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**Bron Taylor**  
**President, International Society for the Study  
of Religion, Nature, and Culture**  
**Editor, *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature & Culture*  
and the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature***

The University of Florida  
[www.religionandnature.com/bron](http://www.religionandnature.com/bron)

# Thinking like a Watershed: Spirituality, Ethics & Watershed Organizing



**Bron Taylor**

The University of Florida

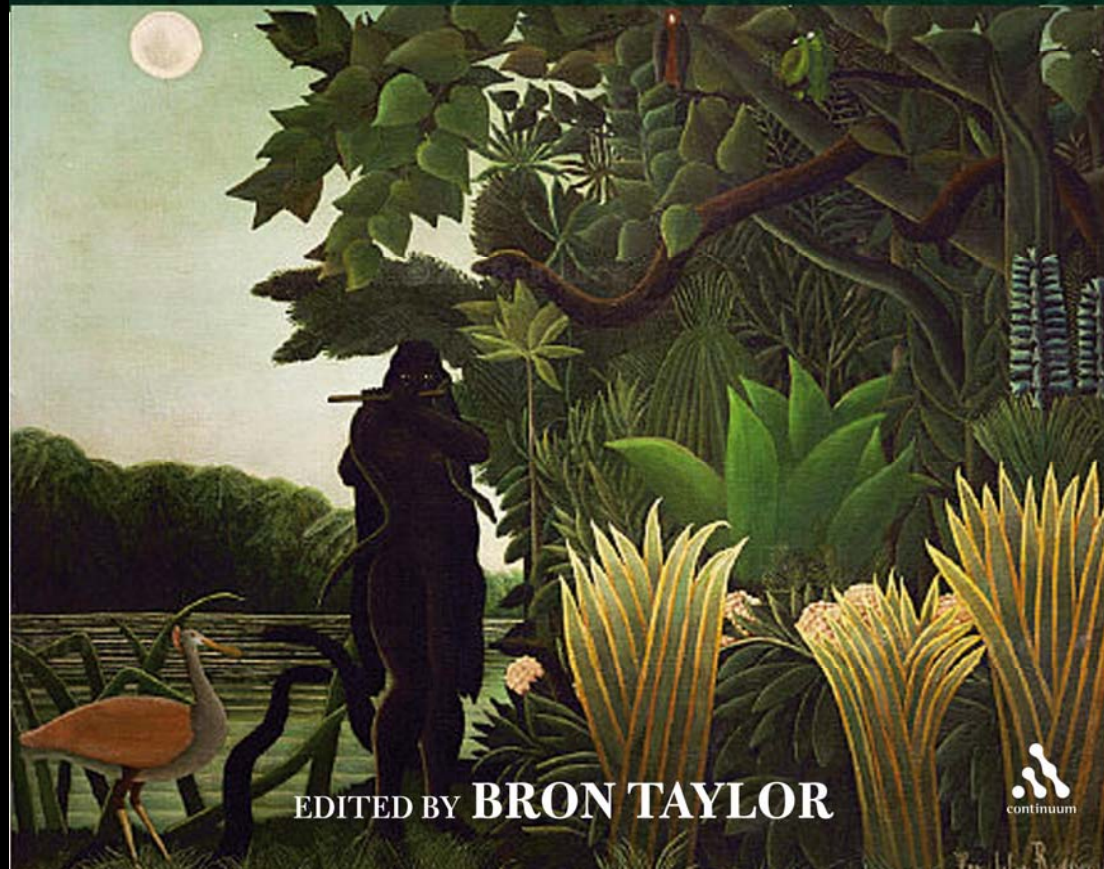
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Three, interrelated trends related also to watershed movements

1) Religious environmentalism or “green religion” ~ environmental action as a religious duty



ENCYCLOPEDIA OF  
**RELIGION**  
AND  
**NATURE**



EDITED BY **BRON TAYLOR**



## Three trends related also to watershed movements

- 1) Religious environmentalism or “green religion” ~ environmental action as a religious duty to god(s)
- 2) Dark green religion: nature is sacred, intrinsically valuable, and worthy of reverent care



## Charles Darwin

“If we choose to let conjecture run wild, then animals, our fellow brethren in pain, diseases, death, suffering and famine [all] partake [of] our origin in one common ancestor – we may be all netted together.”



## Charles Darwin

“There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.”



