

✧ Chapter 12 ✧

THE RESTORATION EXPERIENCE: VOLUNTEERS' MOTIVES, VALUES, AND CONCEPTS OF NATURE

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The last several years have brought significant changes in the management of public lands and natural resources in the United States. As a result of debates over management practices, shifts in the goods and services demanded by the public, and developments in scientific knowledge, there has emerged a general, philosophical shift toward managing natural environments as integrated, dynamic systems. As part of this shift toward a more holistic perspective, there has been a growing recognition that people are an important part of ecosystems and that human values, behaviors, and experiences must therefore be integrated into the planning and management of natural environments (Christensen et al. 1996, Cordell 1997).

At the same time, because public agencies are faced with shrinking budgets for programs and services, people are being encouraged to contribute their time, energy, and skills in volunteer activities that benefit their communities. Even before President Clinton's April 1997 summit on volunteerism, many Americans were becoming involved in volunteer programs that they considered to be personally satisfying as well as beneficial to their communities.

These two trends—the shift toward an integrated view of ecosystems that includes human beings, and the increasing reliance on volunteer efforts to carry out programs to benefit communities—have come together in the vol-

unteer ecological restoration movement. Thousands of people are now volunteering their time, energy, and skills to restore endangered native ecosystems in and near their communities (Ross 1994). In Illinois, volunteers interested in restoring prairie and savanna ecosystems have formed the Volunteer Stewardship Network (VSN), an association of restoration groups coordinated by the Illinois chapter of The Nature Conservancy. The members of the VSN are very motivated and appear to derive a great deal of satisfaction from their efforts. They are willing to spend long hours outdoors in physically demanding labor, sometimes under less than ideal weather conditions.

My goal in this research study was to learn more about these volunteers, what their work means to them, and what specific motives, values, and rewards have induced them to give so many hours of their free time to restoration activities. The primary source of material for this study was the periodic newsletters distributed by many of the individual stewardship groups. These newsletters, written and edited by the volunteers themselves, contain many passages that express who the volunteers are, what they are trying to achieve, why they are drawn to this kind of work, and what rewards they experience in the course of doing the work. By reading and systematically interpreting these passages, I hoped to gain insight into how the volunteers view themselves, their work, the sites they are restoring, and the natural world in general.

Methods

With the assistance of the Illinois chapter of The Nature Conservancy, I gathered copies of newsletters from several restoration groups belonging to the VSN in northern and central Illinois. The results reported here are based on a total of twenty-seven issues of newsletters published during the period 1991–1995, representing nine different volunteer groups.

My objective was to identify the main recurring themes in the newsletter text relating to volunteers' motivations, and to document the themes with illustrative quotes drawn from the original text. I used an approach for interpreting textual material that I had employed in two previous studies for analyzing people's written descriptions of special places (Schroeder 1991, 1996). The process involves building an outline of topics, cross-referencing each topic back to the original text, and then using the topic outline to compose a narrative of themes occurring in the text.

First, I read the newsletters and identified passages that pertained to the volunteers' goals, the rewards they experience from doing restoration work, and their values and concepts about the natural world. I typed each of these passages into a computer word processing file. Next, I divided each passage into smaller units of text. Each text unit consisted of one or more phrases or sentences that expressed a distinct idea or line of thought. Then I read each of

these text units carefully and began developing an outline of topics that were being repeatedly mentioned across different articles in the newsletters.

As I continued reading the text, I elaborated upon the outline by adding more specific subtopics and by grouping topics together under more general categories. I cross-referenced each entry in the outline to the places where it occurred in the original text, so that I could easily refer back to and retrieve specific instances of each topic. My goal was to have each unit of text linked to at least one entry in the topic outline.

When I had finished reading, outlining topics, and cross-referencing the text, I reviewed the results by tallying the frequency with which each topic had appeared in the newsletter passages. My purpose in doing this was not to quantify the data in any precise way, but simply to get a general idea of which topics were appearing most consistently. Then, based on the topic outline and the tallies, I began writing a summary of how the volunteers who write in the newsletters view themselves and their work. In writing the summary, I referred back to the original text to find quotations illustrating the themes in the summary.

