

Stewardship Stories

A Master's Project

Final Paper

by

Caroline Raisler

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Introduction

Natural land is disappearing at an unnatural rate. 5,000 acres a day are developed in the United States. This problem comes along with several others. According to Richard Louv, children are suffering from Nature Deficit Disorder. Their lack of unstructured time outdoors leads to numerous health consequences: the current generation is likely to be the first to have a lower life expectancy than their parents. More broadly, all generations are suffering from a lack of social capital, or connection to others, as Robert Putnam described in his book Bowling Alone.

The private land conservation movement offers solutions to these problems. The number of land trusts (non-profit organizations that protect land) is increasing rapidly. In 2005, there were 1,600 – an increase of 32% from the year 2000. These land trusts save land – a total of 37 million acres by 2005. But even more importantly than that, they provide a forum for people to come together to take care of land.

Land trusts have recently realized that if they are to be successful, they need to reach out beyond their usual base to engage new people. The oldest land trust, The Trustees of Reservations, says on their website, “We need to tap the wellspring of people’s joy—in their communities, their heritage, and the natural world—and mobilize a whole new generation to care.” The broader environmental movement has also realized that they need to mobilize more support if they are to make any headway against global warming, species extinction and other dire threats.

Many land conservation and environmental leaders have brought up the importance of stories for engaging new people. Holly Doremus, in her essay “The Rhetoric and Reality of Nature Protection” examines the role of storytelling in political decision making and concludes,

“As a practical matter, relatively brief stories and evocative rhetorical images are well suited to the political process and can capture the emotions and intuitions that underlie the urge to protect nature. Advocates of long-term nature protection, therefore, might well be advised to work on identifying or developing stories and images that can help us achieve a viable and satisfying human relationship with nature”

Telling stories will help environmentalists effect the political change that needs to happen. Peter Forbes, director of the Center for Whole Communities, said, “Our challenge is to help our

neighbors and ourselves to imagine, and then create, a different world. Story has the power to do that.” People learn best, and change best, from stories.

Therefore, environmentalists and land conservationists have been telling a lot of stories. However, the stories that they are telling are not helpful. The environmental movement as a whole tells stories of gloom and doom. Peter Forbes characterizes it this way, “Environmentalism is often about NO. It tells negative stories with overwhelming and abstract facts that depress people, offer few solutions, and leave us feeling powerless.” Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus made waves in 2004 with an essay entitled, “The Death of Environmentalism,” in which they compared environmental rhetoric to Martin Luther King, Jr.’s speech.

“Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I have a dream speech” is famous because it puts forward an inspiring, positive vision that carried a critique of the current moment within it. Imagine how history would have turned out had King given and ‘I have a nightmare speech’ instead. In the absence of a bold vision and a reconsideration of the problem, environmental leaders are effectively giving the ‘I have a nightmare’ speech.”

Forbes and Shellenberger and Nordhaus point out that most people are not motivated to act by doomsday scenarios. Martin Luther King Jr.’s dream gave people an idea of what we could hope for, and thus inspiration to work towards it. Warnings of impending destruction instead make us want to give up and think about something else. The environmental movement needs to “rethink everything” (Shellenberger and Nordhaus) and come up with a better story, one that is hopeful and motivating.

The land conservation community, as a subset of the environmental movement, has often been guilty of this problem. I began this paper with a typical line from a land trust newsletter, “Natural land is disappearing at an unnatural rate. 5,000 acres a day are developed in the United States.” That may make some people eager to take action. Others will immediately stop reading. However, the land conservation movement is coming around to telling more positive stories. For example, the Land Trust Alliance website, revised in June of 2008, now puts a story front and center on their website. They change the story every day, but it is always about a piece of land that has been conserved forever. The story of permanent success, after a crisis, is definitely an improvement over the “I have a nightmare story.” Yet it has its own problems: it

implies that once land is protected the problem is solved. Even more troubling, it removes people from the picture of success.