## **Aldo Leopold on religion & environmental ethics**

No important change in human conduct is ever accomplished without an internal change in our intellectual emphases, our loyalties, our affections, and our convictions. The proof that conservation has not yet touched these foundations of conduct lies in the fact that philosophy, ethics, and religion have not yet heard of it

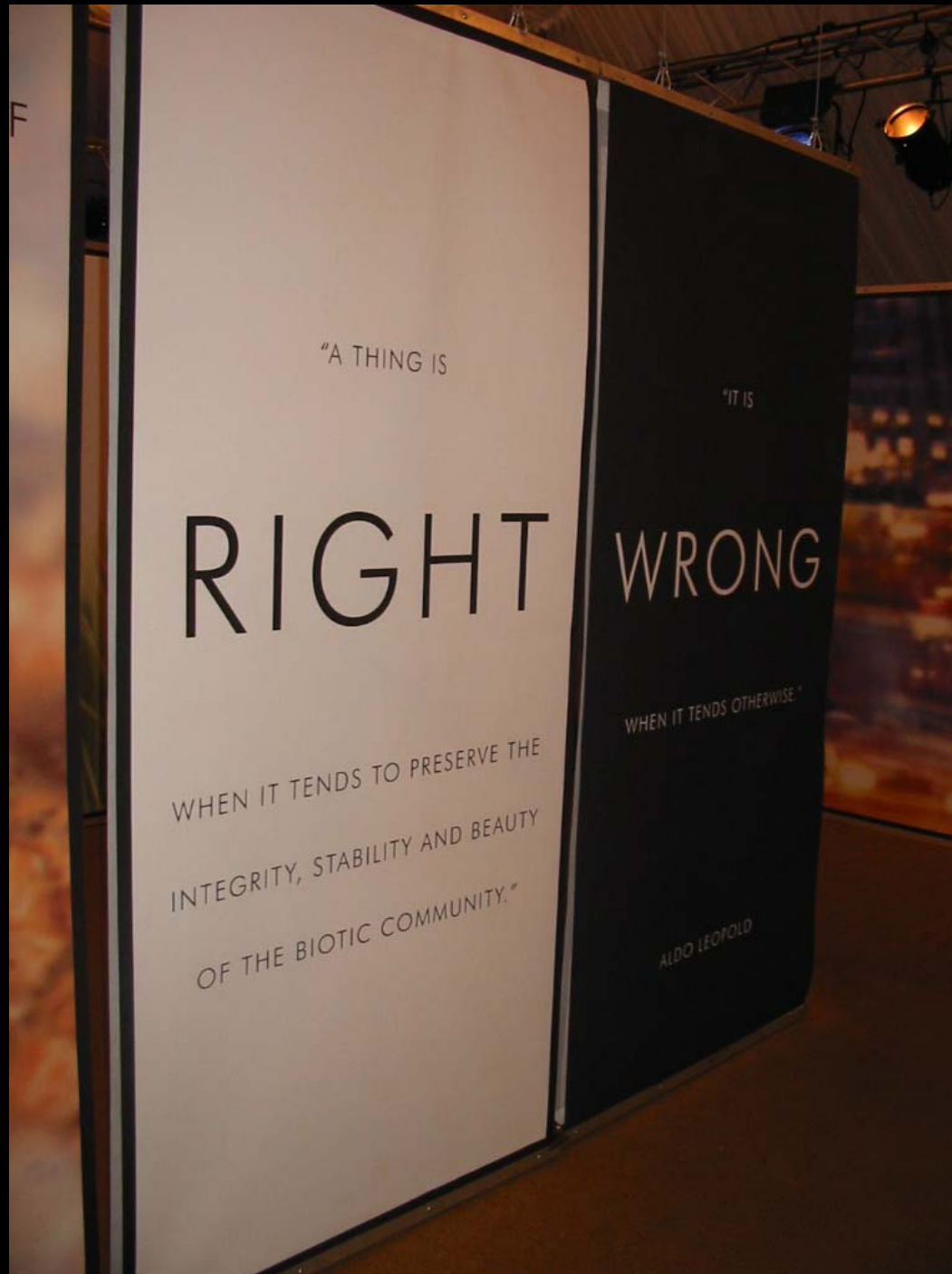




## Aldo Leopold's watershed *Land Ethic*, 1949

"All ethics rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts."

