a human species. I wanted to minimize polarization between land use decision makers in order to focus instead on developing a comprehensive view of all the ways humans affect other

species. I express this through my land use decision makers matrix. Taylor speaks of how differences engaged and exchanged in relationships contribute to the fullness of our humanity. However, like Sagoff, he emphasizes that it's not a matter of adding up our differences. There must be an exchange.¹⁷⁹ Similarly, Brennan defines a complementarity in moral pluralism, which involves learning to work with multiple perspectives to gain a fuller understanding of the complexities and responsibilities we face in our world.¹⁸⁰ Minter's environmental pragmatism, and his emphasis on ethical inquiry for learning about the diversity of our cultural experiences, enabled me to see environmental ethics as relevant to this process, rather than just a fixed set of principles.¹⁸¹ Ury speaks of being a thirdsider who takes in, appreciates, and works with all views in a conflict.¹⁸² Choosing sides and debating the issues is a strong tradition in our land use culture and public deliberations. I believe building a capacity to take in other views and values, in an effort to work with our differences, is one step towards seeing ourselves as a human species in relationship with other species.

The more I saw other species as a presence, the more I saw them as contributing to the life of our community in ways deserving of our consideration as land use decision makers. Goodin believes other species deserve our regard and consideration as active participants and producers in our community and calls for developing ways to represent the mute interests of nature in our deliberative systems.¹⁸³ Gillroy, in his view of nature's intrinsic value, calls on moving beyond seeing nature as a mere resource to granting it "full status as an end in itself in policy deliberations."¹⁸⁴

But I was still left with seeing these philosophical approaches as somehow disconnected from the so-called realities of land use deliberation. I am less concerned about whether other land use decision makers would agree or disagree with these views than I am interested in the way these views create a vision of nature being part of our deliberative system. Goodin and Gilroy led me to consider the possibilities of framing conversations in which nature is portrayed as more than a natural resource, and gave me the courage to ask questions about how much other plants and animals deserve our consideration. Even though the land use regulations require land use decision makers to consider the resource value of other species, talking about these plants and animals as having lives of their own is rarely a part of land use deliberations. I am grateful for Mansbridge's concept of everyday talk as anchoring one end of the spectrum of public deliberation, the other end being public decision making.¹⁸⁵ Everyday talk gives us the opportunity to express new ideas, to talk about them informally, and to bring them out of private consideration into the public realm. I've always felt a difference between talking about land as an environmental educator and discussing land as a land use decision maker. When we view our conversations about our relationship with other species as everyday talk, and therefore a part of public deliberation, it becomes more difficult to dismiss such conversations as having little to do with land use decision making.

Forbes and Cronon share a concern that, even in our land conservation conversations, the focus is more often than not on land acquisition "war stories" and the economic achievements of land protection. We need to talk about why protecting a

particular place is important to the life of our community, and how caring for that land is part of a deepening relationship.¹⁸⁶ According to Satterfield and Slovic, narrative forms of expression connect with nature-oriented values in ways that economic forms of expression cannot.¹⁸⁷ Connor believes we've become so focused on expressing our scientific and factual knowledge that we are losing our ability to work with our moral knowledge.¹⁸⁸ Gilroy writes about the moral austerity of our environmental policy-making and the lack of complexity in public deliberations that occur when we consider our obligations to both nature and humanity.¹⁸⁹ As an educator, I see conversations about connection and responsibility as opportunities to engage our moral knowledge.

Plumwood further extends our consideration of other species by promoting a cultural relationship with nature based on “contextual and negotiated relationships of communication, balanced dialogue, and mutual adjustment between species.”¹⁹⁰ For me, this is the ultimate vision enabling me to move towards living with other species in my community. Viewing nature in terms of a cultural relationship frees me to see myself and other species each doing our part—learning together to make contributions to the community, to use and appreciate each other, to work with our conflicts and differences, and to form new connections and meanings.

I am drawn to Jordan's deep consideration of engaging with other species through land restoration, which indeed kills other species and imposes a hegemonic relationship on the land, but at the same time reverses destruction and creates opportunities for new life.¹⁹¹ He sees connecting with nature as presumptuous, even “shameful”—how are we to know about the complexities of other species? But he also

sees land restoration as a way to practice living in community with nature, setting up exchanges of goods and services through which we not only take from nature but also give back in whatever ways we can. Over time, our interactions with nature will surely result in a more meaningful and complex relationship.

The scholars represented in this essay have given me a foundation for further inquiry and action. I have acquired the skills to facilitate value-laden discussions and dialogue. I no longer view conflict as something to dread, but I am wiser to the pitfalls of bringing people together. Intellectually, I know these conversations can go deep—if the participants are willing enter into the complexities of our cultural differences and our often conflicting views of nature. However, given our strong tradition of land as property and our pride of ownership, how far will our consideration of other species go? On the other hand, if these conversations can break through polarized views of conservation and development and open up new dialogue, then talking about nature's presence in our community will also become a part of our public conversations and a point of pride.

Extending the Conversation

This section describes ways of putting my research into practice in order to enhance decision making about land use and further our conversations about our relationship to nature. I begin with my interview questions and a new way of considering the four quadrants of the Land Use Decision Makers Matrix. I also describe three activities designed to bring nature into the land use dialogue. Lastly, I suggest possibilities for continuing research and scholarship.

A. Asking questions

My interview questions can serve a conversation in several ways. First, they introduce talking about land and land use in a non-confrontational yet meaningful way. Second, they satisfy our curiosity about what the person next to us is thinking. Once again, here are the questions I asked the land use decision makers during their interviews:

1. What are your thoughts about land as a living community?
2. Do you feel a connection to land?
3. Do you feel a duty to or responsibility for land?

Every person I interviewed was eager to respond to these questions. They are easy to relate to and generate a diversity of response. (See Appendix 2 for a compilation of responses.) Responding to these questions is a way to practice public expression without concern for right or wrong answers. They allow for hearing responses from other people that may seem out of character, and they set the stage for further exploring the complexities of our human-nature relationship.

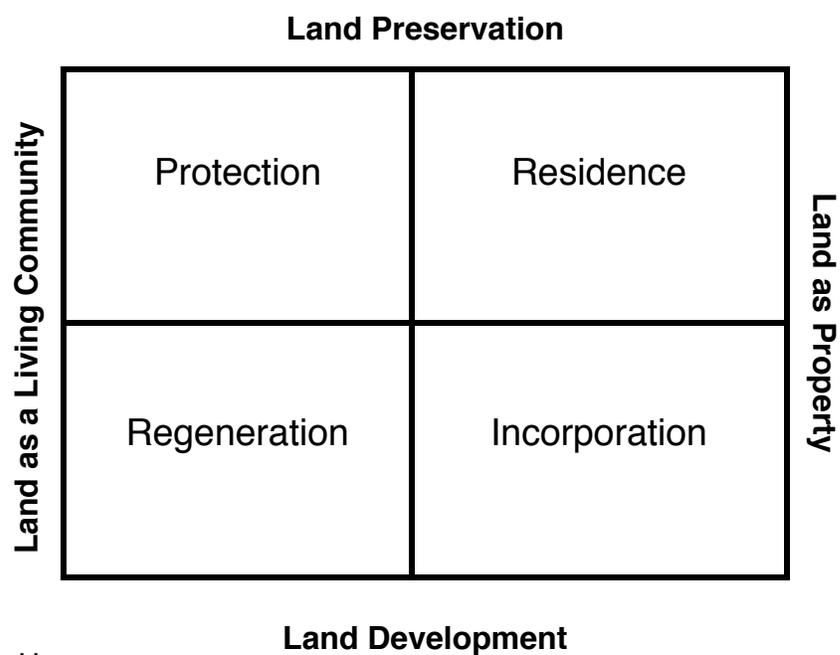
B. Using the matrix for further discussion

The Land Use Decision Makers Matrix identifies multiple ways to think about land and land use while moving away from polarized thinking. An important aspect of this matrix is that so-called opposing aspects of land use are illustrated as interrelated parts of a whole rather than as adversaries. I strongly believe we need each quadrant to understand the big picture, no one quadrant represents a “better” view. Using this matrix as a focus for conversation opens the door to a view of land use conflict in which

multiple perspectives are explored and insights gained into different aspects of our relationship to land and land use.

For further discussion, consider the version below, each quadrant representing a different aspect of our connection to and responsibility for land and land use. No doubt each of us could choose one quadrant that best represents our relationship to land, but we each also could find ways to identify with the other quadrants.