Results

This process of interpreting and summarizing resulted in nine main themes, each having two or more subthemes. The themes and subthemes are listed in Table 12.1 and briefly described below; each subtheme is illustrated by one or more quotations drawn from the newsletters. Thus, to a large extent, this summary of newsletter themes is presented in the words of the newsletter writers themselves. The themes and subthemes included in this summary represent the themes that occurred most consistently across the nine volunteer groups. Almost all of the subthemes were expressed in the newsletters of at least four of the groups. (Those subthemes that appeared for less than four of the groups will be identified as such when they are discussed below.) The reader should bear in mind that this summary reflects the views of a subset of volunteers—those who edit, contribute to, or are interviewed in the newsletters—and that their views are not necessarily identical to those of all other volunteers.

The Purpose of the Volunteers' Work

Preserve, protect, and restore nature. The basic purpose of the volunteers' work, as seen by the newsletter writers, is to preserve, protect, and restore nature. This goal is expressed with respect to the whole Earth; general types of ecosystems; and particular species, features, and sites within ecosystems. Preservation, protection, and restoration seem to be regarded as complementary goals. More than one of them is often mentioned in the same sentence or phrase.

Table 12.1. Themes and Subthemes Identified in Restoration Newsletters

The Purpose of the Volunteers' Work	Being surprised
Preserve, protect, and restore nature	Getting excited
Protect the original, native landscape	Having fun
Preserve and restore biodiversity	
The Current State of Nature	Social Dimensions of Restoration
Small, isolated remnants	Socializing
Development pressures	Developing a sense of community
Nonnative plants	Feeling attached to the group
Struggle for survival	Admiring leaders
Nature needs help	
Metaphors of Invasion and War	Volunteers as People
Science-fiction invaders	Ordinary people
Army on the battlefield	Enthusiastic and dedicated
	Hard-working
	Persevering
Making a Difference	Feelings Toward Nature
Acting locally	Aesthetic appreciation
Being part of a larger effort	Friendship with nature
Envisioning future outcomes	Attachment to their site
Benefiting future generations	Sense of loss
Personal Rewards of Restoration	Sources of Ideas and Inspiration
Having a satisfying experience	Literature
Seeing tangible results	Native Americans
Learning and sharing knowledge	Religion
Enjoying the outdoors	

We have a need to exercise our right as stewards of this Earth, our home, to protect what is nature. . . . We want to make a positive difference in helping to restore our Mother Earth.

Large tracts of woodland such as Cedar Glen are important today because they represent our best chance to restore and preserve this ecosystem.

Protect the original, native landscape. More specifically, the nature that these volunteers want to protect is the original, native landscape—the vegetation and the land of Illinois as they existed in the past, before the European settlers came.

The DuPage Volunteer Stewardship Group is dedicated to preserving remnants of the original Illinois landscape.

We [will] reclaim this land from farmland and turn it back to native prairie and woodland.

Preserve and restore biodiversity. One of the most important attributes of nature that the stewardship volunteers wish to preserve and restore is biodiversity.

They are pleased when they discover evidence that many varied species are surviving within the small area of one of their restoration sites.

By returning the prairie to this area, Carpenter Park would become one of the most biologically diverse areas in Central Illinois.

The final count of species should approach 600, a very respectable number for a preserve of 215 acres.

The Current State of Nature

Small, isolated remnants. The volunteers' efforts are motivated by their perceptions of the current plight of nature. The original landscape of Illinois now exists only in small, isolated remnants. The volunteers regard these remnants as precious because they harbor the last vestiges of many rare plants and animals.

Indian Bluff Prairie—that tiny, isolated remnant of what was once a vast expanse of waving grasses and colorful flowers.

At the fringes of the cliffs, one can see the last vestiges of the flora that once covered the ridge top.

Development pressures. These remnants of original nature are threatened by the pressures of development and land-use change that alter or destroy native landscapes.

Because of the planned widening of a county road, many prairie plants will be destroyed unless we move them.

[DuPage Volunteer Stewardship Group] is working to save remnants of the original Illinois landscape that are under severe stress from neglect and encroaching development.

Nonnative plants. Another threat is the invasion of nonnative species of plants, which crowd out the native vegetation.

But invaders are taking over the ridgetops, shading out plants that depend upon full sunlight for survival.

Buckthorn shades out potential competitors, and is easily and widely spread by birds. It is possibly also allelopathic, releasing chemicals to destroy competition.

Struggle for survival. Faced with these threats, native species and ecosystems are struggling for survival and are barely hanging on to their existence.

Prairie species . . . struggle to exist.

[We came to] help it fight for its existence, before the battle—and the prairie—are lost forever.