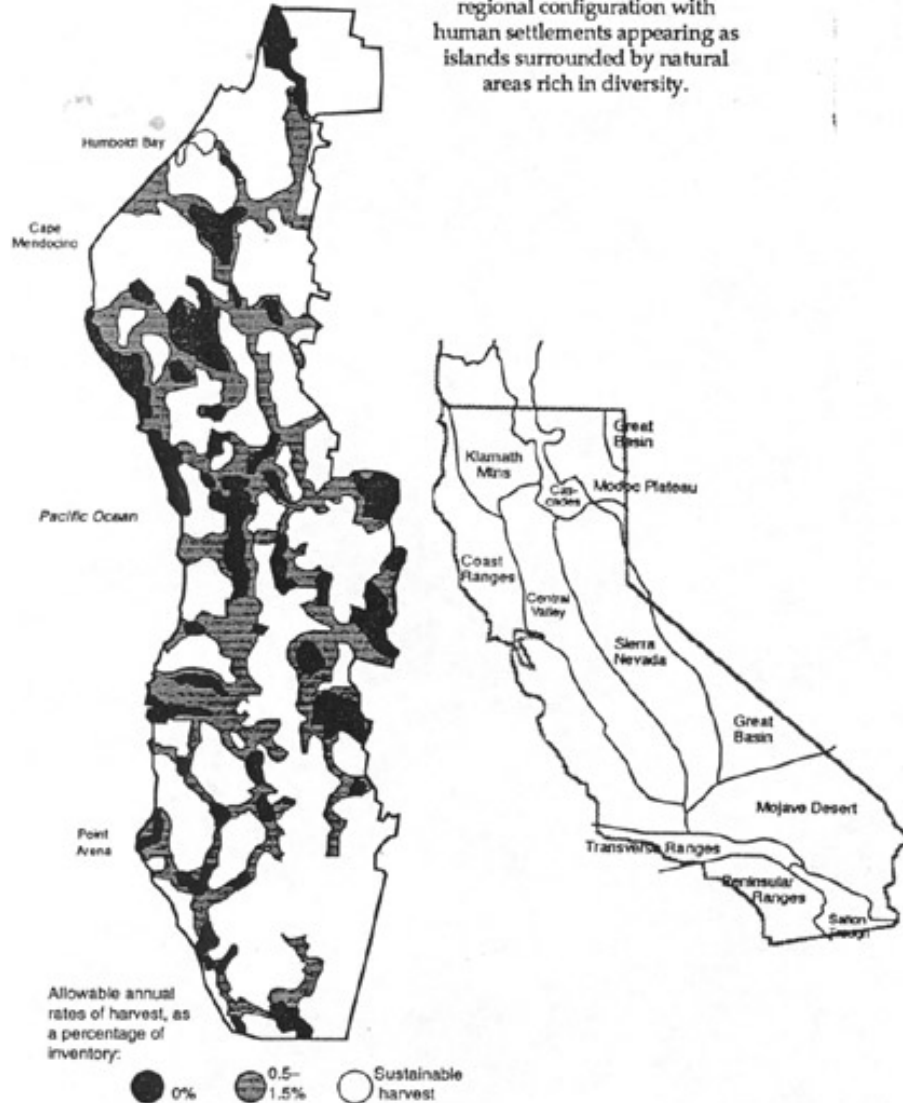
The Land ethic "enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land"



A thing is right  
when it tends to  
preserve the  
integrity, stability,  
and beauty of the  
biotic community