A Matrix for Discussion



Each of the above four ways of describing our relationship with land generates its own set of questions.

Protection

- Is all land worthy of our protection?
- How do we decide which land to protect?
- Must there always be a human benefit?
- Is some land worthy of protection without a human benefit or use?

Regeneration

- What is our responsibility for maintaining the capacity of our local land?
- How can we best protect our local agricultural land, forests, family farms, and orchards?

Residence

- As property owners, what is our responsibility for the plants and animals residing on our land and for the natural functions they perform?
- How can land be shared by many species?

Incorporation

- What are the greatest land-based human needs in our community?
- How are other species supporting our human community?
- How are we supporting other species?

C. Three outdoor activities for bringing the life of the land into the conversation

As an environmental educator, I have little patience talking about nature without actually going outside and experiencing it. In addition, I believe when land use decision makers spend time in nature their negotiations are better informed.

The first activity is a “Nature Awareness Walk.” Even when we claim to know very little about other species, we can still direct our awareness to the natural world

around us, taking in and responding to what we see and hear. One person may see a squirrel run up a nearby tree, while another is attracted to a hole in the ground or a bird in the sky. Sharing these simple observations hones our ability to experience all that surrounds us and sets the stage for a dialogic relationship with other species.

My best experiences in nature are when I come across something happening—deer darting across the path, a hawk calling in the sky, a sweet smell coming from a bush in bloom, ice jams breaking up in the river. Things are always happening in nature—we just need to open our eyes and be willing to focus our attention outward, setting aside our constant mind chatter. Connecting with nature involves looking down, up, and in between, focusing on the whole landscape as well as one leaf or rock. We can look for animal signs, holes in the ground, tracks, scratch marks on tree trunks, chewed leaves. We can listen, smell, touch, look for different colors, watch for sudden movement. I can almost guarantee that one or another of these happenings will spark our interest and bring our attention to nature's presence.

The biggest challenge of this outdoor activity is our tendency to view nature walks as recreational activities having little to do with the business of land use decision making. They are, however, important opportunities to make contact with local species where they live and work—to begin seeing them as having lives of their own. When we are engaged in land use decision making, we can bring this awareness of the natural world into our negotiations and better represent nature's needs and interests.

The second activity is "Considering a Range of Acceptable Land Use." This is a conversation taking place on a piece of land with boundaries clearly marked, e.g.

orange flags on trees, stone walls in the distance, or visible road frontage. The conversation's focus is how this land could best be used.

The land visited would have interesting natural features and be "unencumbered" in terms of preconceived or future land use. For example, even though a nature center provides an interesting landscape for this site walk, it would not be a good site, because its designation as protected land could inhibit talk about development.

Before the walk begins, participants receive a map of the land, which they use to sketch in their chosen land use or to make notes of natural features. Local regulations affecting this land such as zoning or wetlands should be noted. There is no discussion during the site walk. Each person, while walking this land, considers several questions. What does this land suggest in terms of a particular land use? Should it be partially or wholly preserved or developed? Where would roads and buildings go? How densely should the land be developed; how much land set aside? How is adjacent land being used, and how does this influence your decision? How do you experience nature's presence on this land? How is nature contributing to the value of this land?

When participants come together to compare land uses, each person is asked which land uses seem most acceptable and which go against his or her beliefs and values about how land ought to be used. Further discussion invites participants to consider what these land uses reveal about a sense of duty and obligation to our own species as well as others. Are there limits to preservation or development that will always be, or never be, acceptable to some people, no matter which land is under

consideration? Are there ways to allow a human use of this land that will have a minimum impact on the resident plants and animals and the work they are doing?

The discussion following the site walk will undoubtedly engender debate and argument. But there is also opportunity to learn more about one other as land use decision makers and to ask each other questions that would not be possible to ask if this were a real site walk with pending decisions. Being in the presence of the land could also open up a discussion about our impact on natural habitats and reveal different views of human entitlement and the protection of other species.

Through brainstorming and conversation, the third activity “Nature’s Contributions to the Land” promotes seeing nature as a contributing partner in our community. The purpose of this activity is two-fold: to improve our ability to observe nature performing important functions on land in our community; and then, to consider both our human obligations to maintain these functions, and our willingness to share land with other species. Held outdoors in a natural setting, such as the wooded hillside of a nature preserve, the conversation begins by focusing on the landscape and listing all the ways nature is maintaining that land—roots holding the soil, grass providing a natural carpet, trees supplying shade and homes for other animals. It is not necessary to be a biologist or an engineer to see or even imagine the functions of nature.

In generating the list of functions, remember nature’s importance to other species besides our own. Think about what is happening under the ground as well as on top. Think about a wide range of species from mammals to insects to microbes to birds, and the contribution each makes to the land. When it’s not possible to look at a real

landscape, use a photograph, such as a lake-front hillside showing trees, grass, water, and other natural entities. Start by asking what are the ways nature is maintaining this hillside and protecting the lake? What would be missing if we removed certain plants and animals from this landscape? What would change? What functions would need to be replaced?

After completing the inventory, use questions to invite discussion. We talk about doing our part as citizens in a community; does nature deserve credit for doing its part? Are we only obligated to protect rare or highly valued species that are perceived as serving our community in dramatic ways? Is it desirable for land to be shared by many species? Why or why not? To what extent do property owners have an obligation to maintain and protect the natural functions provided by the plants and animals on their land? To what degree are we entitled to change the land to suit our needs, or substitute manmade functions for those provided by nature?

Opportunities for Further Inquiry

A. Working with consumer-based and community-based mindsets

In chapter 4, I described consumer-based and community-based mindsets. Two of Sagoff's quotes especially informed my thinking:

A community is not an aggregate of individuals or a set of preferences to be satisfied; people in communities know purposes and aspirations together they could not know alone.¹⁹²

Should we base environmental policy on the interests individuals may act upon as consumers or on the values that they may agree upon as citizens?¹⁹³

Considering these statements helped me to define the specific characteristics of each mindset.

Consumer-based mindsets:

- are self-serving
- lead us to defend our property and our rights
- lead us to compete in order to prevail or win
- come together as an aggregate of interest-bearing individuals
- view nature in terms of how it serves our needs

Community-based mindsets:

- moderate our actions as individuals
- temper our sense of personal entitlement
- take many viewpoints into consideration
- acknowledge the contributions of others
- focus on discerning public values

I believe that being conscious of the dynamics of these two mindsets, and deliberately choosing to work with these different mindsets, can add meaning to our land use conversations and moderate the economic discourse that often dominates our land use discussions. For example, when consumer-based mindsets are driving conversations about protecting land from development, undoubtedly someone will say the only way to protect land is to buy it—you can't take away the owner's right to get a return on his or her investment—essentially narrowing the conversation to the

economics of landownership. However, if we choose to then shift the conversation to a community-based mindset, looking at how we value nature as a part of our community, we may find additional ways to protect what we value, thus expanding the conversation to include more than economic concerns. Buying land remains an option, but shifting mindsets enables us to move beyond land as property and talk about nature's presence as well. Research is needed that would introduce these two mindsets to land use decision makers who would agree to work with them in a series of conversations. Using this process, we could see if shifting mindsets does indeed open up land use conversations in new ways.

Drawing from Sagoff's statements, I believe it's important for land use decision makers to develop the capacity to cooperate as well as compete with each other; to search for common ideals as well as satisfy individual interests. We need to recognize and engage these different ways of thinking as they are appropriate to our decision making process. However, it's important to acknowledge that pursuing our individual desires as consumers or property owners draws from a different mindset than the mindset we use when we join with others to pursue our goals as citizens.

We could benefit from applying each of these approaches to our land use decision making. In terms of scholarship, I see opportunities to explore Sagoff's statements as they apply to local land use decision making. How does land use decision making reflect both individual and community values? And, how are these values acknowledged as part of our democratic process and our relationship with the life of the land? For example, when we make decisions as a wetlands commission, we

work with both the interests of individual property owners, who come before us to receive a permit for their land use, and the community values we have adopted in our regulations to protect our wetlands. Many landowners see this process as one more regulatory hurdle to get past before they can start building. Others say they want to “do the right thing” for the wetlands and watercourses on their land. Using the concept of consumer-based and community-based mindsets, further research could focus on learning more about how local landowners approach land use in terms of their concern for and awareness of the value of other species residing on their land and to what extent these landowners feel a responsibility to a larger community.