The more interesting story is what happens once the land is protected. That part is generally called stewardship – a word which means taking care of something that does not belong to you. A group of people – sometimes paid, sometimes volunteers – who care deeply about the land, though they do not own it, take care of it day after day. In the process, they connect with the land and with each other. Peter Forbes said, “Imagine if every story that conservationists told about the land helped people to see what really matters and how they can get more of it.” The stories about permanent protection do not contain that information. What really matters, according to Richard Louv and Robert Putnam, is connection to land and connection to each other. The stories of stewardship, of taking care of land, can show people how they can get more of that.

Having read these sources in classes and at conferences, I was convinced that more stories of stewardship needed to be told. I had also often had the experience, through my work in land conservation, of walking through the woods with someone and listening to his or her stories about taking care of their place. I would return home inspired and eager to continue working on land conservation. Other people should get that feeling, I thought. So, I decided my master’s project should consist of collecting the stories of people who take care of land. Rather than write the stories down in a thesis that would only be read by my advisor, I wanted to make them available to everyone.

Methods

I set out to collect stewardship stories. I intended to do seven interviews – as many as could fit in my one-semester time frame. I wanted the stories I collected to be in the interview participants’ own words and to engage as many people as possible. So, I launched a website (www.stewardshipstories.com) and put the stories online. I released the stories in two forms: audio podcasts, which I envisioned people downloading and listening to on CD or MP3 players as they were driving or doing other work, and “videos” that incorporated audio and still photographs (no moving images), which I thought people would likely watch sitting at their computers.

More details about how I did each step of the process are below. Even those details are somewhat summarized, however. For more information about people who advised me, software and web services I used, and other stories that served as inspiration, see the Annotated Bibliography. For detailed information about my interview subjects, see my website, where I have written profiles about each of them.

1. Recruitment

My goal was to interview a diverse group of people with respect to:

- Geography
- Age
- Race
- Political points of view and attitudes towards conservation
- What brings them to the land – i.e. landowners, volunteers, professionals
- Kinds of land they take care of – i.e. urban, rural, mountain, valley, large, small
- What they do to take care of the land – i.e. agriculture, forestry, invasives control, wildlife stewardship, hunting, gardening
- Their particular passion with regard to land – i.e. trees, birds, gardening

I recruited people in a few different ways. I asked four people, who I thought were good storytellers and had the kind of story I wanted to tell. Three of them I know well. Two of those: Paul Strasburg and Jim Caffrey, agreed to be interviewed. One of them refused, because he is a private person and did not want his voice available to others on the internet. I had met Terry Blunt, but did not know him well. I had heard he had good stories, so I asked him. He agreed to be interviewed. One wonderful person that I know offered to be interviewed without me even having to ask (Sarah Charlop-Powers).

I also asked several people I know who work with a lot of different land stewards to recommend people to me. Through that, I got about twenty-five recommendations. I picked about ten of those to contact, and three of them (Riverland Farm, Tony Coyler-Pendas, and Phil Stanway) agreed to be interviewed. I also posted a request for interview subjects on Conservation Common, a website for the Massachusetts land conservation community, but got no responses.

My ability to interview a diverse group of people was limited by how I found my subjects. It was also limited by the fact that all of them had to be within a few hours' drive of

my home in Western Massachusetts. Finally, I only did seven interviews. In the count below, I am counting the couple that runs Riverland Farm as one interview subject, even though they are technically two people.

Given my constraints, I ended up interviewing a fairly diverse group of people in several respects:

- Geography
 - Western Massachusetts (4)
 - New York (2)
 - Eastern Massachusetts (1)
- Age
 - 20s/early career (2)
 - 30s/mid career (1)
 - 40s/late career (1)
 - 50s/late career (1)
 - 60s/retired (2)
- Race
 - Cuban-American (1)
 - White (6)
- Political points of view and attitudes towards conservation
 - “I’m not a tree-hugger” (2)
 - Tree-huggers (5)
- What brings them to the land – i.e. landowners, volunteers, professionals
 - Landowners (2)
 - Volunteers (1)
 - Professionals (4)
- Kinds of land they take care of – i.e. urban, rural, mountain, valley, large, small
 - Rural, hilltowns (5)
 - Rural, valley (4)
 - Urban (1)
 - Suburban (1)
- What they do to take care of the land – i.e. agriculture, forestry, invasives control, wildlife stewardship, hunting, gardening
 - Forestry (2)
 - Land acquisition (3)
 - Agriculture (2)
 - General stewardship (3)
 - Public access (4)
- Their particular passion with regard to land – i.e. trees, birds, gardening
 - Forestry (2)
 - Beauty (4)
 - Public access (5)
 - Ecology (0)
 - Agriculture (1)