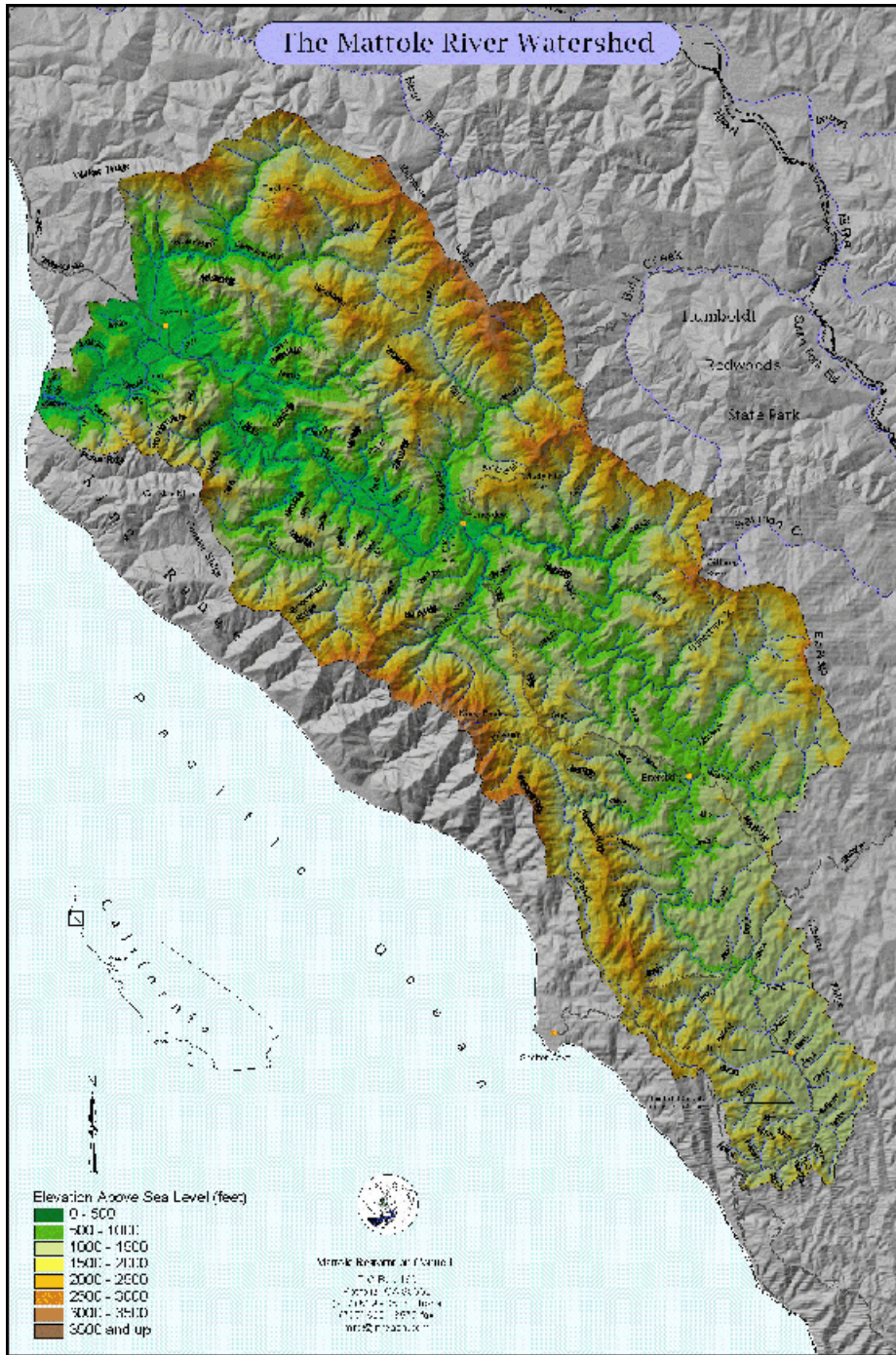
**Aldo Leopold's Land  
Ethics, present in the  
exhibition,  
Voyage to Antarctica,  
at the World Summit  
on Sustainable  
Development,  
Johannesburg (2002)**

An Ecological Reserve System for the North Coastal Basin – the work of Map Rap. As the present industrial context evolves into a wild one, core territories and corridors would fill out until surveyor's lines gave way to a regional configuration with human settlements appearing as islands surrounded by natural areas rich in diversity.



The Mattole watershed, south of Humboldt bay, in the Coast Range of Northern California