B. Seeing people and nature living together

Jordan writes about viewing “land as a community to which we properly belong” and this view provides for “a relationship between ourselves and the landscape that is both engaged and participatory and at the same time respectful of nature for its own sake, and not merely as a resource.”¹⁹⁴ He goes on to explain the reason for the ineffectiveness of environmentalism in strengthening community:

For more than a century, environmentalism has shifted uneasily, unproductively, and often even destructively between the poles of an alienated preservationism and a resource-oriented conservationism, and has proved incapable of inhabiting the middle ground where community is achieved as selves confront each other, first to acknowledge and then somehow to transcend the irreconcilable differences between them. This, I believe, explains why environmentalists have argued for community but have made so little progress in the task of strengthening the human community, much less expanding it to include other species.¹⁹⁵

We need research describing a real or imagined community of people and nature living together, working out agreements for each other's existence and co-habitation. I'd also like to see more research in environmental philosophy that focuses on the ethical challenges of land use decision making and our necessary use of nature, using a pragmatic approach that acknowledges and works with a range of perspectives and moral pluralities.

Land use conversations customarily refer to nature as our natural resources. Do land use decision makers ever see nature as having a life of its own beyond its resource value? If they do possess this awareness, how does it influence their decisions about protecting and using land. Furthermore, how do they account for nature's presence on their land in terms of property rights and landowner responsibilities?

In Connecticut many towns are working on natural resource inventories—identifying, describing, and mapping within their town borders natural habitats and features, such as lakes and rivers. I'd like to see scholarship focusing on how these towns use their inventories. There are opportunities to explore ideas with the people who are compiling and working with these inventories. In terms of nature's presence and the challenges of human land use, why are these inventories important for the use and protection of land in their town? Those who work with inventories could also be asked about their personal connection to land and their sense of duty or responsibility to land. I suspect their responses would deepen the conversation and reveal more insights about the moral knowledge they bring to these inventories. I want to know how or when

local educators are using these inventories to promote public awareness of nature's presence in their community.

C. Including nature in our democratic process

If we are serious about considering the life of the land as contributing members of our community, we are faced with finding ways to include the interests of other species in our democratic process. Rights-based approaches tend to be focused on the autonomous individual and have little to say about our relationship and responsibilities to others. It's awkward to talk about the rights of nature, because nature comes to us not only as individual plants and animals, but also as species, ecological communities, and habitats. Moving away from a rights-based approach, Goodin focuses on participation and value as criteria for inclusion in our democratic process. I find his approach much more conducive to including nature. The following statements by Goodin are most thought provoking for further scholarship.

In so far as natural objects have objective values that can properly be construed as interests, those ought to be politically represented just as any others. To deny them representation merely on account of whose they are would be as unacceptable as it would be to deny other interests representation because of whose they are. It would, in the contemporary phrase, amount to sheer 'human chauvinism'.¹⁹⁶

At root, what I want to query is the image of democracy as necessarily entailing each person representing his or her *own* interests, and those exclusively. It might be empirically more realistic, as well as being morally and politically preferable, to think instead of democracy as a process in which we all come to internalize the interests of each other and indeed of the larger world around us.¹⁹⁷

There is simply no other way in which the interests of mute nature or unborn persons can find political representation except through being politically incorporated within the interests of sympathetic people in the present who are capable of bringing political pressure to bear on their behalf.¹⁹⁸

There may be disagreement about how we value nature, but Goodin's approach opens the door to seeing nature contributing in ways we humans are not able to. It also challenges our land use decision making to take nature's contribution into consideration. For example, we may be able to engineer a manmade process to prevent flooding and erosion. But if nature already is already providing this function on the land we are considering, why not incorporate nature's efforts into our land use plans? Why not design our land use to protect that part of nature doing the flood control, making sure it has all it needs to continue this process? There are opportunities for research about nature's contribution. We might start with what is already in place, such as protecting functional values through our wetlands regulations or land use plans designed to suit the land.

Because our form of democracy is based on groups or individuals speaking up to express their needs, Goodin explores the problems of representing the interests of those who are mute, such as nature and future generations. When representation is not possible, he suggests identifying and working with objective value as a way to represent the interests of other species. There are opportunities for scholarship focused on ways to assess, describe, and understand nature's objective value so that other species are better represented during land use deliberations.

In addition, I would like to see research about what land use decision makers think about Goodin's approach. How would they support or oppose it? Is our democratic process applicable only to human interests? How are we extending it to other species?

Looking Forward

Sometimes land use decision makers will make a choice against nature—the trees will be cleared, the land bulldozed, the house built. There are those who will insist on mitigation or restoration to minimize the impact, but others will insist they have the right to use this land as they wish. Land use decision making will always be a negotiation between protecting and using nature because, as much as we may proclaim our love of nature, we cannot survive without taking the lives of other species. My hope is that we will continue to learn more about how our choices affect these lives and their work in our communities, drawing upon our moral knowledge to consider our obligations to other species in addition to promoting human entitlements. There is a strong tradition in our culture of incorporating difference and including those different from ourselves. Granted, this inclusion is not without conflict and continuous negotiation; nevertheless, our goals for a more equitable society are achieved through our democratic process. In addition, there is also a strong connection to nature and a concern for other species. We are a culture that supports parks and clean rivers, nature centers and land trusts, protective legislation and regulations, animal rights, pets, and baby birds.

Almost every spring, a pair of ducks wander away from the river to take up residence under a bush next to one of the buildings around New Milford's town green. Although they hold up traffic crossing the street and graze up and down the green during the day, people seem to enjoy their presence and do what they can to protect

them. There's nothing special about these ducks; they go about their business as do the people around them. They draw our attention because it seems unusual to see ducks away from the river in such a people-inhabited area. But nature is all around us, even in the center of town—the trees, the grass—almost everything on the town green is nature. Nature is integral to our communities. I look forward to the day when we are so aware of nature's presence that everywhere we go we see nature doing its part, and in return we do our part to assure nature's ability to carry on.

As an environmental educator, I encourage nature centers to team up with neighborhood groups and homeowner associations to offer nature walks that wander through their own backyards and common open space—to experience nature as a surrounding presence and to talk about fears and concerns, connections and responsibilities. These walks are also an opportunity for neighbors to meet each other, step over property boundaries, and look beyond the confines of their own backyard—to recognize themselves as part of a wider community in which we encounter our differences and learn how to extend our consideration.

As a wetlands commission member, during meetings I now find myself more consciously representing nature in my questions and comments. I have made the shift from seeing plants, animals and wetland functions as separate entities on a checklist of concerns, to taking a more integrated approach in which I see a community of plants and animals carrying out a range of functions, engaged in work that may be disrupted, impacted, or changed by the proposed land use. No longer do I justify each plant or animal according to its status as an endangered species or other special designation. In

the human community people don't have to be outstanding citizens to receive protection and consideration. Why should it be any different for other species? At the same time, I do feel a loyalty to my own species and I readily use the lives of other species to provide for myself.

Our human-nature relationships are filled with complexities and contradictions that will always challenge our decision making. My research has shown me new ways to bring nature into our conversations and talk about our connections and responsibilities. I trust I have set something in motion that will be carried on by our conversations, our experiences with nature, and the diversity that enlivens our community.

Endnotes

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Appendix 1

- **Letter to Participants**
- **Interview Guide**
- **Study Guide Introduction and Readings**

**Cathy Setterlin
20 Paper Mill Road
New Milford, Connecticut 06776**

March 2000

Dear XXX,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study which will enable me to complete my doctoral dissertation in Environmental Studies from Antioch New England Graduate School. My research topic is, "Exploring the Concept of Land as a Living Community with Land Use Decision Makers in New Milford, Connecticut."

I chose my participants to represent many different points of view as land use decision makers. Whether you are a conservationist or developer, both or in between, your willingness to share your particular view is what I need to successfully complete my research. What you have in common is that everyone in this study is a New Milford land owner and/or has a close connection with New Milford land.

Your participation includes reading the study guide, reflecting on the three articles, and granting me an hour of your time for an interview. The interview will focus on your response to the topics presented in the study guide. I am not looking to assess your knowledge, I want to understand your point of view.

With your permission I will tape record the interview. I will be compiling each person's statements to demonstrate a range of responses in my final report. Because this is not a statistical document, I will be using direct quotations but I will protect your confidentiality by changing your name. My plan is to share this final report with each participant by September so that you can confirm your own statements as well as read the thoughts of others.