Racial diversity was the most limited, but the group of people who take care of land tends to be predominantly white, so this is not surprising. I got a fairly good spread of ages. I interviewed more professionals and fewer volunteers than I would have liked to. I was pretty happy with the variability of what motivated my interview subjects to be land stewards and what they do with the land to take care of it. I expected that I would find more people to be inspired by a pure love of nature and ecology and to work on restoration and monitoring. None of the people I interviewed had much interest in that. They were much more active stewards of the land, and more concerned with interacting with other people and with the landscape.

2. Recording

I picked a Marantz PMD 620 field recorder, based on advice from many people and the review in [trasom.com](http://www.trasom.com) (see Annotated Bibliography for details). It cost \$320. I also purchased a



2GB SD card for \$20, which allows me to record 4.5 hours of audio at excellent quality. I have found it to be easy to use and very reliable. The recorder has built in microphones (on the top), but it allows one to attach an external microphone. Many people advised me to also get a good microphone and a foam windscreen along with the field recorder. I decided not to do that for two reasons. First, that would have doubled the cost. Second, and perhaps more importantly, I was concerned that, since I had no experience using a microphone and would be interviewing people who were also not comfortable with them, the awkwardness of holding the microphone in my

www.trasom.com

interview subject's face would detract considerably from the intimacy I wanted to achieve in the interviews. Without a microphone, I was able to just put the field recorder down on the table and have my interview subject forget about it. The stories had a more intimate and authentic feel because of that decision.

However, they were often so authentic that they were hard to hear. Though the built-in microphones were of surprisingly good quality, not putting them right up next to my subject's mouths meant that I got a lot of background noise in the recordings. Since I did not have a recording studio, but was instead traveling to meet my interviewees wherever they liked, many

of my stories have significant noise – chainsaw, construction, a truck engine, and a very loud heater – in the background. I did have to cut some parts of the interviews out of the stories because they were unintelligible due to the background noise. I would not claim that the stories I produced sound professional, mainly due to my decision not to purchase an external microphone. However, they are still not unpleasant to listen to, and in some cases the background noise adds to the sense of place. Given the constraints of the project, I am satisfied with my decision about how to do the recording.

3. Interviewing

I spent between half an hour and two hours interviewing each person. I also tried to do some other activities to get a sense of place, particularly in places I had not visited before. Before Tony Coyler-Pendas’s interview, I went to one of the Columbia Land Conservancy’s public conservation areas. Phil Stanway and the Riverland farmers took me on tours of their properties.

The challenge in each interview was building a rapport with the subjects so that they would feel safe saying interesting things. I have always been good at that, but still it was easier with the people I already knew – and I think those stories are better for it. The Riverland Farm interview, the only one in which I interviewed two people, was also a great one, full of comfortable banter, though I had not met them before. I think that, since they knew each other well, they were able to provide that.

Before I did the first interview, I wrote these interview questions, intending to use them for all the interviews:

- What is the history of this property?
- What is your history?
 - How long have you lived in this town?
 - Where are you from?
 - How long have you been working on this property?
- What do you do on this property?
- What motivates you to do it?
- What was your first experience in this kind of work? Who got you involved?
- Any interesting plants or wildlife on the property?
- What is your favorite part of the property?
- What kinds of people use this property? Who helps you with it? How do you think this property affects other people?

- Tell me some memorable experiences on the property.
- How has working on this property changed you?
- What are your hopes for this place in the future?
- Who else do you know who takes care of land, that you think I should interview?