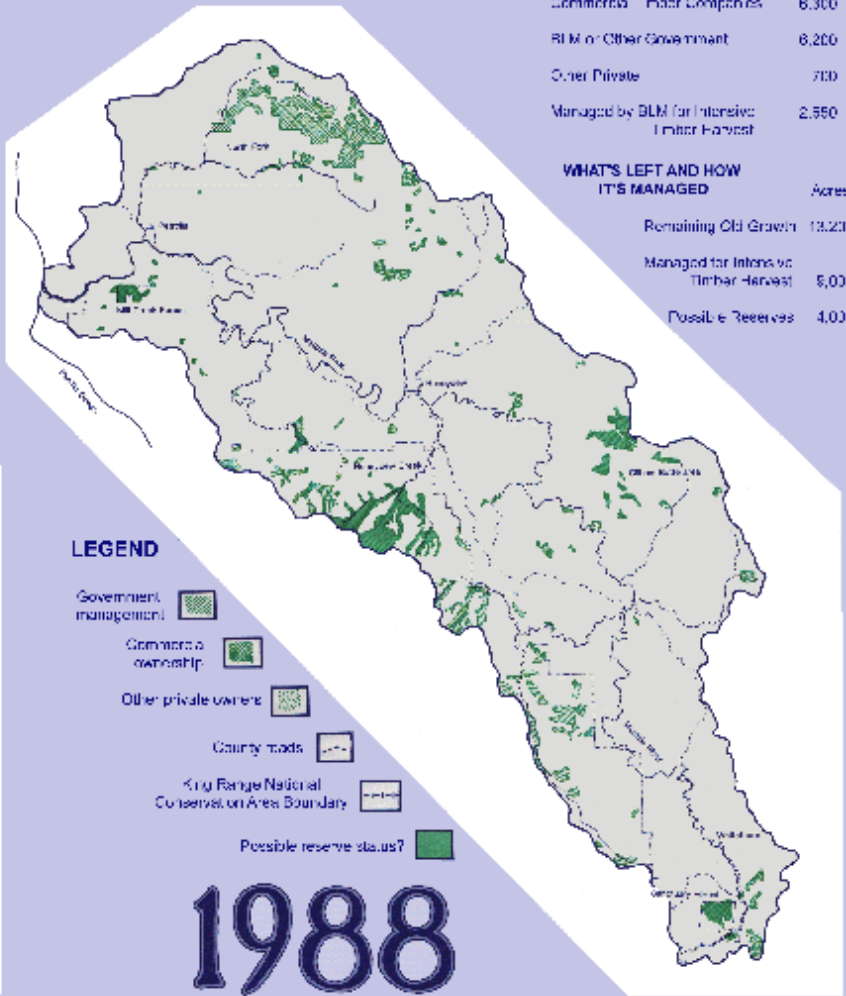




# Distribution of Old Growth Coniferous Forests in the Mattole River Watershed

1988 DISTRIBUTION BY OWNERSHIP	Acres	% of 1988 Forests
Commercial Lumber Companies	6,300	46
BLM or Other Government	6,200	47
Other Private	700	6
Managed by BLM for Intensive Timber Harvest	2,550	20

WHAT'S LEFT AND HOW IT'S MANAGED	Acres	% of 1947 Forests
Remaining Old Growth	13,200	6
Managed for Intensive Timber Harvest	5,000	7
Possible Reserves	4,000	3



- LEGEND**
- Government management: [Green hatched box]
  - Commercial ownership: [Green solid box]
  - Other private owners: [Green dotted box]
  - County roads: [Dashed line]
  - King Range National Conservation Area Boundary: [Dotted line]
  - Possible reserve status?: [Green solid box]



“Totem Salmon”  
in a mandala  
inspired by  
religions of the  
far east, and  
drawing on the  
Native American  
image of North  
America as “Turtle  
Island”