Nature needs help. In this fight to survive, nature needs help from human beings. The volunteers feel called upon to aid nature in its struggle because without the efforts of concerned people, endangered natural areas will be lost.

But this . . . is an expansive Forest Preserve area which desperately needs human care and appreciation.

The prairies need our help! Won't you give a few hours to a worthy cause?

Metaphors of Invasion and War

The volunteers' sense of the current situation and their goals regarding nature are sometimes expressed in metaphors of invasion and war. This is especially the case with respect to exotic plant species, which constitute the most immediate and persistent threat that these volunteer groups must deal with on their established sites.

Science-fiction-type invaders. Nonnative plant species are depicted (tongue-in-cheek) as evil, science-fiction-type aliens—an invading menace that threatens to take over the restoration sites if it is not destroyed.

You saw the first installment, and dread the next. Yes, it's ALIENS! the fearful sequel to ALIEN. That's "Alien Weed Control."

Parts of Kibbe are being taken over by the alien invasion of the black locust. . . . Cut down the scum, spray them with killer herbicide. . . . How many locusts will die in one day?

Army on the battlefield. Volunteers use military metaphors, comparing themselves to an army on the battlefield: waging war, defeating the enemy, and helping endangered ecosystems to fight back against the invaders.

From the Battlefield: I was . . . waging war against some aliens! . . . If we don't fight back, they'll take over! . . . See these beauties? If we hadn't defeated the enemy, none of these would be here. . . . Along with many like us, we can join forces to defeat the evil alien.

On this frigid March day, our small band of intrepid volunteers went to war, armed with a rag-tag assortment of loppers, pruning shears, [etc.] . . . to help tip the delicate balance ever so slightly back in favor of the little prairie, and help it fight for its existence, before the battle—and the prairie—are lost forever.

Making a Difference

Acting locally. Volunteers find satisfaction in knowing that they are doing something about the problems described above. They believe that they can make a real difference by getting actively involved and putting their beliefs into practice in their own local area.

Join us and make a difference for the last few remnants of native Illinois ecosystems . . . and the plants and animals that thrive there.

Saving Antarctica or the Amazon rain forest is important, but we here in the Midwest can't do much about it. What we can do is to make a difference here in our own backyard.

Being part of a larger effort. The volunteers work locally in small groups, but at the same time they feel that they are contributing to a much larger effort that involves many other like-minded people and groups.

Each group is not acting alone, but as part of a much greater enterprise.

We are among more than 4,000 people statewide who volunteer their time to care for some 16,000 acres of significant natural lands.

Envisioning future outcomes. In their imaginations, volunteers look forward to the outcomes of projects now under way. Their ability to envision the future enables them to accomplish important goals. They hope and dream of a future when nature will be restored on a broad scale.

There were many . . . who realized that a diversity of native plants still survived among the weeds. They had the vision to look beyond the wine bottles and garlic mustard to see the area as a safe and convenient nature preserve for the surrounding communities.

It will be a land abundant in rolling prairie, interrupted only by an occasional creek and woodland. Where deer and buffalo roam.

Benefiting future generations. The volunteers believe that their efforts will benefit future generations, by preserving nature so that it will be there for others to enjoy.

I want the world to know that a small group of dedicated people in the south suburbs are doing their part to see that future generations will have these beautiful places to enjoy.

I do this because I want future generations to be able to enjoy open lands. If we don't conserve them now, there won't be any in the future.

Personal Rewards of Doing Restoration Work

Having a satisfying experience. Volunteers find that getting directly involved in restoration work is a satisfying way of contributing to an environmental cause.

A few hours of time volunteered can be more rewarding than donating a few dollars to let someone else do the work.

Being a volunteer gives me a feeling of satisfaction and a sense of security that I am doing a little something to help.

Seeing tangible results. Volunteers take great satisfaction in seeing the tangible results of their labor. For the prairie and savanna landscapes of the Chicago region, even a small effort may produce a visible change in the landscape after one or two years. Seeing clear signs of progress is rewarding and motivates them to continue their work.

Just one year's work by a small group of volunteers has made a visible difference on the first ridge of Warnock Prairie.

We work hard and already see results of our continuous efforts. . . . It is both gratifying and rewarding to visualize these results and then see them happen right before your eyes.

Learning and sharing knowledge. Volunteers also enjoy learning and sharing knowledge about native plants and animals and about restoration techniques.

Workdays are also a time for learning about an area's native plants and animals and for gaining a better understanding of the delicate process of ecological restoration.