However, after the first interview I realized that the interviews would go better if I wrote specific questions for each one. Having to rewrite the questions in my head on the spot made it harder for me to connect to the interview subjects. See the Appendix for the questions I wrote.

However, even with specific questions written, I generally did not stick to my script. Also, I told my interviewees at the beginning of the interviews that if at any point they wanted to talk more about a certain subject or bring up something new, they should feel free to do so. I told them that I was not trying to collect a certain amount of data, but instead I wanted stories. More than a few of my interview subjects took me up on that offer and talked for long periods of time without any prompting by me. Generally, those parts did not make it into my final stories, but they still helped the interview subject become comfortable. And, in a few cases, those were the best parts of the interviews.

4. Story Construction

After returning home from an interview with half an hour to two hours of recorded audio, I struggled with how to create a coherent story out of it. I first listened to the entire interview and took detailed notes. Then, I would read my notes over several times, cutting and pasting them into something that seemed like a story. This process took between two and six hours for each interview. Often, I would have to give up on it for the day and return to it the next day with fresh eyes.

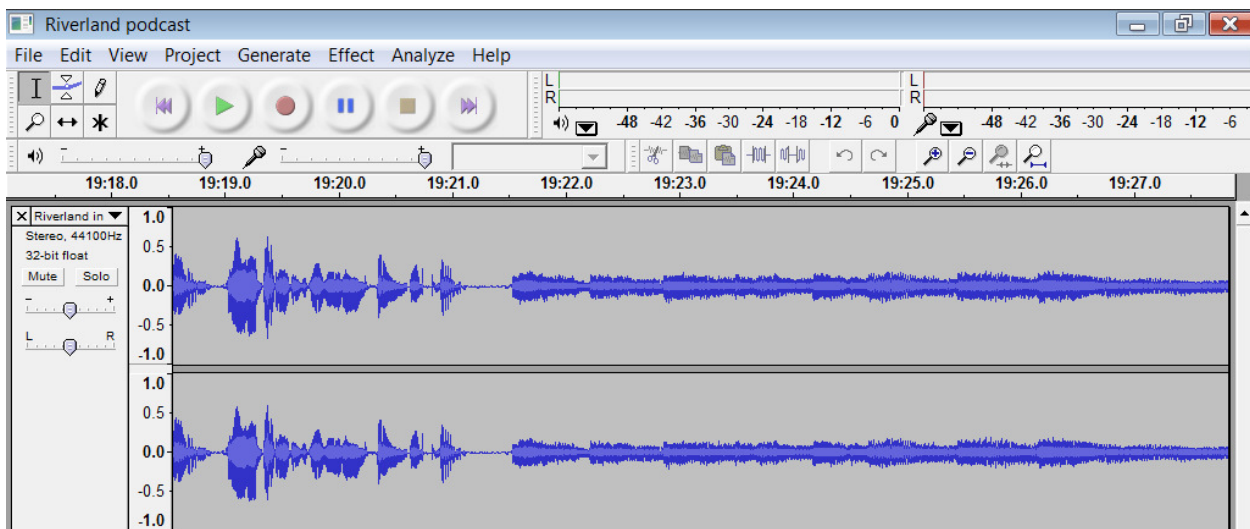
As I wrote earlier, I decided to produce two kinds of products from each interview – an audio podcast and a “video” slideshow. I was unsure about how long each should be. Many of the “how to” sources I read (see Annotated Bibliography) suggested that when listening to audio on the web, people have very short attention spans and will not listen to anything longer than five minutes. My videos were constrained by the fact that YouTube would not accept anything longer than ten minutes. However, I felt strongly that the stories should not be so short that I was reducing the interviews to sound bites. I wanted to preserve the complexity of what people had told me.

I tried several different ways of telling the stories as I progressed through the project. For some I just produced one story, others I broke down into chapters focused around different themes. Sometimes I kept the chronological order of the interview, and just made it shorter; other times I rearranged and re-combined the audio. Finally, some audio podcasts and “videos” were identical except that the “videos” had pictures, while some “videos” were considerably shorter than their audio counterparts.