The final stage of this project, after you have read the report, will be a two-hour focus group session in which you will be invited to share your responses with other participants. This meeting will be run in a dialogue format where people come together to learn about and understand each other's point of view. Your participation in this focus group is an optional, but very important aspect of my study.

Again, I want to emphasize how important it is to this study that I receive a range of views, especially those which may differ from my own. You were selected because I believe you are willing to reflect on this topic and give me a thoughtful response. If you have any questions or concerns please give me a call at XXXXX or email me at XXXXXXXX. Thank you again for agreeing to participate!

Sincerely,

Cathy

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Name _____

Occupation or profession _____

Educational and/or training background _____

Positions held as a land use decision maker _____

Number of years in land use positions _____

Other connections with land in New Milford _____

1. Which passages did you find thought provoking? Did you agree or disagree?
2. What is your opinion about the concept of land as a living community?
3. Have you ever considered this before?
4. Do you feel a connection to land? If so, how so?
5. Do you feel a sense of duty or responsibility to land? If yes, please describe.
6. Is there anything you would like to add? What have I missed?
7. Is there anybody in particular you feel I should talk to?

Introduction to the Study Guide

Land conservation and development is a hotly debated land use issue in many New England towns. The late twentieth century saw the rise of ecological concern among local citizens as well as an ever-present desire for their towns to thrive economically. Local land trusts and open space advocates seek to protect land that developers claim for potential profits and tax dollars.

Historically, the land in New England has supported the lives of generations of people -- Native Americans, homesteaders, farmers, industrialists, urban and rural dwellers. However, during the past three centuries little recognition has been given to the land itself as a living community -- trees, grass, soil, rocks, streams, and animals -- which has enabled our successful habitation. We use the land to satisfy our human needs whether it be a beautiful woodland set aside for hiking or a two acre lot for our new house. In our culture, land with no designated human use is often referred to as “vacant”, “abandoned”, or “available property.” The natural community in residence is usually ignored.

In recent years a concern for land conservation and protection is bringing the land community into our awareness as we acknowledge our ecological connections with the natural world. Through environmental education programs we encourage our children to feel a sense of wonder and a respect for other living beings. As a natural entity land is a wildlife habitat, a wilderness, a nature sanctuary, a provider of food and sustenance.

However, land is also seen as property, a natural resource, a commodity, a house lot, a source of wealth and power. When we reach adulthood we enter this world of property where love for the land is often relegated to a private realm and considering land as a commodity comes to the fore as our public expression.

The passages selected for this study guide offer several ways in which people view land, and emphasize society’s growing awareness of ecological connections. Because these three excerpts were written by a law professor, two philosophers, and a political scientist each passage takes on a different intellectual perspective as well.

These passages were selected to be thought provoking and interesting. I look forward to discussing them with you, so I hope you will take the time to reflect on each one. I want to emphasize this is an exploratory study and my goal is to identify a range of perspectives. I am not trying to resolve any issues, change your mind, or propose new policy.

As you read these excerpts please mark the sections that elicit the most responses from you. These may be ideas you agree or disagree with, ones which remind you of land use issues or personal experiences, ones where you say, “Yes, that’s it!”, “No way!”, or, “What the heck is this person talking about?” I want to hear the full range of your response. Again, thank you for your willingness to participate. R

Readings

1. Reconsidering Land Policy: An Introduction

Among the ways of relating to the land and its uses, two concepts predominate in modern society. At the cost of over-simplification we may identify them as *economic* and *ecological*. Between the polarities of each position there are many intermediate or mixed attitudes. Within each grouping there are controversies over public versus private interests, over conflicting private interests, and over ethical judgments that complicate and deter the development of public policy for land. Because land is literally the base upon which all human societies are built, public decisions about how land is possessed and used have powerful implications for the character of a society and for the respective rights of individuals in that society.

How people relate to the land influences how they relate to one another. Deeply held values link us to things beneath, upon, and above the land, and we seldom perceive the earth solely as a biogeochemical phenomenon. Attitudes toward the land and its uses express economic, ethical, and aesthetic values, often held with deep emotion. Given these circumstances one can readily understand the reluctance of American public officials to move a graveyard, for example, or to condemn private, family-owned land for a national park. Land use is a contentious field of policy. As a consequence, many politicians would like to avoid any consideration of policy for land, regarding it as a “no-win” issue.

Economics and Ecology

Although it is not feasible to attempt precise descriptions of the two dominant concepts of land use, several characteristics seem representative of the differences in these two attitudes. The first and most widely accepted land attitude in the developed, industrialized world is economic—an attitude based on exaggerated and unsustainable economic priorities. For those who share the economic view, land is primarily a financial resource—a commodity bought, owned, sold, and used for some form of financial return. Land is perceived as little more than legally described, discrete pieces of negotiable property. . . .

Where commercial considerations are foremost, approaches to decisions regarding land rights and responsibilities tend to be incremental, legalistic, and strongly influenced by prevailing economic dogmas—such as the right to and necessity for growth, and the use of monetary return as the measuring stick for the highest and best value of land. Public decisions for land use also tend to be case-specific and tactical in that, within the general parameters declared by law, they focus on respective rights

among parties in conflict. This approach may be described as “fractionated.” Its focus is upon individual increments of property in land (large or small), and neither upon responsibility for care of land as an ecological and economic resource, nor upon land as a basic element in a comprehensive natural system.

The second or ecological attitude toward relationships with land emphasizes organic, human uses of the land within a complex, interactive web of life for which the earth itself is the frame and indispensable support. This organic concept of the earth is characteristic of many so-called “primitive” or traditional societies. Drawing support from advancing science, this view is also held by growing numbers of broadly informed, environmentally concerned persons. Unlike the economic orientation, it tends toward strategic rather than tactical approaches to land policy. That is, the ecological attitude toward land takes a comprehensive, long-range, systemic view. It views land, earth, humanity, and the entire biosphere in a mode that is, or seeks to be, integrated rather than incremental. Although the scientific application of this integrated ecological view has not been fully developed, it nevertheless represents an ethical and political ideal, a vision of real-life conditions and interdependencies. If specific land use issues were seen in their larger ecological context, then the orientation of policy would tend to be integrative rather than fractional. Today this breadth of view is exceptional. If our society were guided by a concept of human interdependence with the land, a broad set of prevailing assumptions, behaviors, ethics, and legal principles would have to change. In the United States, where rights of individual land ownership have been deeply entrenched, ecology has encouraged modifications of and exceptions to conventional modern law and policy. These developments have arisen as a result of a growing understanding both of the linkages between causes and effect (e.g., leaching of toxins in landfills and resultant groundwater pollution) and of environmental science (including biogeochemical cycles, maintenance of biotic diversity, and the ultimate necessity for sustainability in human uses of the earth). For the modern mind of the twentieth century an ecological view of the earth has had to be acquired through learning. Ecological literacy has not always been a characteristic of modern authors. It will be an unavoidable feature of postmodern society.

Whereas some changes in land policy and law have addressed practical problems of health, safety, and economics—restrictive use of flood plains, for example—ethical considerations are increasingly becoming factors in land-use legislation. The changes emerging in land ethics, however, are not wholly new. In some respects they are a return to preindustrial attitudes that presuppose—as economic methods characterizing the industrial era generally did not—an interdependence between humanity and the earth, and a human responsibility to use the land in ways that will be sustainable throughout future generations. But emergence of this ecologically based land ethics has aroused counterethics based on exaggerated individual rights to possession and use and defended as the American way of life.

Powerful though they still may be, these ethics appear to be a “rear guard” defense of an attitude receding into history.

Caldwell, Lynton Keith, and Kristin Shrader-Frechette. Policy for Land: Law and Ethics. Lanham: Rowman, 1993. 3-6

Lynton Keith Caldwell is Arthur F. Bentley Professor Emeritus of Political Science and Professor of Public and Environmental Affairs, Indiana University. Kristin Shrader-Frechette is De Crane Professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame.

2. Residence and Resource: Community and Commodity

Culture may modify nature, but we continue to live on landscapes. All life requires a place; an examined life needs a sense of place. With this sense of place, treating the dirt as a natural resource to be farmed, mined, timbered, or owned is necessary but not sufficient for an understanding of natural value. The question is not that of maximum exploitation of Earth as a big property resource; it is that of valued residence in a community of life. A discriminating account will counter any bifurcation of nature and culture by realizing that humans reside in their cultures within countries, where ‘country’ includes a sense of geographical dwelling place. A person without a country—a landscape as well as a nation-state—is a tragedy. That is the root of the word *nation*, those who are “natives,” being born and bred (Greek: *natans*) in a country.

