

ARKANSAS OZARK HEADWATERS GROUP

Can the mental health field encourage conservation?

“... human beings evolved in natural settings, not urban or fabricated environments and, therefore, have an innate longing, love and need for natural spaces.”

by Joanna Pollock
Ex-Comm Member

As we endeavor to protect wild places through our work at the Sierra Club, let us also consider what those natural spaces mean to our own well-being. Some of us may have heard the term “Nature Deficit Disorder,” and of the book “Last Child in the Woods,” by Richard Louv, but you may not realize that this issue is becoming an intense area of research in the field of mental health. Psychological scales measuring nuisances of



Provided by Arkansas Game and Fish Commission

the varying ways and degrees that human beings do and do not relate to the natural world continue to be developed. All of this study has evolved from the theory of Eco-psychology, which asserts that human beings evolved in natural settings, not urban or fabricated environments and, therefore, have an innate longing, love and need for natural spaces. Nevertheless, many questions arise from this premise since we see diverse levels of this “biophilia” in human beings. What factors, learned or innate,

influence the degree to which human beings love and want to protect the natural world?

Hopefully, you can now see how the study of Eco-psychology relates to the mission of the Sierra Club. Part of the mission of the Sierra Club is to “explore, enjoy and protect the wild places of the earth; to practice and promote the responsible use of the Earth’s ecosystems and resources; to educate

and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment...” Making an assumption that most Sierra Club members have a deep concern for the well-being of human beings and may accept a principle of interconnectedness and interdependence between human beings and the eco-systems of our planet, I want to invite you to consider that the studies of Eco-Psychology and Eco-therapy may be of some interest to your consideration as conservationists.

Eco-therapy is applied Eco-Psychology and entails mental health professionals ad-

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OHG Update:

Watch your mailboxes! Ballots have gone out for the Arkansas Chapter and OHG ExComm. Take the time to vote on who will be the next leadership members in your state and local Sierra Club!



vising their clients, who may be experiencing depression and/or anxiety, to involve themselves in endeavors in natural spaces. Eco-therapeutic practices could be starting a garden, walking in park daily, going on a camping trip or volunteering at your local botanical garden. Therapists engaging in eco-therapeutic techniques could also conduct therapy sessions in natural environments, such as, walking in a park with a client (with attention to confidentiality) or simply having plants in their office and having a recording of natural sounds playing during the session.

One unexpected finding of Eco-therapists is that when they employ these techniques with their clients, not only do their clients benefit emotionally and psychologically, but they sometimes become neo-conservationists! In other words, when people realize how much they truly love the natural world and how beneficial it is to them personally, they start, sometimes for the first time, to want to protect this natural world. This is a principle that outdoor enthusiasts have touted for sometime having seen this play out in the lives of those they have exposed to nature through guided hikes and camping excursions.

The fact remains that not everyone, regardless of exposure, has the same deep sense of duty to protect natural spaces for future generations. Therefore, psychologists and counselors are researching the etiologies of these differences as being possi-

bly rooted in such constructs as personality, gender, culture, attitude and world view. For instance, some people believe that the natural world is too strong for human beings to damage in any appreciable way, and their world view may not permit them to believe that anything human beings do to the natural world could possibly be a threat to human beings themselves. Such attitudes and beliefs may very well prevent some people from having any anxiety or subsequent behavioral change relative to such issues as climate change or potentially toxic natural gas extraction processes.

There are several psychological scales exploring aspects of the origins of these attitudes, beliefs and behaviors, or lack of behaviors. One such scale that is fairly comprehensive is the "Nature Relatedness Scale," developed by Nisbet, Zelenski and Murphy of Carleton University. This scale explores the cognitive, affective (emotional) and physical relationship individuals have with the natural world. Recent studies using this scale have found strong correlations between the time people spend outdoors, nature relatedness and environmentally responsible behaviors.

There also appears to be a factor of personality involved, which denotes innate tendencies that some may have and others do not. For instance, individuals who are naturally more open to novel experiences and concepts, those who tend to be conscientious and those that tend to be more agreeable have higher correlations with nature relatedness. That said, there is also evidence that spending time outdoors

in natural settings can lead to a learned appreciation of nature and increasing scores in nature relatedness. Although more research is needed in this area because some appear to enjoy the perceived challenge of natural settings and do not necessarily develop a sense that the natural world has intrinsic value.

This author contends that some people have innate tendencies to value and want to protect the natural world; however, their culture may not encourage this tendency. They may not have many occasions to enhance their innate nature relatedness and this is something Sierra Club can do something about! In this time of environmental and economic crisis, anxiety incidence increases and getting outside on some good old-fashioned Sierra Club style excursions is plain "good medicine," individually and socially.

By all means, let's do our part as an organization to ensure that those with an innate love of the natural world have an opportunity to express this trait in 2012! This way, as the studies have shown, we can have more people working together in the preservation of our beautiful, physically and mentally beneficial natural world!

I do not believe I am going too far out on a limb (although I have been known to climb a tree) to state that John Muir would agree that by preserving natural spaces, we make integral strides in preserving humanity, physically, psychologically and even spiritually, as we sense the majesty of the planet we are fortunate to inhabit. So happy new year and I hope to run into you on an Arkansas trail!

-Joanna Pollock is on the programs committee of the OHG Sierra Club and will complete her master's degree in counseling from the University of Arkansas.

WATCH OUT FOR UPCOMING CHANGES, A NEW LOOK AND THE BEST OHG SIERRA CLUB YEAR YET!