It is hard for me to tell whether the ways I constructed the stories changed as I moved through the project because the stories were all different or because I was learning as I went. It would be interesting to see, if I approached my first interview again with fresh eyes, how I would chose to tell that story. I am not sure that I made any firm decisions about the best way to create the stories, except that I decided on the length. I was happiest with my audio podcasts that are between fifteen and thirty minutes long and my “videos” that were considerably shorter, with just the highlights.

5. Audio Editing

I used Audacity, a free program available online, to edit the audio (see Annotated Bibliography for details). This program was easy to understand and use. However, audio editing



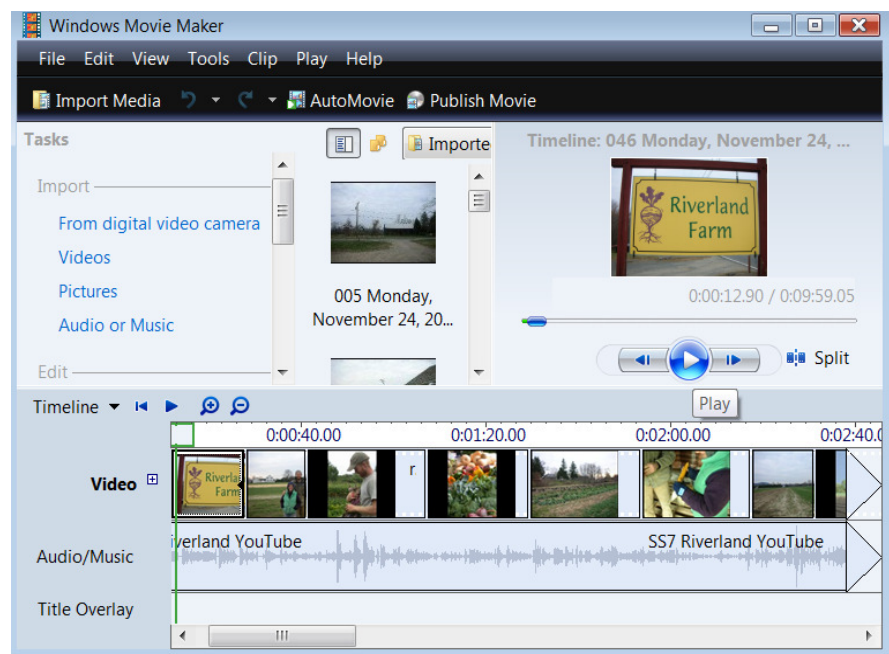
is still tedious and time consuming. It took me between five and ten hours to do the audio editing for each story.

I avoided most of the sophisticated abilities the program has – I did not combine different tracks or do any fade-ins. What I did do is cut and paste to rearrange the interviews into coherent

stories. I also added in my introductions and David McMahon’s music. The picture above shows the interview, followed by my conclusion, followed by music. I also used the program to equalize the volume in different parts of the track and among tracks. That was difficult, and I did not always do a good job of it. Finally, I went through and edited out most of the times when my interview subjects said “um,” stuttered, paused for long periods of time, or made strange noises with their mouths. I left in a few of those instances to keep the interview sounding authentic, but not enough so that it would be difficult to listen to.

6. “Video” Editing

I used Windows Movie Maker to edit the “video” slideshows which combined photos and audio. I chose that program because it was already installed on my computer. It was fairly easy to use. Like with audio editing, I only used the program for a fraction of its capabilities.



The most difficult part of making the “videos” was editing them shorter than the audio-only podcasts. In the beginning, I sometimes cheated my way around YouTube’s ten-minute time limit by making the story into two consecutive chapters. However, people advised me that nobody would sit through watching that. So, I had to edit down the audio further before adding pictures. For the stories for which I had to re-edit the audio, it generally took me two to three hours to make “videos”. For the stories for which I did not do that, it only took about an hour to add the pictures.

I put “video” editing in quotes because though I used video editing software, and what I produced was in computer “video” format, I did not actually use any moving pictures. I decided early on in this project that using moving images would make the project much harder, and I am

confident that was the right decision. I did want people to be able to see the places that were being talked about and the people that were talking, but I think that using a photo slideshow was more than adequate for that task. Had I done actual video, I would have been able to tell far fewer stories.