... Americans sing “America the Beautiful,” glad for purple mountains’ majesties and the fruited plains stretching from sea to shining sea. People on the frontier found that they had no sooner conquered a wilderness than they had come to love the land on which they settled. As sung in the musical *Oklahoma*, “We know we belong to the land, and the land we belong to is grand.” Of those drawn to the city for livelihood or commodities, many really prefer to live in the “suburbs,” so as to remain also near the country, in some place not consummately urban but where there is more green than anything else, where, with the neighbors, there are fencerows and cardinals, dogwoods and rabbits. We cherish our hills of home, our rivers, our bays, our country drives. Real estate agents term these “amenities” with our “commodities,” but this is really nature mixed in with our culture. We want greenbelts in cities, mountains on the skyline, parks, seashores and lakeshores, spits, headlands, islands, forests, even wildernesses, including deserts, tundra, and swamps to visit. Most people identify with some countryside; indeed, our affections toward the city are often exceeded by those we have toward the landscapes on which we were reared.

“Resources” contains the idea of taking a natural source and *re*-directing it to our cultural needs. “Resource” is not just a cultural concept, because every living thing must have resources, nutrients that it takes in and sequesters for its own uses. Humans, coyote, and warblers all require resources, but humans redirect their resources extensively and intentionally to rebuild their environments. They do so with the know-how of transmissible cultures. Within culture we distinguish between what we value as consumers and what we value as citizens. Often we use government to regulate business in order to protect these citizen values that cannot be left to unregulated commerce. The question is not simply one of multiple exploitive uses, but of multiple values to be optimized. We already know this when we think like citizens. Environmentalists add that people need to be “native residents” as well. “*Re*-side” has the root “re” (repeatedly) and “sedere” (to sit); it is where one settles down to live, one’s home. When we begin to think of ourselves primarily as consumers, and secondarily as citizens, and only rarely as residents, we are getting our values topsy turvy . . .

We are born clean of culture, for any culture can be emplaced in any newborn. But we are not born free of nature, and in any cultural education we do ill to neglect those emotions that are native to our birth. The word *human* is cognate with the word *humus*, because we are made of dirt and we dwell on earth, on Earth. We need roots as well as resources. Nature offers resistance to life as well as conductance, and the values that flow on Earth are aroused and energized in the interplay of both; human values flow in the interplay between natural and cultural values.

The landscape is crucially a “commons,” a public good, and that not just for people but for all the residents of the biotic community, including nonhumans. Coyotes and warblers cannot be citizens, but they are residents on the same landscape as ours. They, too, are earthlings. The decisions we make as geographical residents, then, will have to consider the fauna and flora not simply as resources but as residents who count for the values they carry. The word *resident* enlarges one’s community further than does the word *citizen*. Good citizenship is important. But it is not simply what a society does to its slaves, women, minorities, handicapped, children, or future generations, but what it does to its fauna, flora, species, ecosystems, rivers, beaches, and landscapes that reveals the character of that society. (9-12)

Urban, Rural, and Wild

The values that humans cherish in towns cannot be modeled on values in nature, since there are not templates for towns in wild nature. Nature frees humans to do their own thing. Humans are the creatures that nature did not specialize but rather equipped with marvelous faculties for culture and craft. There must remain a biological understorey for our cities, rather like the life of the mind requires ongoing biochemistry; after that, we

are on our own. The values of the city are up to us and they ought to be judged by a culturing of those native endowments we call reason and conscience. The city is in some sense our niche; we belong there, and no one can achieve full humanity without it. Cultured human life is not possible in the unaltered wilderness; it is primitive and illiterate if it remains hunter-gatherer or even if it remains at a merely rural level. The city mentality provides us with literacy and advancement, whether through the market with its trade and industry, or through the library and laboratory.

The rural environment is likewise valuable, since no city can be sustained without rural life support. The rural is nature as domesticated, rebuilt for our residence, primarily the cultivated landscape—the agricultural field, the woodlot, the pasture, the orchard, the ranch, the forest watershed, irrigation ditches, the road from place to place, rivers bridged, and nature as generally managed. Forests are cut down or planted, fields plowed, livestock tended, farmhouses and barns built, and so on. The farm feeds the city, and that may be taken as metaphor for the whole support of society in soil, water, air—for the organic circulations of the city in nature. The rural environment is where humans meet nature in a productive encounter, where we command nature by obeying her. . . .

Nature is a place of encounter where humans go, not to act on it, not to labor over, but to contemplate it, drawing ourselves into its order of being, not drawing it into our order of being. This accounts for our tendency to think of our relationship to nature as being recreational, and therefore perhaps idle, since we do not do any work while there. We are at leisure there, often, of course, an active leisure, but one that is not economically productive. We do not convert wilderness for farm or city. Wild nature is not commodity for us, but it does reveal the diversity of the larger Earth community in which we reside, even though we humans cannot reside in wild nature and have resolved not to remake it into *polis* (town). Wilderness brings a moment of truth, when we realize how false it is that the only values, moral or artistic or political, are human values. Wild nature has a kind of integrity; it is creation itself and contact with it is re-creating (a deeper recreational value) because we encounter our sources, beyond our resources. . . . (12-15)

Community

A biotic community is a dynamic web of interacting parts in which lives are supported and defended, where there is integrity (integration of the members) and health (niches and resources for the flourishing of species), stability and historical development (dependable regeneration, resilience, and evolution), where the achievements of the past are carried forward and enjoyed in the present, with variations leading to creativity in the future (cybernetic, transmissible heritage). Communities are plural; there must be many members. But communities are not sheer pluralisms. All

community members have relationships; but some may be little related to some others. If there is excessive pluralism, however, there will be diminished integration in the community. A community is not possible without individuals, but a community puts individuals in vital relationships with others. Individuals are not possible without communities.

None of us has any doubt that there are cultural communities, and that they are highly valued because they nurture our human values (mixed, no doubt, with many disvalues). But neither should there be any doubt that there are biotic communities, and that these, too, are of high value (possibly also with mixed disvalues). These systems are the fountain of life. There is no community on the moon. But community is the miracle of Earth—as it has been for almost forever. . . . (77-79)

Rolston, Holmes., III. Conserving Natural Value. NY, Columbia UP, 1994. 9-15, 77-79. Holmes Rolston III is Professor of Philosophy at Colorado State University.

3. Tales of Eden, Old and New

As the first colonists went about their backbreaking work, they instinctively turned to the Bible to supply meaning and context for their lives. For some of them, the New World was a promised land, not unlike the land Moses sought in the Exodus. For John Winthrop and his band of Puritans, New England was the place God had chosen for them to erect their city on a hill that their light might shine forth in accordance with the Sermon on the Mount. Over and over, though, it was the Book of Genesis, and, within Genesis, the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden that gave the colonists a sense of what they were about.

The Eden narrative fascinated the colonists just as it had caught the interest of generations before them. Their fascination arose, paradoxically, as much from the story's ambiguity and malleability as from its importance. The Eden story wasn't so much a single tale as a collection of raw materials from which several tales might arise. One narrative that took root likened the New World to the Garden of Eden itself. Just as Adam and Eve had been placed in Eden, so, too, were the colonists led to America. It was a lush, fertile land, this America, so wonderfully designed and so abundant in its yield that the colonists' needs would be met forever. In this interpretive myth, America was a friendly, productive place. The unbroken forests represented wealth, as did the rivers teeming with fish. To enjoy this garden, the colonists needed merely to live in it, in as godly a way as they knew how.

Alongside this America-as-Eden narrative grew a second, much different one. In this alternative story, America wasn't Eden; it was the wilderness to which Adam and

Eve had been banished when they misbehaved. Now, this wilderness had much potential, but the colonists needed to transform it with their labor, taming it and controlling it, before the land would be habitable. In this story, the ideal garden was not the unaltered land that greeted the colonists when they first arrived but rather the well-tended, pastoral countryside around a New England village or a Virginia plantation. Trees had to be cut, the land plowed, fences erected, and wild beasts driven off before Eden would rise again.