2012 Promises to be an exciting year with our planned activities, and activities yet to be planned. With a new newsletter, revived enthusiasm, Eric Boles as the new "Outings Chair" and a growing interest from the community as a whole in environmental issues, we hope you will stay involved with helping us protect our state's precious resources. We want to remind our members to visit our **Facebook** page and join our group. We already have 358 members and it's a great way to stay updated on our events. And remember to look for outings in Spring 2012 with Eric and the rest of us. So go ahead fellow Sierrans, GET EXCITED ABOUT 2012!



Events: Past and Future

Past 2011 Events

Sept. 25, 2011 – Moving Planet Day: OHG partnered with Bill McKibben’s 350.org, the Omni Climate Change Task Force, and the University of Arkansas to host Moving Planet Day. The event kicked off with a bicycle ride from the downtown Fayetteville square to the mall in front of Old Main on the U of A Campus. Speakers took the microphone throughout the morning to talk about the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. A free-cycle event helped gently used items find new homes. Non-profit groups provided information on everything from backyard chicken houses to watershed management, from community gardens to energy efficiency.

Oct. 9, 2011 – Sir Robert Swan, Order of the British Empire, the first person in history to walk to both the north and south poles, talked about his first-hand experiences with climate change to a crowd of about 100. Sir Robert presented photos that dramatically illustrate shrinking ice in Antarctica. The team work that is required to reach either of the poles is the same sort of team work that will be required globally if we are to avert climate crisis.

Nov. 3, 2011 – Carlos Velasquez spoke to Sierra Club members about the impact of climate change on the Inuit people, our northernmost neighbors. About 25 people attended Mr. Velasquez’s presentation, which included slides and artwork crafted by Inuit artisans. Mr. Velasquez emphasized the impact of warming weather patterns on the culture of the Inuit people and the prospect that their way of life will be lost in the not too distant future.

Dec. 6, 2011 – Bryan Welch, author of the book “Beautiful and Abundant” and publisher and editorial director of *Mother Earth News*, the *Utne Reader*, *Natural Home and Garden*, and *The Herb Companion* spoke about his book and a message of inspiration and hope that each of us can use to make a positive impact in our quickly changing world.

Future 2012 Events

January 10, 2012 - OHG will hold their ExComm meeting at Nightbird Books in Fayetteville at 6:30 p.m. All are welcome to attend.

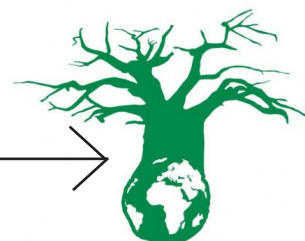
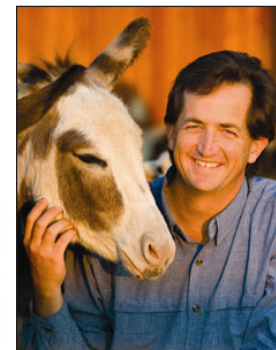
January 26, 2012 – Report from Durban: Outcomes from



Local residents display their mode of transportation.



OHG Leadership pose during Sir Robert Swan's visit to Fayetteville.



COP17/CMP7
UNITED NATIONS
CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE 2011
DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA

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the Latest Round of Climate Change Talks. Dr. Robert McAfee will provide an overview of the outcome of the climate meetings in Durban. 7 p.m. Nightbird Books, Fayetteville.

February 2011 – Local leaders in the sustainable food systems will share their knowledge and insights including the value of food in our culture, economy and diets, as well as, the need to support and understand local agriculture, community gardens and ways to enhance our own backyard growing efforts in a changing climate. Date and location to be announced.

March 2011 – AR state lobbyist will share knowledge of issues and bills in Arkansas of particular significance to Arkansans and how to influence our legislators for the social and environmental justice. Date and location to be announced.

April 2011 – In honor of Earth Day, local experts in forest habitats will share the importance of the protection of trees for a variety of ecological reasons and provide an update on the state of Arkansas forests, as well as, international forests of which we all depend for the health of the Earth's ecology. Date and location to be announced.



Lumps of Un-coal fill holiday stockings

The Ozark Headwaters Group participated in the Alternative Gift Market held Sunday, December 4, at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Fayetteville. Non-profits from the U.S. and abroad offered a variety of gifts this year including flocks of chickens from Heifer International, vaccines for children in developing nations, as well as gifts from local charitable organizations. Sierra Club offered gifts for the environmentally-conscious recipients on everyone's list.

Shoppers could choose among several environmental options including a year-long membership to the Sierra Club. Donations of \$20 will be used to "Protect Arkansas' Water." Donations at the \$10 level will support the Beyond Coal Campaign in Arkansas.

"The 'Beyond Coal' gift was marketed as a 'lump of un-coal,' perfect for those who've been naughty or nice this year," said Michele Halsell, coordinator of the fund raiser. "It was by far the most popular choice with 20 gifts sold."

The gift certificates were accompanied by an ornament crafted by local Sierra Club members out of recycled newspaper. All in all, the fundraiser netted \$450.

"It was our first time participating in the market. We hope that as we become a fixture at the market, we'll raise more money each year. People will know that they can find a meaningful holiday gift that will be used to protect the environment," said Halsell.



From left: Dawn Farver, John Kester, Joanna Pollock Shannon Joyce, Terra Baker, and Quinn Montanna make ornaments from recycled newspapers for the Alternative Gift Market.



John Kester and Johnnie Chamberlain volunteer selling lumps of un-coal at the Alternative Gift Market.



Left: Crafty Quinn Montanna makes ornaments for the Alternative Gift Market.



Right: Joanna Pollock making ornaments for the Alternative Gift Market.