To obtain photographs to use in the “videos,” I often took photographs during my interviews with my digital camera. Sometimes, I also walked around before or after the interview and took photographs. I also asked my interview subjects to provide me with photographs, and several did. Those definitely were the better “video” stories.

7. Distribution

The main point of this project, and how it differed from a conventional master’s project, is that I wanted the project to inspire people who take care of land to keep doing it and new people to get involved. In order of that to happen, a lot of people had to listen to the podcasts and watch the “videos.” I tried to make this happen in several ways.

First and most importantly, I had a “blog” or web journal at www.stewardshipstories.com. I began posting to this website long before I did my first interview, writing about the project, land stewardship, and storytelling. Once I had stories produced, I began putting them up on the website. As of December 17, the website had been viewed over 1,250 times.

I also put the “videos” on YouTube. This is where the videos were hosted, but it is also where people go to look for content on the web and I hoped some people would find them there. The “videos” have had between four and forty views each, as of December 17. I also put the audio podcasts up on iTunes. iTunes does not host podcasts (so I hosted them at archive.org), but it is the first stop for many people looking for audio content. iTunes does not provide statistics about how many people have subscribed to my podcast through them.

In addition to waiting for interested people to find me on the internet, I proactively let people know about the projects either by emailing them directly, posting on forums, or emailing list-serves (see Annotated Bibliography for details).

8. Reactions

I have been very gratified by the feedback I have received on my project. People I know have told me that they liked it and provided constructive criticism. Will Sloan-Anderson, a colleague who suggested several interview subjects, wrote me:

“Hey Caroline,

I just cruised around your website again and I am so impressed. There is so much wonderful information and the interviews that I watched are great fun and informative, be it a forest land owner or someone passionately discussing her work in the Bronx. One theme that arises is how people’s perspectives change as they interact with the landscape. Whether it is “I grew up in South Bronx and never thought I would return when I left at 17” or the forest land owner who went from no cut no hunting to a sophisticated plan of management and interaction with his resource. I have always believed this for myself in the experiences I have had. For me managing resources has always opened my eyes to new challenges to preconceived notions. Nature is dynamic and people are as different as snow flakes.....It should be no surprise that this theme exists.”

I was thrilled that not only was he listening and enjoying it, but he was noticing themes that I had not even consciously addressed.

I was perhaps even happier, though, when people I did not know left comments or sent me emails. One person posted to the website, “Bravo... Terry is one of the great ones.” I received an email from another person that said, “This project looks really awesome. I look forward to hearing more of these stories.” These reactions have made me think that I am at least part way towards my goal of inspiring others.

Themes

In an ordinary thesis, this section would be called Results and Discussion. However, this project did not set out to be a scientific inquiry of any sort. There are several problems with accepting any “results” from the interviews as true. Among them:

- I did not have a random sample of people. In fact, I set out to find people whose stories would fit into my preconceived idea of what the story should be.
- I had a website in which I wrote about my ideas for what the stories should be like. My interview subjects had access to the website.

- My interview subjects got to review their podcasts before I put them out.

However, I did set out to explore several themes through these stories and I wanted to use this section to write about how those themes were manifested.

In my original prospectus, I wrote that I wanted each story to contain these elements:

- Portraying a character that listeners can both relate to and be fascinated by.
- Describe the process of doing actual work to take care of land – bring people in by showing technical, how-to description.
- Include photos, sounds and descriptions that give people a sense of a special and unique place.
- Include stories. Try to get people to tell stories and anecdotes about their work, and get pictures that go with the stories. I think the power of a good story is really what’s going to draw people in to this project.
- Give people a sense of inspiration - show what motivates people to do the work, and what they get from it.
- Talk about community –show how the land brings in other people other than the one I am interviewing.
- Talk about the larger context of the work people are doing on one piece of land – what are the threats? What is important to conserve?
- Include humor wherever possible.

How I arrived at these elements of what makes a good stewardship story is complicated.