*Tee-shirt design for NABC III held in the Mish bioregion, by Alison Lang.*



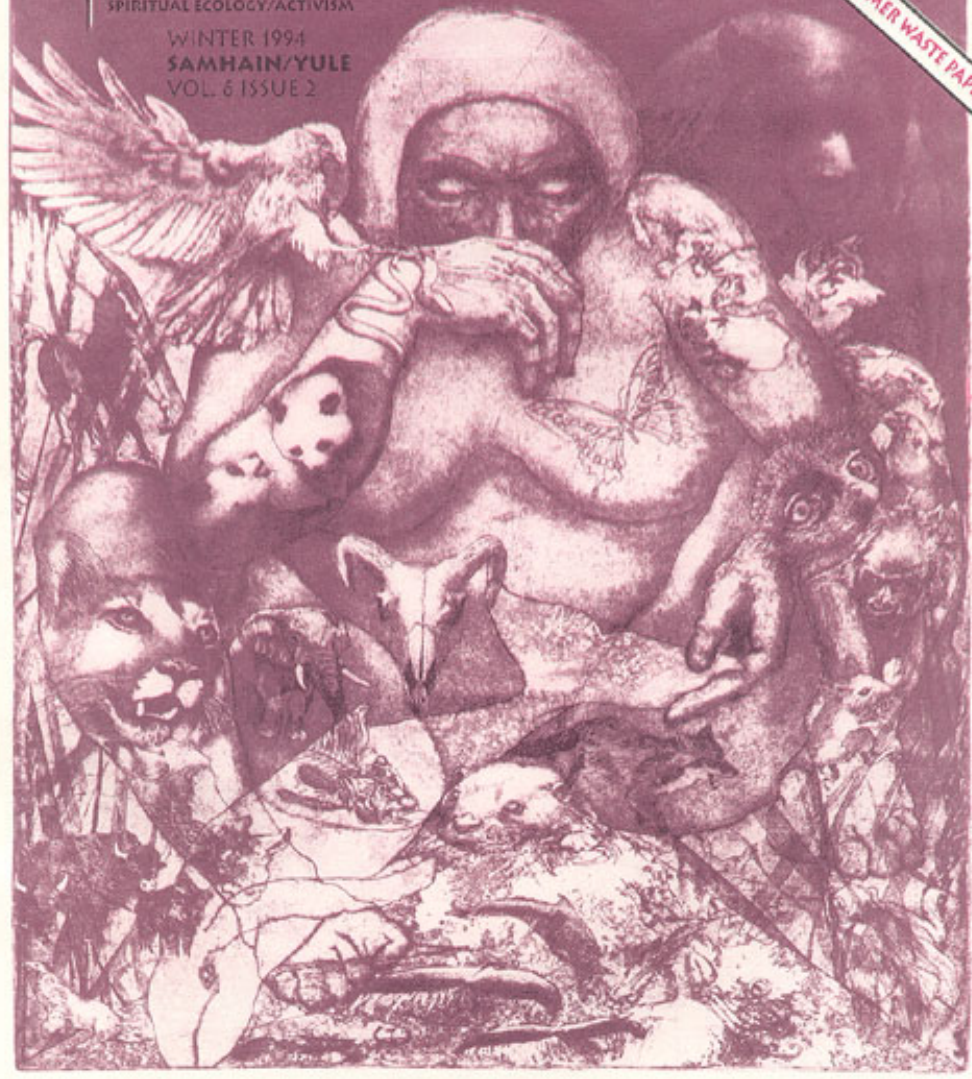
# Talking Leaves

A GLOBAL JOURNAL OF  
SPIRITUAL ECOLOGY/ACTIVISM

WINTER 1994  
SAMHAIN/YULE  
VOL. 6 ISSUE 2

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**ENDANGERED ANIMAL TEACHERS**

# Queen Salmon



Sept. 13 -  
Oct. 30



A Biologically Explicit Musical Comedy  
for People of Several Species

Tour Schedule

# Three, related trends

- 1) Religious environmentalism or “green religion” ~ environmental action as a religious duty to god(s)
- 2) Dark green religion: nature is sacred, intrinsically valuable, and worthy of reverent care

## 3) Planetary, Civic Earth Religion arising



# The Earth Charter



[www.earthcharter.org](http://www.earthcharter.org)

...urges “respect and care for the community of life in all of its diversity” and claims that protecting the earth is a “sacred trust,” inseparable from the quest for justice and peace.

... concludes, “let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life.”