We can learn from this diversity, too, and use it to educate children as we take them on tours. . . . We can all learn more about the environment we live in just by taking a walk through one of Markham's sanctuaries of diversity.

Enjoying the outdoors. Restoration work gives volunteers a chance to get outside and enjoy the outdoors, the weather, and the wildlife. Restoration sites can also be settings for outdoor recreation activities such as canoeing, skiing, and bird watching.

The days set aside to come out and cut brush and assist in burns are called workdays, but are truly a time to come out and enjoy

the weather, to bird watch, to learn of the natural plants and animals of these areas.

[Cedar Glen-Kibbe] can be a great place to walk in the winter. Some people even cross country ski there. The deer are easy to spot. Although some trails that lead to the eagle roost are closed, the rest is open for your enjoyment. It's a winter wonderland.

Being surprised. Volunteers enjoy being surprised by new, unexpected, or unusual things at restoration sites.

We came across some interesting creatures. . . . One of the joys of going into the woods is not knowing what you'll come across.

It seems each day that I work, a new plant or animal makes its appearance and the steward's excitement highlights its importance to the prairie.

Getting excited. Some aspects of restoration work provide excitement or thrills. This is especially true of prairie burns.

"Burn" days are especially exciting.

Now the fun—the head fire is lit along the southern edge of the prairie. Towering flames roar across the fields, engulfing the whole thing in less than fifteen minutes. Dense black smoke pours into the air.

Having fun. Aside from the more serious aspects of volunteering, being part of a restoration group can provide opportunities to just have fun.

All it takes is the desire to work those muscles a little bit (or a lot), to share the beauty of the Grove, and to have fun!

The butterflies were numerous and it was fun to name them.

Social Dimensions of Restoration Work

Socializing. Restoration work involves more than just working on the land. Making friends and taking part in social activities at workdays, meetings, and special events are also important parts of volunteering.

The workdays . . . always include a chance to make new friends.

Come a little early if you'd like to chat with other volunteers before the work begins. Occasionally, coffee and doughnuts magically appear from some thoughtful person.

Developing a sense of community. A sense of community develops among volunteers as they work together for a common cause.

Steering committees from all regions meet periodically to discuss common concerns, and these meetings engender a spirit of community.

We are a group of ordinary people . . . joined by a common concern for our environment.

Feeling attached to the group. Volunteers feel pride and affection toward their group and the individuals they work with.

Personally, I feel proud of the accomplishments of my prairie Friends.

I love what I do and love the people I work with.

Admiring leaders. They have respect and admiration for their leaders.

Site stewards: . . . These folks do the hero's work and are responsible for the ecological management of sites in the Volunteer Stewardship Network.

[He] was a leader of men . . . and women. . . . He was imbued with a determination that scared ordinary people into saying, "Yes. Yes. We love to say yes."

Volunteers as People

Ordinary people. The newsletters also reveal how the volunteers look at themselves. Volunteers see themselves as ordinary people. Advanced degrees in biology and ecology are not a requirement for doing this work. (This subtheme appeared less consistently across the groups than most, being expressed by only three of the nine groups.)

We are a group of ordinary people—professionals, homemakers, students and retirees—joined by a common concern for our environment.

We'd rather have your bright spirit than your transcripts. You don't need a degree in botany or a job as a naturalist. We don't care if you never won a research grant.

Enthusiastic and dedicated. Volunteers are enthusiastic and energetic. They show great dedication and commitment to restoration work. They give freely of their time and energy and communicate their enthusiasm to others.

VSN is the Volunteer Stewardship Network, an army of dedicated, energetic, knowledgeable people who handle the task of managing the lands acquired by TNC.

I got involved in the summer of 1985 through [the group's founder]. His enthusiasm was contagious.

Hard-working. Volunteers are hard workers. When necessary they will spend long hours doing physically demanding tasks.

Using loppers, bow saws, fire, and a lot of sweat, volunteers have made great progress in controlling these brush and weed problems.

We are justifiably proud to say that our volunteers are so conscientious in coming to workdays.

Persevering. They are willing to brave the elements and persevere under difficult or uncomfortable conditions.

The schedule of workdays, which looked so realistic last winter, will not meet this spring's muddy reality. . . . We must, however, remain steadfast in the muck, plan on working through the merry month of May, and possibly later.

Not wind or rain or snow or cold can dampen the spirit of a prairie lover.

