

We Need Everyone to Develop an Ecological Conscience. Part II

Two weeks ago, I first wrote about an ecological conscience and how it applies to landowners as something in the back of their minds that is always there telling them that there are ecological consequences to any action they either are, or are not, contemplating doing on their land.

But I also wrote that I think we all need that ecological conscience, even if we don't own rural land.

Last week I reran a previous column about ecosystem services which explained how all of our lives, even those of city dwellers, depend on a healthy and complete ecosystem, even if most of us seldom think about it.

Today, I hope to tie the previous two columns together to argue that everyone, as in everyone, needs to have an ecological conscience that tells them the environmental consequences of any of their daily activities—whether it is something they should do, or not do, or how they should change the way they do things. Because an astonishingly long list of ordinary daily activities do have an impact on the health and functioning of the ecosystem, we have an effect on the ecosystem every day.

It is important to point out one simple fact—it may not matter much if one individual wastes water by letting the water run while brushing his teeth, but what if everyone did it every day?

Here is a list of some very broad categories of activities that we all do that have an effect on our environment:

Anything that has to do with water, inside or outside the house, where it comes from, how much is used, when it is used, what happens to it when we are finished with it, are there renewable versus non-renewable sources? All of these things have environmental consequences. Rainwater harvesting is at least a partial alternative to treated city water.

All uses of electricity, inside or outside the home, how much we use, how much could we save, how is the electricity generated and what is the environmental cost of its generation? Long term, the use of electrical panels on the roof is something some of us could consider.

The use of fossil fuels: Anything we can do to reduce our use of these fuels reduces the amount of environmental harm done by their use. The car we drive and how it is powered is a major issue, but how we use that vehicle can also be an issue.

How efficient are our homes, our appliances, how well insulated?

Yards/lawns—the smaller the better. Native grasses and forbs and shrubs instead of water-hungry non-natives make a habitat for native species such as pollinators and butterflies and songbirds. Maintain a compost pile to produce fertile soil additives and reduce garbage.

Take your ecological conscience with you shopping, including food shopping—buy local if possible, think about buying less meat. Recycle everything possible.

All of the above raise a huge number of issues, some simple and some complex, but all issues your ecological conscience will help you make good choices about.

The problem is that the overall condition of the environment, both locally and world-wide, is declining, and the rate of decline is predicted to increase in coming years. We can't, the world can't, continue to ignore the condition of the environment, because the ecosystem services that we all depend on, more than most people realize, may not always be there.

The more people adopt an ecological conscience and take into account the environmental consequences of their everyday activities, the better off we will all be and we will be making a smaller footprint on the land and protecting the ecosystem we will need.

Fortunately, the younger generation is way ahead of most of us older folks, not only in being aware of the consequences of their actions, but in being able to alter their actions to be more eco-friendly. They may not use the term, but they are, as a fraction of the population, more likely to already have an ecological conscience, and that may be the best hope for the future of mankind.

Most of us of a certain age had to learn how to use seat-belts, many of us even managed to stop smoking—it wasn't the end of the world, and some of us are probably here because we learned to do those things. So there is reason to hope.

Finally, take your ecological conscience with you when you go vote!

Until next time...

Jim Stanley is a Texas Master Naturalist and the author of the books "Hill Country Ecology," "Hill Country Landowner's Guide" and "A Beginner's Handbook for Rural Texas Landowners." He can be reached at jstmn@ktc.com. Previous columns can be seen at www.hillcountrynaturalist.org.