**The Earth Charter ~ inscribed on Papyrus in the 'Ark of Hope', and filled with plaintive letters from children**



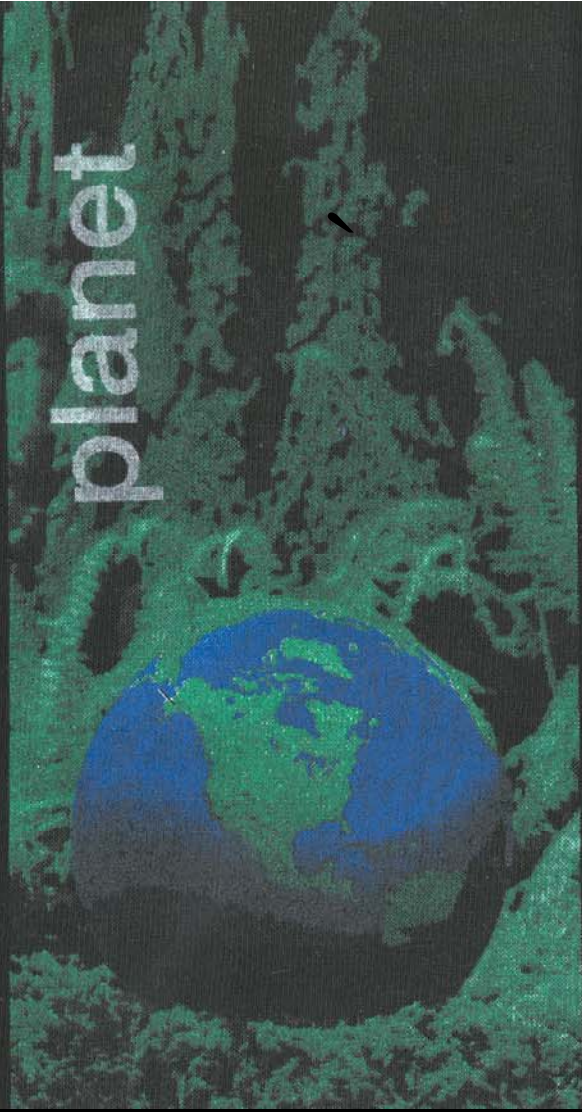




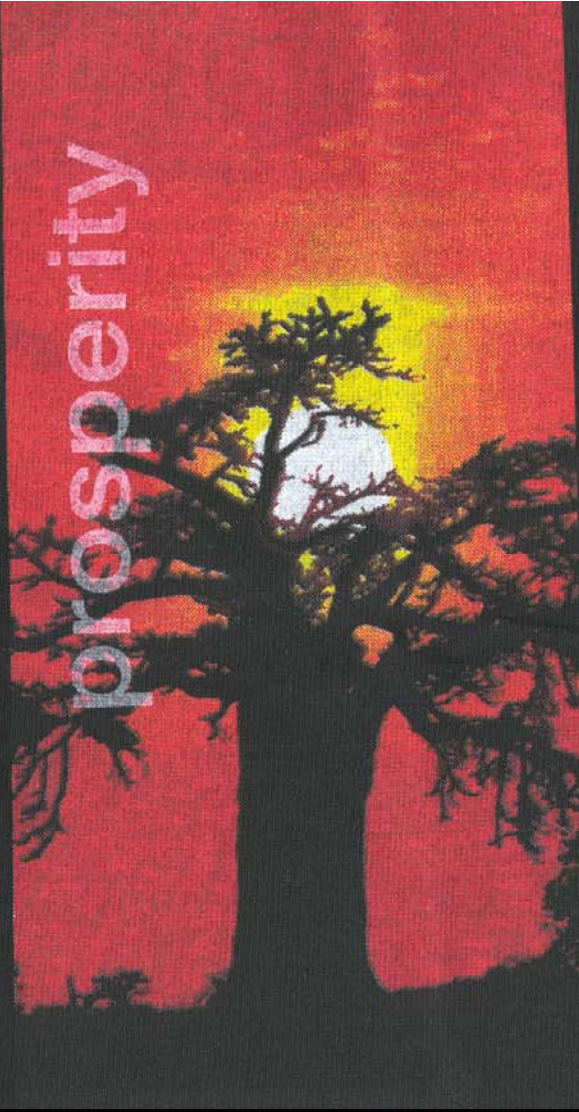
people



planet



prosperity





Africa is the Cradle of Humanity. . . and

. . . in the beginning, there was the wind!





“The Baobab Tree, the tree of tree of wonder, prosperity, firmly rooted and majestic, tales and fortunes of greatness, ancient secrets, past, present, and future . . .”



Animals join the chorus of life at the waterhole . . .

. . . symbolizing a time of Eden-like harmony



Animals join the chorus of life at the waterhole . . .

. . . symbolizing a time of Eden-like harmony



**There is hope, because the leaders of the world are gathering . . .  
the life and health of Mother Earth depends on their decisions**





**The Apocalyptic State of the Earth**



We are children of Mother Earth, who cares for us. . . . but through greed and foolishness we are failing to love and care for Mother Earth



**Child: “Is there anything we can do mommy?” Is there any hope?**

**Mother: “Yes. . . for as I speak, the leaders of the world are gathering . . .  
the life and health of Mother Earth depends their decisions”**



**Children, who are the future, gather in solidarity with the Earth**





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FRIDAY, AUGUST 30, 2002

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# Let's Be Grateful to Mother Earth



### Tsuru no Ongaeshi (The Grateful Crane)

Every day we are surrounded by things that we take for granted. We are grateful to Mother Earth for the things that we have. We are grateful to Mother Earth for the things that we have. We are grateful to Mother Earth for the things that we have.

Ongaeshi: gratitude.

Japan has always depended on Mother Earth to power its industries and homes. So we have been working hard to develop energy technologies that will help the world preserve its limited resources and protect the environment.