Feelings Toward Nature

Aesthetic appreciation. Volunteers enjoy the aesthetic qualities of nature and the beauty of their restoration sites. Some volunteers are deeply touched and inspired by their encounters with nature.

The spring growing season looks good and there should again be a spectacular display of Shooting Stars on Dropseed Prairie. Come out and see the beauty of this natural area.

In autumn we are thrilled by Mother Nature's spectacular leaf displays which set our hearts afire. . . . We can hear the clarion call of fall and appreciate its beauty.

Friendship with nature. Some volunteers feel a special affinity for nature, the Earth, and native ecosystems. They personify ecosystems and nature, and feel friendship toward the plants and animals that live on their restoration sites. (This subtheme appeared in only three of the nine volunteer groups and was especially prominent in one of them.)

Each time I've greeted the prairie and her volunteers, I've felt a wonderful kinship with the Earth and humanity.

For five years these same birds have made a home on Paintbrush [Prairie]. . . . Like old friends, I look forward to seeing them there in the summer months.

Attachment to their site. Some volunteers develop a strong feeling of attachment to their particular site after they have worked on it for a period of time.

Although [her] tour of duty as steward of Schiller Woods is over officially . . . , she will continue to keep an eye on her woods as she has in the past. (Natural areas that you've worked have a way of getting in your system like that!)

She . . . says her life consists of family . . . work, and Funk's Grove.

Sense of loss. Volunteers feel distress and a sense of loss at the vanishing of native plants and animals and at the rapid urbanization of the landscape. This gives a sense of urgency to their work. They believe that if they do not act now, irreversible losses of natural sites and species will occur.

Unless something is done, we will witness the loss of the oak woodland . . . just as our forefathers witnessed the loss of the bison, elk, and open prairie.

These natural areas present a striking contrast to the development activities all around us. Seeing a cornfield turned into a shopping mall or a woods transformed into a subdivision seemingly overnight can leave us with a sense of loss. Having those changes envelop an entire county, as they have in DuPage over the last decade, can destroy our sense of place.

Sources of Ideas and Inspiration

Literature. Volunteers draw ideas and inspiration from a variety of books, poems, talks, and other sources. Quotations from well-known environmental writers and speakers are used to elucidate the philosophy behind restoration work.

As Aldo Leopold wrote, stewardship is right when it increases the integrity, stability, and beauty of the land.

"All things by mortal power / Near or far / Hiddenly / To each other linked are, / That thou canst not stir a flower / Without troubling a star." . . . [by] Francis Thompson.

Native Americans. For some volunteers, Native Americans are a source of inspiration and provide an example of a traditional land ethic. (This subtheme occurred for only two of the groups and was especially strong for one of those groups—the same group for whom affinity with nature was a strong theme.)

From Onondaga Chief Oren Lyon's Long Island University lecture: "When you sit in council on the welfare of your people, you must council with the seventh generation in mind." The wisdom behind it rings ominously true in our current time of ecological crisis.

In spite of incredible cruelty and greed, the indigenous people survived. Their survival can be our hope for restoring the ecosystems of the earth.

Religion. Some volunteers derive religious inspiration from contact with nature at restoration sites, or base their land ethic on a particular religious tradition, e.g., Judeo-Christian or Native American. (This subtheme appeared for only two groups, again including the same group that expressed affinity for nature.)

I hold in my sight thrilling variations of plant forms, whose structures boldly proclaim (to my eyes) praises to their Architect. . . . I see the fluidity of fascinating adaptation as it is channeled securely within definite guidelines of divine design.

We need to learn the ways of those who . . . lived a life that was respectful of and spiritually rooted to the land. . . . Chief Seattle: "Every part of this soil is sacred in the estimation of my people." Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce: "The earth and myself are of one mind. The measure of the land and the measure of our bodies are the same."

Discussion

The results of this research study can help those who manage and coordinate volunteer ecosystem restoration activities to understand why certain volunteers become highly committed to restoration work. Based on the themes identified in the newsletters, I believe that the high level of motivation and enthusiasm of these volunteers stems from three interacting factors. First is the sense of urgency and immediacy they feel about the fragility of nature and the impending loss of native sites and species. They sense that something precious is slipping away and will be irretrievably lost unless immediate action is taken. Second is their belief that they can make an important and real difference in

preventing this loss. By getting actively involved, volunteers see the possibility of actually changing the course of things and achieving a better outcome for the future. Third is the ability to see tangible progress from their efforts in a fairly short time span. The effects of volunteers' interventions in the prairie and savanna ecosystems in which they focus their efforts may become visible in as little as one year, reinforcing that their actions really are making a difference.