This second narrative diminished the luster of the raw New World, but it comported better with the realities of hardworking frontier life. It also fit well with the institution of private landownership, so important in the colonists' lives. Adam and Eve might have frolicked and gamboled, feeding on grapes at their leisure, but colonists had to work hard for their bread. And they didn't want to work without knowing they could reliably harvest what they planted. They wanted, that is, their own private property. Back in England, land had been hard to get. In the New World, land was plentiful, and few colonists were content to go without. By the time of the Revolution, colonial culture had changed markedly, and the economy had changed along with it. Individualism had become much stronger, and nature was increasingly viewed as a collection of natural resources rather than a mysterious, organic whole. In the economic realm, more and more farming was done to produce surplus crops or livestock for the market rather than food for home consumption. A true market economy was rapidly developing. To Americans wrapped up in this change, John Locke's writings made a good deal of sense. Locke celebrated the common individual, arguing that he possessed natural rights that existed independently of the state and that trumped even the powers of the king. Preeminent among those rights was the right to own property. As Locke interpreted the Bible, God originally gave Earth to humankind as collective property, yet any individual could seize a piece of land from the common stock and make it his own simply by mixing labor with it. Before labor was added, the land had no value. Once labor was applied, however, value arose and the tilled land became private property.

Locke's theory of property ownership made particularly good sense in North America, more so than in England. Frontier colonists could readily agree that labor was essential to the creation of value. Moreover, because land was plentiful, one person's occupation of land didn't deny others the chance to gain land, too. By contrast, in England a person had to buy property or inherit it, and one person's occupation of land did limit another's chance to do the same.

Americans instinctively linked Locke's theory of property ownership to the second interpretation of the Garden of Eden story, the narrative of progress in which labor transformed the dangerous wilderness into a peaceful, pastoral garden. North America was the raw land described by Locke, waiting to be seized. By laboring on it, the colonists gained property rights at the same time that they transformed the land into the

new Eden. Private landownership, it turned out, was a highly effective engine of progress, providing just the incentive needed to induce the rebuilding of paradise.

Eventually, this progressive story of human labor taming the wilderness overshadowed the first interpretation of the Eden story, which valued more highly the untouched land. Thomas Jefferson kept alive this first narrative when he defended the beauty and perfection of North America to his doubtful European correspondents. And by the time Jefferson died, in 1826, the first tradition was enjoying renewed favor among romantic writers, who looked to nature for meaning and inspiration. But writers were an elite few, and it wasn't until the end of the nineteenth century that this interpretation regained much support. By then, the frontier era had ended and people were beginning to mourn the loss of wild places. Outdoor hiking and camping became the rage as people sought to regain contact with the dwindling wilds. The boy Scouts of America and Camp Fire organization (now the Camp Fire Boys and Girls) were founded. John Muir regaled readers with his adventures in the Sierra Nevada and Alaska and gained a rapt audience when he spoke of the inherent value of wildlands. In *The Call of the Wild*, Jack London captured the public imagination with his tale of a domestic dog that joined the wolves. Then there was the true blockbuster of the day, the captivating tale of an English infant reared in the jungle, *Tarzan of the Apes*.

By the late nineteenth century the altered American landscape itself had become more ambiguous in its messages, just like the Eden story in Genesis. Labor could indeed add value to the land and make it more productive, just as John Locke said it did. But land also had value without labor, and it was becoming clear that too much labor could be as bad as too little. When misapplied, labor could bring ruin to the land, scraping away trees, eroding soil, and polluting waters. To alter the wilderness was sometimes to bring not progress but decline.

As the countryside showed more scars of misuse, this declensional interpretation made greater sense to people, prompting calls for conservation, pollution control, and preservation of wildlife refuges and wilderness areas. Conservation measures became more numerous, placing limits on the expanding market economy that Locke's reasoning had helped propel. At the same time, ethical attitudes toward the land were shifting. To see inherent value in the land, as John Muir and others were doing, was to reaffirm that humans alone had not created all value. If the land had been a fruitful garden before people entered it, then people were merely tenders of that garden subject to divine instruction, and the private property rights they held were limited accordingly. This way of thinking represented a demotion in status for people, from conquerors and creators of value to something less than that, stewards of value that already existed, shepherds of animals and plants lent to humankind in trust.

From Bounded People, Boundless Lands by Eric T. Freyfogle. Copyright © 1998 Island Press. Reproduced by permission of Island Press, Washington, D.C.

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Appendix 2: Response Sets

- 1. What are your thoughts about land as a living community?**
- 2. Do you feel a connection to land?**
- 3. Do you feel a duty to or responsibility for land?**

1. What are your thoughts about land as a living community?

Land as a Living Community-Land Preservation Responses

There is always a feeling for me of the land being alive. Not just because of the wildlife, but in the spring there's a rebirth and in the fall it's dying off. The species come, the species go. . . . It's living, it's breathing. You watch trees being born, you watch trees die. (Conservation Commission member)

I'd like to encourage people to think about land as a living community. Not something to be used and left, but if we take something out we put it back. We replace it. If we take some soil out, we put something into the soil. We make it good stuff, like composting. We don't put chemicals in. We try and think about the creatures who are living there and the water that's under the land because all the stuff we put on is going to eventually run down into the water. (Property owner)

If we are truly the higher animal we better learn to live in balance with the foundation for life, namely soil, water, and air, or we will fall into Malthus and his hypothesis of over-population, destruction, death, and degradation to the point of irreversible. We have to be in partnership with the carrying capacity of the planet. . . . We have to be respectful and become less arrogant . . . in the sense that we are part of an interrelated, ongoing, dynamic process. We can't be outside of that, feeling we can manipulate it. (Nature preserve manager)

Land as a living community is just something to value because it's valuable. . . . It doesn't disturb me that mankind is taking a bigger part of the world than he did at whatever time you may name in the past, but it disturbs me that he has the power, and is certainly going in the direction of completely destroying it. You can't understand how pessimistic I am about the possibility of mankind surviving. I think it's miraculous that there's anything alive on Earth today. (Wetlands Commission member)

Land as a Living Community-Land Development Responses

Mycorrhizas, the fungi that helps tree roots assimilate nutrients, remember that? It's only been twenty years since that concept entered my being or my understanding. You start to look at the dirt that you're kicking up and you say,

what are you really kicking up here, because, as you know, I could put a plow under the ground and plow in the manure and create a garden that will be productive for them's that use it. Yet, it would be just as well to leave it if you could get your food from someplace else. (Retired vo-ag teacher)

Every time we do something outside, whether it's destroying habitat, whether it's creating erosion, whether it's just improper use of pieces of land, there is a reaction, because it is a living thing. . . . Everything has its specific purpose, whether it be a rock, whether it be a tree, whether it be something that's fallen on the ground. By disturbing it you disturb the chain which holds the entire community. . . . You remove a rock, somewhere down the line it's gonna have an impact, so it's very, very important to cherish each one of these little pieces. (Youth service bureau administrator)

Community is not a static thing. If you build a house, no matter what kind of job you do, you can have Frank Lloyd Wright lay it out, you have compromised some part of that biotic community. Whether the whole is better than it was depends on your perspective of where man sits in the overall scheme of things. . . . As we grow, as we develop, we're going to compromise some portion. What we need to make sure of is that we are not compromising the parts that are shared by others in the larger scheme. In other words we cannot develop either an individual lot or a development in such a way that it compromises a neighbor's well or the pristine stream that goes down between our homes. (Environmental consultant)

Land has a right to exist on its own in an unspoiled state and it's not about cost. It's a philosophical thing. All land doesn't have to be owned. It doesn't have to be property. Some land doesn't even have to be common property owned by all citizens of a country. It should be recognized as being apart, separate, alone, and not susceptible to the whims of a legislature or the special interests of the logging industry or anything like that. . . . I do as best I can to be a good steward and to recognize the land as a friend as opposed to a resource or part of my living. (Farmer)

Land as Property-Land Preservation Responses

It's absolutely accurate, and that ecosystem can be killed. We see it killed when asphalt goes down on parking lots. We see it killed when large surface areas are covered with houses and other buildings. . . . Land supports organisms in the soil, organisms above the soil, trees, animals, and so on. . . . I don't think there's any question that land supports so many different levels of living things, it is almost by definition living itself. Those ecosystems are affected whenever any

portion of them are significantly changed by building or farming or whatever we seem to do to it. (Land trust officer)