Nuclear and renewable energy sources can help us meet the challenge of sustainable development, and solve the problem of global warming.

The Japanese electric power industry has ongaeshi.

fepec

The Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan

Hokkaido Tokai Chubu Kanto Kinki Chugoku Shikoku Kyushu Okinawa Electric Power Development Japan Atomic Power

From Japanese companies  
promoting nuclear power,  
at the WSSD





# Findings/summary: increase of

- 1) “metaphysics of interconnection,” which consider not only individuals but the well being of ecosystems and society
- (2) kinship ethics viewing all life forms as related through participation in the same odyssey of evolution
- (3) Spiritualities of Connection & Belonging
- (4) convictions that the pursuit of environmental sustainability is a religious duty





Earthen spirituality and kinship ethics represented in the massive “tree of life,” where animal bodies are embedded in trees’ trunk and leaves: at Disney’s Animal Kingdom



*Climb the mountains and get their good tidings.—JOHN MUIR Wilderness begins in the human mind.—EDWARD ABBEY*

This is not about getting back to nature.  
It is about understanding we've never left.

*We are deep in our nature every day. We're up to our ears in it. It's under our feet, it is in our lungs, it runs through our veins. We are not visitors here. We weren't set down to enjoy the view. We were born here and we're part of it—like any ant, fish, rock, or blade of grass.*

*This connection is as personal as it is fundamental. It can't be proved with theorems and diagrams. You either feel it or you don't.*

Sierra Club members feel it.

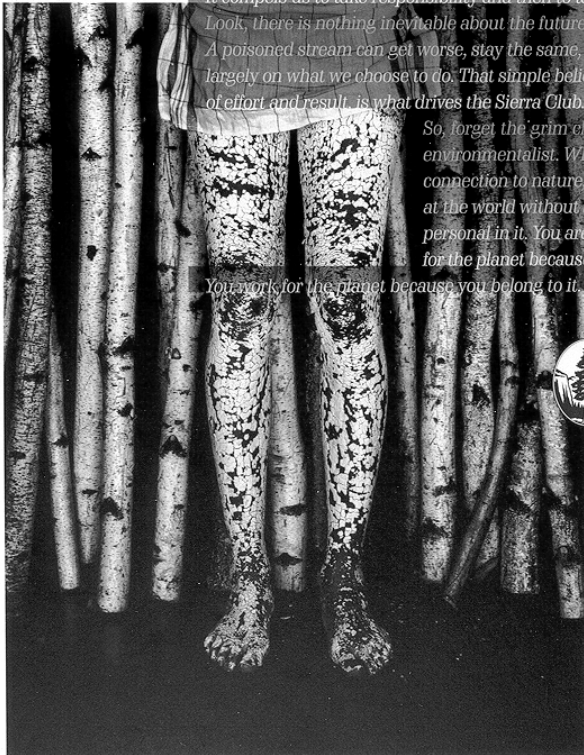
*Maybe it came to you on a mountain trail, or on a riverbank, or at a windowsill watching a spider's unthinking intelligence unfold. Simply put, it's the sudden conviction that there is something out there, something wonderful. And it is much, much bigger than you.*

*A revelation like this could easily overwhelm a person. We choose to let it inspire us. Nature, vastly complex and infinitely subtle, is our perfect metaphor. Related to everything, signifying everything, it is the spring where we go to renew our spirit. And it, in turn, asks something of us. It compels us to take responsibility and then to take action.*

*Look, there is nothing inevitable about the future of our environment. A poisoned stream can get worse, stay the same, or get better. It depends largely on what we choose to do. That simple belief, backed by 100 years of effort and result, is what drives the Sierra Club.*

*So, forget the grim cliché of the selfless environmentalist. When you accept your connection to nature, suddenly you can't look at the world without seeing something very personal in it. You are part of it, and you work for the planet because it gives you joy to do so.*

*You work for the planet because you belong to it.*



SIERRA  
CLUB  
FOUNDED 1892

[www.sierraclub.org](http://www.sierraclub.org)

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*Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. —JOHN MUIR Wilderness begins in the human mind —EDWARD ABNEY*

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When you accept your  
connection to nature,

You work for the planet because you belong to it.

Or to summarize the connection between  
science & spirituality:

The Earth and its life processes are sacred  
– we belong to them and they to us – we  
must protect and treat them with love.





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Ferni Julien Boudreau  
1907





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