

Managing Natural Resources, Managing Ourselves: A values approach to natural resource decision-making

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“The long and short of the matter is that forest conservation depends in part on intelligent consumption, as well as intelligent production of lumber.”

~ Aldo Leopold, 1928, “The Home Builder Conserves”

In a 1995 national telephone survey by the Merck Family Fund, 67 % of the respondents acknowledged that “Americans cause many of the world’s environmental problems because we consume more resources and produce more waste than anyone else in the world.” And 88% of Americans agreed “protecting the environment will require most of us to make major changes in the way we live. But the same survey showed that Americans really don’t know what the specific ecological implications of their lifestyles are, and don’t know precisely what to change.

At Oregon State University and other land-grant institutions, we focus our educational efforts on teaching students to professionally manage natural resources. However, as population, economic and consumption pressures increase, helping consumers take a thoughtful approach to understanding their cultural, economic and environmental ethics and addressing their responsibilities as consumers of natural resources, become viable educational tools.

Managing ourselves means making intelligent consumer decisions about natural resources. This requires understanding the personal values, ethics and beliefs that underlie decision-making. Other integral components are considering the barriers to living sustainably, examining national trends, and determining personal priorities.

Since 1998, we have been offering intelligent consumption decision-making workshops for typical American adults and older youth. Over 7,500 people have participated in workshops, and over a half million browsers have visited the website <http://www.cof.orst.edu/cof/extended/sustain/>. In 2004, we expanded this programming by creating a national network of 45 Extension professionals at 17 land-grant universities.