I think of land as almost like a host site. I don't see land as a community. I see it as the place on which communities live. I see land as inorganic, and then the community is the organic life that is in it, and on it, and through it. We have the capability of protecting the life that is in it, and on it, and through it. We also have the capability of destroying it, until all that's left is the inorganic part like the subsoil. (Land preserve director)

We are only one piece of life. . . . I've been aware that there is a constant life surrounding me on my own property and that the more people are aware of this, the less destructive they will be. Although, there are still people who can set fire to cats. Some people are not salvageable, I guess. I'm the kind of person pushing the spider out of the house so I don't have to step on it. (Planning Commission member)

The concept which I think has to be understood today is that land as a living community includes all the citizens of that land, everything from bugs and beetles to coyotes, deer, and everything else that makes our local ecological environment a community. . . . How do you broaden our concern and our understanding of the land to instinctively understand it as a community, so that when we attempt to affect the land by either building on it or crossing a stream, or cutting a woods, or mowing a hill, we have to be extremely conscious of exactly how we're affecting the community? That is not an instinctive issue in our world at the moment and I think that's where we have to go. (Architect)

Land as Property-Land Development Responses

We are not the only beings on Earth. They are all part of what is called resources. They are all part of our ecosystem. We need to protect that, no doubt about it. It doesn't mean you can't build homes, doesn't mean you can't build bridges, doesn't mean you can't build roads. Everything has gotta be done with a balance. . . . Can we protect the ecosystem, the ridges, and all the resources and yet have the capitalistic environment that we need for all of us to survive? Because, there are a lot of jobs created by what happens on the land, from farming all the way up to house building. (General contractor)

I have no problem with decisions that have been made regarding endangered habitats. I think the health of the land, the terrain, and the wetlands and watercourses, is certainly a valid aspect of land use. And it's been not as well

considered as it should be. . . . It's important for quality of life. . . . A key element of quality of life here is sufficient open space. You can make a pretty good argument that it's in current land owners' best interest to preserve as much as possible, because it maximizes the value of their existing properties. (Economic Development Commission member)

I don't see the land as anything but that. . . . When the European settlers came over and had an opportunity to own land . . . the land seemed to diminish in value as a result of their labors. The land had more value as the Indians treated it. We seem to be coming back that way and that's good. . . . We've been sensitive to protecting open space, acquiring common control of the land, and we share. (Zoning Commission member)

You need responsible use of it. People need to take care of themselves, and have a place to live, and have shelter. I don't want to go back to running around in the woods. . . . The Indians were here and they took care of the land and treated it as if they were part of it, but in the evolution of things, they were probably closer to emerging from the animal world than we are today. . . . You need the trees to filter the oxygen. If you do something to damage the trees, you have a problem. (Professional engineer)

It's a question of degree to me. . . . We can't be reckless on how we use our property. We can't use our property without regard to the guy next door or the guy downstream. Where we've come to that recognition, the living community—the fish, the birds, all that—to some degree have improved. . . . In the sense that we have prohibited each other from being reckless, you're also not only protecting the guy next door, you're also protecting the habitat for the wildlife. . . . The will to live and the ability to adapt seems to me to be so great, that, especially in this kind of environment where there is a lot of rain, a lot of water. It's not dry. The soils are pretty good. It doesn't take much for wildlife to survive. I think wildlife can survive right around us. (Attorney)

2. Do you feel a connection to land?

Land as a Living Community-Land Preservation Responses

I feel a big connection. . . . I love nature. It sustains me, it nurtures me. I used to have a school . . . and in the spring we took a stethoscope and put it on this sugar maple tree out in our yard . . . and you could hear the sap in our tree. . . . That really was powerful for me because it reminded me of how the trees are alive, they're beings. . . . I have a connection. I'm never happier than when I'm out weeding in my garden, or walking on the trail or down the road. (Property owner)

I feel it on a very personal level. I love being out identifying things, looking at things, understanding about things, thinking about their relationships, just seeing the beauty, looking at the colors of green, looking at plants opening and closing, watching little insects crawling along stems, and spider webs, and butterflies. (Wetlands Commission member)

I have a strong sense of place. I would like where I live to be a good place and not to be ruined by greed and ill thought out actions. . . . The land and everything associated with it is vital to human survival in the long run and the survival of all life. I'm a human so I would like the human race to make it and not wipe it all out. (Wetlands Commission member)

I'm lucky enough to live with many acres that are still undeveloped . . . I don't care what time of year I go out there. Winter, summer, spring, or fall, there is always a feeling for me of the land being alive. . . . If I had a hundred acres I'd be out there every summer cutting trees, just dropping them to let more air into the forest, and I'd be nurturing my forest so it would be a healthier forest. (Conservation Commission member)

Land as a Living Community-Land Development Responses

My childhood was basically outside. . . . I've always felt more comfortable in the woods than I did in town. I was able to have the experience of being around a tremendous amount of individuals who were very knowledgeable in woodlore – farmers, people who hunted. . . . I read constantly and pick up all kinds of information that way. (Youth service bureau administrator)

I know if I don't mow that field that interaction between the wooded land and the open land will cease to exist and the very animals that we've come to enjoy will not have that place. The bluebirds, for instance, come to my property because I have an open field, and the deer come down to my property because I have fruit trees. . . . I love it. I like working with soil. I like working with plants. (Retired vocational teacher)

We are a product of the land. . . . I think we're completely dependent on a symbiotic relationship with the land. There's no way we can survive exclusive of it. And I think that we are all supposed to be stewards, in our own capacities, of the natural world. . . . I just happen to be a happier person when I'm working it so I have a selfish motive as to why I like to work the land. It just makes me a more complete person. (Farmer)

When I think of a physical connection to the land I'm thinking of the farmers and I guess there was a farm here at one point in time that no longer exists, or some of this area was farmed. I don't have that physical connection. I have a residence and I roll down the driveway and go to work at another location. I feel a responsibility for the land but not a connection to it. (Environmental Consultant)

Land as Property-Land Preservation Responses

I can recall sitting on a log watching a beaver on top of a dam. I once read in a little mammal book about a star nosed mole. I thought I would never see one of those in my life because they are pretty rare and they don't like human beings. I saw a motion down by my foot. There was a little hole where my foot was and out popped this star nosed mole. It was a wonderful experience watching a beaver stripping a fern leaf for a snack, and then having this other creature come out. Unfortunately, I don't do that very often, but when you have an experience like that you get to have a sense of how all these things are interdependent. . . . I feel really fortunate that is available. That's part of the land we put in easement and hopefully someday will donate to the land trust. (Land trust officer)

When I was a little kid we lived in a house that was surrounded on two sides by woods. . . . We played there all the time and it had sort of a connection to my image of nature and home. . . . When we were kids one of the things my mother would do, sometimes weekly, was bring us up to . . . a farm. . . . It was just like heaven. It was the best place to be. . . . Through her taking us there I think I developed this real love of the livestock and the farmland and the open fields and walking in it, the quiet of it. . . . When I was in high school I worked on a farm. . . .

I loved being there being in community with the people who were doing that kind of work. (Land preserve director)

We had an absolutely enormous, enormous ash tree and like many ashes it became diseased. But it just seemed so integral to the property it was heartbreaking. I couldn't be home when they actually took it down. It really was very upsetting to me. I never thought I could have cared that much about a tree. . . . We tried planting a little tree and it was just so pathetic We went out and bought a dozen birches and essentially planted a grove and at least that helped fill in the space. . . . So I've seen the cycle and it's just a different awareness. It's a respect for it. (Planning Commission member)

I can get up in the morning, look out my window at the river that goes by, and essentially rekindle my connection with the land every time I wake up, which I enjoy, which is very important to me. To me there's no question that the land is an essential part of my makeup and that my understanding and respect for it grows daily. I've become more and more sensitive to the dangers and the potential for the dismembering of the land around me. (Architect)

Land as Property-Land Development Responses

I like the trees and I like the open space and I like the brooks and I like the land I build on. I own a lot of it. It has value to me in a lot of senses. Do I like my privacy? Do I like to have land around me? Absolutely. I mean I see it as a different value. Then I build it, too. I'm from the school of thought that you don't obtain it by not buying it. I see it more than just the economic sense. . . . I have a beautiful waterfall behind my home. Gorgeous, probably a fifty-foot cascade. It's really pretty. Stuff like that should be protected. . . . I have a connection to land other than building. Of course, we all do. Because I'm a builder people see me as the big bad wolf of the north, but it's not the case. (General contractor)