These three factors combine to create a powerful incentive and reinforcement for the volunteers' work. Therefore, managers and coordinators of restoration programs might help maintain the motivation and enthusiasm of their volunteers by highlighting the importance of restoration to the future of the local, regional, and global environment, and by providing frequent opportunities for volunteers to see the tangible outcomes of their work. In addition to these three important factors, the newsletters also reveal a diversity of other pleasures and rewards that ecosystem volunteers experience in their work. By building opportunities for learning and sharing knowledge, enjoyable outdoor activities, and social events into their programs, volunteer coordinators can help make the volunteering experience still more engaging and rewarding.

These conclusions parallel, at least in general terms, the findings of other studies of volunteers and their motives. For example, the themes of "making a difference" and "social dimensions of restoration work" in this study of newsletters parallel the categories of purposive benefits and solidarity benefits found by Caldwell and Andereck (1994) in a survey of members of the North Carolina Zoological Society. Manzo and Weinstein (1987) found that active members of the Sierra Club were motivated by a desire to make the world a better place, perceptions of the efficacy of citizen action, feelings of having been personally harmed by environmental problems, and friendships with other club members. These are similar to the themes of "making a difference" and "social dimensions" and the subthemes of "seeing tangible results" and "sense of loss" found in the restoration newsletters. Corresponding to the newsletter subtheme "attachment to their site," Ryan (this volume) found that park users (including volunteers) had developed feelings of attachment to urban natural areas in Michigan.

Grese et al. (this volume) found four factors that motivate volunteer ecosystem stewards. Their strongest factor, "helping the environment," includes several items similar to the "preserve, protect, and restore nature" subtheme and the "making a difference" theme in this study. A factor they label "exploration" appears similar to the "learning and sharing knowledge" subtheme in the newsletters. Grese et al. also found a "spirituality" factor that contains items similar to the "enjoying the outdoors," "friendship with nature," "sense of community," and "religion" subthemes from the newsletters. Finally, Grese et al.'s "personal and social" factor includes items similar to the "social dimensions" theme as well as the "seeing tangible results" subthemes in the newsletters.

The results of this study may also provide some insight into how volunteers' definition, purpose, and philosophy of restoration differ from how restoration is discussed in the academic world. In that world, scholars often treat restoration and preservation as conflicting or mutually exclusive goals, so that choosing one means rejecting the other (Baldwin et al. 1994). The main argument in the debate between preservation and restoration is clearly articulated in the philosophy section of this book. In this debate, preservation is interpreted as a hands-off policy that precludes active intervention of the type taken by restorationists. Judging from how the concepts of preservation and restoration are used in the newsletters, however, these volunteers do not seem to see any conflict or contradiction between preserving and restoring natural areas. In fact, their fundamental purpose (as they state it) is the preservation of nature. They view restoration as a means to that end, because it offsets the disruptive impacts of civilization and helps nature to function as it originally did.

Another philosophical question that has been debated recently concerns the status of restored ecosystems as either natural or artifactual. Eric Katz in this book and elsewhere has argued that restored ecosystems should be considered artifacts rather than natural entities, because they are the result of deliberate, intentional actions of human beings. (See chapters by William Jordan, Andrew Light, and Cheryl Foster in this volume for other views on this question.) The newsletters I examined in this study never explicitly discussed this issue, but the results of my analysis suggest that the newsletter writers would not agree with the assertion that restorations are human artifacts. These volunteers seem to regard nature as that which existed in the landscape before European settlement. Remnants of this nature still exist in places, but in a greatly damaged and diminished state. The volunteers' goal is to counteract the forces that have destroyed and altered these natural landscapes, thus freeing nature to once again function in the way that it would have if the damage had never occurred. Thus, these volunteers would most likely regard the restoration sites they work on as being more, rather than less, natural than before the restoration efforts began.

Both of the philosophical points discussed above are illustrated in the following newsletter quote:

For the last fifteen years, the role that these volunteers have had in realizing those early dreams of preserved natural sites is inestimable. Without people out there cutting buckthorn and honeysuckle, and pulling garlic mustard and sweet clover, these "natural areas" would become Hansel-and-Gretel-type deep, dark woods, overgrown with Eurasian exotics.