As I wrote in introduction, many authors have called, in recent years, for new stories. Josh Stearns, a recent master’s student at the University of Massachusetts who studied the role of storytelling in land conservation (who I found through my website), wrote in an unpublished paper that all the writing on the role of language in the environmental movement

“suggest[s] only partial descriptions of how we might learn to speak more fully and completely about humans’ relationship to the land. While Forbes and the Trust for Public Land went so far as to publish a handbook on storytelling for land conservationists, the text gives only the most general instructions and is most effective when convincing not instructing people about the place of language in conservation. Although storytelling is central to land and people conservation, the act of storytelling retains a kind of mystical quality. Peter Forbes describes a variety of things storytelling can achieve, but never really considers how stories function.”

That is a problem that I had with Peter Forbes’s book as well – though it talks a lot about the need for new and better stories, it did not tell me how to write one. To really get at what makes a

story function, I had to think back to my training in creative writing. I wanted to display strong, real, interesting characters that changed over time. (I think the latter inclination, though not mentioned in the themes I set out to cover, was the one that Will Sloan Anderson picked up on in his comments). I also wanted to show the characters interacting with others, because interaction is the heart of any story. However, in stewardship stories, unlike most stories, the land had to play a starring role.

In spite of Josh Stearns' critique, there are some hints on how to tell good environmental or conservation stories buried in the writings I cited in the introduction. Holly Doremus stated,

“The new discourse, therefore, should be as much about people as it is about nature. It should explain how people can fit into nature and fit nature into their lives. It should address not only the ways nature can shape individual identity and character, but the ways it can shape, and be shaped by, human communities.”

In other words, I needed to make both the people and the land dynamic characters, which can change each other over time. Peter Forbes did have one key paragraph in his book, which otherwise did not offer specific advice on how to tell stories:

“So perhaps what we are looking for is *a language of relationships*. Aldo Leopold said, ‘There are two things that interest me: the relationships of people to each other, and the relationship of people to the land.’ Fifty years after Leopold's death, conservationists are still struggling to rethink the promise of land conservation as a force for social reform that heals people and culture by creating relationships between people and the land that positively transform them both.”

He, like Doremus, wants stories that address how people and land can change each other. In his case, he prefers stories about how they change each other for the better.

Looking here at the original goals I had for my stories and reflecting upon the themes that emerged as I created the stories, I realize that they fit fairly well into Doremus's and Forbes's call for stories. I talked with each of my interview subjects about what inspired them to care for land. In all cases, they were inspired by how it helped them to relate to other people. I had wanted to find stories about community, land, and the larger context. The themes that emerged, related to this, were, as Aldo Leopold put it, “The relationships of people to each other” and “The relationship of people to the land.” These concerns relate back to what I discussed in the

introduction – that land stewardship addresses Robert Putnam’s concerns about declining social capital, but building relationships.

The other themes that emerged from the stories have to do with Richard Louv’s ideas about the next generation’s relationship to each other and to land. I asked all of my interview subjects about their early experiences in nature, and they all brought up the importance of bringing children outside.

Inspiration

My first goal in telling stewardship stories was to have them inspire people. So, I asked my interview subjects what inspired them to take care of land. It amazed me that almost nobody talked about the landscape inspiring them directly, though they spoke about the beauty of their land in answer to other questions. Jim Caffrey did say, “I’m always grateful that I am able to live in this kind of beauty. I walk to work, I walk across the field and all too often I’ll just stop and look around and go, “Wow.” You know, it never gets old.... I think it’s spiritual as much as anything else.”

However, he and the other people I interviewed talked mainly about their love of their work and their connections with people as what inspires them to do the work day to day. Jim Caffrey, Phil Stanway and Rob Lynch all talked about enjoying the variety of the work they do and getting to build and fix things.