I always wanted to be a farmer. It couldn't work. I didn't have enough capital. . . . I don't like cities. As I become older I guess I'm becoming more enamored of towns, but I really like the rural areas and open areas. . . . I go to cities, but I don't like cities. Too crowded, too developed. I don't like concrete. (Attorney)

I feel very strongly there's too many people who don't know where their food comes from, and have no idea about that stuff. I mean, drive around and see what's thrown out the windows and what effect it has on wildlife or animals, besides the eyesore. . . . I think there's not a whole lot of appreciation being taught about the environment. (Professional engineer)

I think there are certainly spots I love to go to . . . that have meaning to me in one way or another. And that's a connection, an emotional connection. . . . I've been observing my children. We go to Maine every summer for a week. My mother owns a house there on the water, on a harbor. . . . They think it's valuable time. They do a lot of things they don't ordinarily do. There's no television, they walk on the beach, they go swimming, they go for walks, they go build fairy houses in the woods. I did all those things. I'm seeing it again through their eyes.
(Economic Development Commission member)

I don't know how to answer that. How do I feel connected? Other than it's a part of my life entirely. I mean everything, except for my vocation. Land, in one way or another, consumes the rest of my life. (Zoning Commission member)

3. Do you feel a duty to or responsibility for land?

Land as a Living Community-Land Preservation Responses

I often wonder why I have such a strong feeling of responsibility. . . . I feel a responsibility to do whatever I can, to use whatever assets I have to work for a better world. . . . On the Wetlands Commission using my eye and my knowledge to look at things and say, look, this could be done better. Sticking with it, getting out there, seeing the properties, and not being afraid to say what I think. Not being afraid to confront a developer and make suggestions. (Wetlands Commission member)

Sometimes I feel a stronger sense of duty or responsibility than the person who actually owns it. So you go to that person and you talk to them, and you try to say, maybe, have you considered getting this piece into Weantinoge hands. (Conservation Commission member)

You have to take better care of the land, be considerate, not manipulate it, but really try to protect it, value it, integrate those values into the educational experience, and try to make sure it's not used inappropriately, or in a way that could be destructive or detrimental. (Nature preserve manager)

Put good stuff into the soil. Keep it as natural as possible so that the animals will be here with us. Plant, as much as possible, plants that are natural to the area. . . . Around the property we leave the wild raspberries to grow because the birds like them and the animals like them. So, where they don't encroach on our own garden we leave them where we can see them. And we leave some dead trees because the woodpeckers love them and we love the woodpeckers. I think we have a compromise. Our yard isn't entirely wild, but it's wild around the edges, and we still have some yard that we have control over. (Property owner)

Land as a Living Community-Land Development Responses

I think that I should do my best to protect the land. Certain parts of it are enough to motivate you. For instance, I talked about all the things I do on my farm to be a good steward. But, do you realize that if that was sold to a factory they would be able to strip the topsoil that I worked so arduously to keep alive, and sell it, and move it, and do whatever they want to it? (Farmer)

Everybody has an incredible responsibility because it is a living thing. Our actions need to be scrutinized. . . . Not just whether it's encroaching on a wetland, but what does that impact have to the greater community? What are we taking away? Is it really worth ripping out the old growth forest for five more homes? . . . Another area that people drove by and went . . . those trees are absolutely gorgeous. It makes people feel good. It has a very silent contribution that it gives to the community. . . . Obviously, everything that we do we use the land. We grow vegetables in the land but always look for a type of impact that can be undone in the matter of a decade. So that the land is never pigeonholed into one use. Once you mine and take something out you've changed it forever. When you cut all the trees down and you put houses up you've changed it for a hundred years. We want our impact to be minimal. (Youth service bureau administrator)

We have the responsibility of dealing with the land that we own because we are only there for a short time. If people aren't trained to treat land properly then it will not be there for the next person. . . . We try to keep it the way it is, but it's hard to do that, because the way it is is always changing. If the economy changes people move away. If the economy changes house values go down or go up. If the economy changes open land turns into housing developments or runs livestock. . . . The amount of control I have is very very small. . . . You've got to really work hard to keep what you have, but what you have is going to change in spite of you. (Retired vo-ag teacher)

As we get smarter, we see the impacts of some things, some of which were always bad, some of which became bad because of the increasing population. It was always bad to pour oil down the catch basin . . . hoping for the next rainstorm. That was never a good idea, although we have learned that the river can't clean itself up anymore. We have laws, very properly, on disposal of hazardous waste. Where I have a little bit of a problem with the law is whoever has a deep pocket has to clean it up, whether or not they caused the problem. (Environmental consultant)

Land as Property-Land Preservation Responses

Since land is a resource unlike a lot of resources that are recoverable and reproduceable, land is not a resource that you can easily recover. The use of the land other than a . . . preserve needs to be . . . aggressively managed with extreme care in order to preserve as much of its natural community as possible. . . . Just applying the rules as they are stated in the regulations is not the issue. The issue is to . . . ask questions way beyond the simple regulations in order to

elicit the kind of answers that will determine whether or not you've got a responsible developer. (Architect)

I see a responsibility in terms of a steward, not as a master, but as a steward, and an accountability to people in the future. (Land preserve director)

I do feel a responsibility, that's who I am. I do things. I say I have the obligation to keep doing it. Many people have been involved with the pipeline, or some development in their neighborhood, or Sempra, or whatever. A certain number of them . . . five percent or whatever, actually become involved in the bigger issue. You see them again, or they turn up for something that applies to the whole town. The rest kind of drift off. We've gotta find a way to convert more of those people, once they are exposed to something, to care about it in other places besides right next to them. (Planning Commission member)

I feel a sense of duty and I think everyone else should. That their relationship to the land is a relationship of stewardship. Whether they own it or not is not the issue. If they own land they have a responsibility to use it reasonably and we owe to society living in a reasonable way. . . . I think that we have a responsibility to provide good stewardship for the land and that may not be a hundred acres, it may not be fifty acres, even if it's a couple of acres. I think we should try to do what we can not to spoil it, not to have an adverse impact on other land around it . . . and to consider how it's going to be passed on to future generations as well. (Land trust officer)

Land as Property-Land Development Responses

I certainly wouldn't want to contaminate the land, contaminate water. By the same token, I think there's a lot of options to use the land and the water without that. I don't have a feeling that land should be so intensely developed that it's ruined. . . . I grew up in Stamford and there was land there that I thought would never be developed. You would think it was so rocky it would be impossible to get a septic system in there. [...] It's been generally developed for single family homes. . . . It really doesn't look bad at all. The river still looks clean. To enhance the developments they've put in some ponds. . . . It's a question of values. Would it have been better left open, or left undeveloped? You know, some of it was pretty crappy land to begin with. (Attorney)

When I use land in the economic sense that might freak people out. You know, if I've got a bulldozer up there people just don't understand it, don't like it. It's change. You treat land a little differently today than you did years ago. It's a

commodity that's not getting replaced. It's a commodity that's getting scarce. You see its value, in a monetary sense, by not devastating it, because you know the client you're going to sell it to sees that value. So you lay in more capital. It all equates economics. . . . I can't build a house with a tree going through the center, but I'm a little more sensitive to that today than I was years ago. (General contractor)

It's true they are not making any more, and while land can recover, as shown in the state with . . . wildlife and whales coming back in. . . . It's not going to recover when you have things that pollute the land. You know the cleanup they are going to try to do on Scovill. They are going to clean it up, but it's never going to be there. It's going to be hundreds and hundreds of years before nature can reverse it. . . . We need to make sure it doesn't continue. (Professional engineer)

I certainly would not be in favor of bringing industry into New Milford that would despoil what we have in land. But it's a hard question, to deal with industries that might continue gravel mining or something in an existing spot. . . . There are a lot of compromises that are inherent in a lot of things we do in this town. Clearly there are spots in this town that are fairly ugly. . . . Can you make it better? In my opinion, probably not. So you accept what you have and use it to maximize tax revenues . . . and you devote some of the revenues to preserving spots that are still undeveloped. (Economic Development Commission member)

I have to think of the interests of what's best for everybody. If I own a tract of land that probably shouldn't have houses on it, too bad. If I can't develop it, and I don't want to pay taxes on it any more, maybe I should give it to a trust. We're all just stewards of our property. . . . If a developer has to give up potential profit on a piece of land because it's not appropriate for housing, he has that responsibility to the living community as well as to the people in the community. (Zoning Commission member)