For the author of this quote, the goal of "preserved natural sites" is achieved through the cutting and pulling of nonnative plants, with the impli-

cation that unchecked proliferation of exotic species would lead to sites that are neither preserved nor natural.

The results of this study may have implications for understanding why the Chicago restoration controversy described in the Introduction to this volume and elsewhere (e.g., Gobster 1997; Helford and Vining et al., this volume) has been so contentious and difficult to resolve. Of particular interest in this regard are the warlike metaphors sometimes used by volunteers to describe their work.

On the one hand, this metaphorical likening of restoration work to war has the positive effect of reinforcing the volunteers' commitment, dedication, and willingness to sacrifice for their cause. It seems that for some volunteers, restoration work is in fact "the moral equivalent of war."¹ Unfortunately, once the conflict over restoration in the Chicago area emerged, this martial view of restoration work may have intensified the controversy and made it more difficult to resolve. All the newsletters quoted in this chapter were published before the controversy emerged. Thus, it seems that restoration volunteers were already predisposed to view themselves as combatants in a war to save nature. When people raised objections to restoration projects, it was then easy to view these people as enemies of nature. The immediate impulse was to fight and try to defeat these enemies, rather than to try to understand their objections and look for ways to negotiate and compromise.

Of course, as with most controversial issues, combative individuals can be found on both sides of the restoration argument. It is not my purpose to identify one side as being more intransigent than the other. I am simply pointing out that, while metaphors of battle and war help evoke intense motivation and commitment to a cause, they probably do not make it any easier to resolve conflicts such as the one that has arisen in Chicago.

As in any research study based on written text, the source of the text and the intent of the writers must be taken into account when interpreting these results. The newsletters are produced independently by each of the individual stewardship groups, and they seem to serve several functions. They inform volunteers about upcoming events and workdays. They present technical information on ecology, restoration, and species identification. They help create a sense of identity and community for the group and encourage volunteers to become more actively involved in the group's activities. They also provide an outlet where volunteers can express and share their significant experiences, goals, and values.

The newsletter writers and editors are active members of the group and seem to direct their writing toward other members and potential members of their own group, as well as toward the larger community of restoration volunteers. It could be argued that the newsletters serve as a public relations tool and, as such, present a biased or idealized view of the volunteers. The newsletters do have a consistently positive tone. Most of the articles are upbeat and

do not dwell on less pleasant topics like volunteer burnout, disagreements between group members, or failed restoration projects—all of which probably do occur from time to time.

On the other hand, because the newsletters are local, grassroots publications, they probably contain less calculated posturing and deliberate public-image manipulation than might be found, for example, in the national newsletter of a large organization. My impression is that, in writing for the newsletters, these volunteers are sincerely expressing their own experiences and understandings of the positive benefits and motivations that keep them coming back to work on the restoration sites. Most of the themes discussed above occurred consistently across many of the groups, and may represent common values and meanings that are shared broadly in the volunteer community. One exception was a cluster of themes having to do with a feeling of affinity with nature, spiritual or religious associations, and Native American views of nature. These themes were less widely expressed and appeared to be especially strong in one group. They may represent the perspective of the individual or individuals who are the most involved in producing that group's newsletter.

Of course, the volunteers who write for the newsletters are not a random sample, and their views do not necessarily correspond to those of all volunteers. The volunteers who write for the newsletters are probably among the more highly motivated members of their groups. Volunteers who are less motivated or more casual about their involvement in restoration work, or who disagree with some aspects of their group's activities, are probably less likely to have their experience of restoration work represented in the newsletters.

Thus, the summary of newsletter themes provides a glimpse of the volunteer groups and their work as seen through the eyes of some of their more highly motivated members. Additional research, such as a representative survey or in-depth interviews with the VSN membership, would help to expand upon the information in the newsletters. No single research approach can tell the whole story of what motivates the volunteers. The newsletters, however, contain authentic and spontaneous expressions of some of the most important goals, values, and rewards involved in being an ecosystem restoration volunteer, and as such they tell an interesting part of that story.

Note

1. The expression "moral equivalent of war" was first used by William James (1984, originally published in 1910) in a speech calling for a national public service program. James believed that such programs would help prevent war by providing an alternative means to satisfy the human drive for honor, discipline, and commitment to a higher cause.

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RESTORING NATURE

*Perspectives from the Social Sciences
and Humanities*

EDITED BY
PAUL H. GOBSTER AND R. BRUCE HULL

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