

## **Stewardship Network Notes**

**11 Dec 07**

Bruegger's Bagel Bakery

*The Stewardship Network meets the second Tuesday of the month at Bruegger's Bagels on North University, UM--Ann Arbor Campus, from 7:30 to 8:30 AM. The same topic is repeated on the third Thursday of the month at The Nonprofit Enterprise at Work (NEW) Center, 1100 N. Main, Ann Arbor, from 12:00 to 1:00 PM.*

### **Topic: overcoming environmental grief and despair**

Jason Frenzel, moderator

**The problem** is one all environmental and native plants enthusiasts face: the knowledge of how much has to change to save our planet's biosystems from the disasters it now faces, and the sense of helplessness to accomplish those changes.

**Summary:** Brainstorming, attendees broke this problem down into its component sources--grassroots apathy and ignorance of the issues, organizational loss of vision, and the relative lack of political support at local, state, and national levels to address these issues. Further, the group floated action plan ideas and possibilities to begin local action directed at sparking long-term solutions.

### **Strategies for fending off personal discouragement**

- find joy in each new season and in current activities to improve our landscapes
- find joy in new and eager volunteers and "converts"
- appreciate the great number of national and international initiatives currently in place, or emerging, or growing, that support environmental, climate, biological, botanical, and human health improvements, emerging because of growing political recognition of the links in the chain of life
- try to avoid personally damaging defeatism: see losses of personnel in our orgs as sending trained people to help spread our vision to other locales; see budgetary or other organizational losses as challenges to mobilize volunteers to take up the slack; see bureaucratic roadblocks as opportunities to educate populations to overcome them.

### **What individuals and can do to make a difference**

- personal online advocacy does make a difference to decision makers; do get on these action lists and respond; they make it easy and quick for us to do.
- walk the walk: do your small part by planting native, and see the chain of life beginning to restore itself in your backyard insects and birds
- educate yourself and volunteer in your local organizations' activities:  
AA's Native Areas Preservation department, The Stewardship Network, the Ecology Center, Leslie Science Center, Wild Ones Ann Arbor, Southeast MI Land Conservancy, Washtenaw Land Trust, Sierra Club Huron Valley, etc.
- volunteer with or work to help support and advance organizational cooperation, as below

### **Local activist and environmental groups could increase their effectiveness through cooperation**

--more cooperation among local groups should produce a greater political impact by representing the combined larger number of their members. One suggestion was to take up the Governor's offer/policy of a 5-minute interview, and present her with a statement from regional environmental groups. Another suggestion envisioned an individual who would actively seek links between local environmental groups and lobbying groups.

--The Stewardship Network should get these notes online and advertise them in order to reach more people and inspire more volunteerism, activism, and interest.

### **Build an aware constituency by introducing these issues into the school curricula**

This is another idea that requires a lot of thought and cooperation on the part of environmental groups, volunteers, and the school system itself. Some tools are already available for use or adaptation. National Wildlife, the Wild Ones, and no doubt others have already developed educational programs and materials. Nature, natural processes, and threats to the natural world should furthermore become integrated into the discussions of other fields at all educational levels: social studies and sociology, biology, geography, history, politics, sports, business, technology.

### **Conclusion**

To have the greatest impact, we need to keep this vision of local cooperative leadership working for long-term change before us. These ideas are as yet undeveloped, and assistance or helpful ideas are solicited.

### **Notes and resources:**

--To find your local environmental organizations, see <http://www.eco-usa.net/orgs/mi.shtml>

--A recent PBS film, edited by Liz Goodenough of the UM Residential College, called *Where do the Children Play* addresses a "nature deficit" common in modern suburban children. The film is freely available for showing by contacting [lizgoode@umich.edu](mailto:lizgoode@umich.edu).

--Bringing Nature Home; How Native Plants Sustain Wildlife in Our Gardens, by Douglas W. Tallamy, chairperson of the Department of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at UDelaware, published by Timber Press, 2007 (much cheaper on Amazon)

--Getting started on political advocacy

National Resources Defence Council - [www.nrdconline.org/campaign/](http://www.nrdconline.org/campaign/)

Sierra Club - <http://action.sierraclub.org>;

enviro-semich - <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~ldnum/enviro/FAQ-enviro-semich.htm>.

Others orgs will find you.