Many of my interviewees talked about how connecting to other people through nature was their main inspiration. Paul Strasburg said, “I now really do see myself as just a link in a long chain” of previous and future generations taking care of his property in Worthington, Massachusetts. Sarah Charlop-Powers said that she was enjoying working in the South Bronx because she gets to “help people build connections” and have other people help *her* build connections with the environment. Tony Coyler-Pendas and Terry Blunt both have worked in land protection, helping landowners to save their land forever. Yet they do not focus only on the end goal. Tony Coyler-Pendas enjoys the process of “helping landowners achieve their conservation goals.” Terry Blunt put it even more eloquently when he said, “You’re sort of preserving not just land and not just a culture but also sort of memories.” In both cases, they are valuing the relationship they have with the landowner, the relationship the landowner has with the land, and the relationships people will have with the land in the future.

The Relationship of People to the Land

Nearly everyone I interviewed talked about how the most fulfilling thing about this work for them was getting people out and enjoying the properties. Paul Strasburg, a private landowner, opens his land up for people to use. When I asked him his hopes for the future he said, “I want people to feel comfortable here. I hope they’ll come and walk it and ski it and hunt in it, when it’s appropriate, and learn to appreciate it as much as I do.” Riverland Farm is also a private organization, focusing on providing people with food from the land. Yet, by having a pick-your-own component, consciously sited in the most attractive part of the property, away from the road and near the river, they manage to bring people out to enjoy the land as well.

Tony Coyler-Pendas, Jim Caffrey, Phil Stanway, and Sarah-Charlop Powers all work or volunteer for organizations that focus on connecting land to people. Though the Trustees of Reservations is the oldest land trust, and was founded, as Jim Caffrey pointed out, to preserve land *for the public*, many land trusts have focused on protecting land for its own sake. Though there are strong ethical arguments for why land, or the species of plants and animals on it, is worthy of protection regardless of people’s use of it, Tony Coyler-Pendas explained the problem with that approach,

“A lot of land trusts throughout the country are viewed as elitist. And I think it’s justified in some ways because when you’re focused on protecting private lands, it doesn’t give people the access and a lot of times the work that you’re doing seems somewhat intangible. I mean, yes, people’s viewsheds are protected as you’re driving along the road, but it’s hard to make connection.”

Protecting land for its own sake, and not focusing on connecting people to the land leaves land trusts focused on the charge that what they are doing benefits only an elite group of people. The general public sees no benefit to them. Because many organizations have had that approach, even when land conservation professionals try to bring the public to their land it is often a challenge. “It took a long time,” Jim Caffrey said, to get across that “that’s what we want is just to have people use the properties. We’re getting that now. That’s important.”

Phil Stanway and Tony Coyler-Pendas’s organizations both went beyond opening their properties to the general public to trying to make them accessible to people with disabilities. The Columbia Land Conservancy has developed an ADA accessible hiking trail. Phil Stanway’s

group is in the planning stages of an accessible community garden. Both of them talked about how inspiring it is for them to provide access to the outdoors to people who otherwise do not have that at all.

The Relationships of People to Each Other

I set out to tell stories of how stewardship builds a sense of community among those who do it. I was interested in this subject because, personally, it is what most motivates me to continue to work in land stewardship. Many of the people I interviewed had such stories.

Phil Stanway, who had moved to Chelmsford only in the last decade, told me several times while driving around that he knew “every road” and “every corner” in the town. When we pulled up to his site, the Lime Quarry, there was a man standing in the parking lot. Phil Stanway said, “You get to learn who these people are. Nice guy. You stop and talk to them. They get to know you, you get to know them. And, it keeps the place looking nice.” Then he got out of his truck and chatted with the man for a minute. These are the sorts of incidents that build social capital for land stewards.

Paul Strasburg talked about how his neighbors work on his land, doing logging and maple syruping. He said, “I just found a sense of community in this small town – community that was alive and diverse.... And they were kind of open to an outsider coming in and being part of the community – that felt good.”

Jim Caffrey enjoys being a part of the skiing community at Notchview. He also forms groups of volunteers, people who “are really, really excited about getting out there because in the normal course of work or wherever they live, they just don’t have the opportunity to swing a hammer or swing an axe or a mattock or wield a shovel.” Though the volunteers have different jobs and lives than he does, he enjoys working with them because “as we develop a relationship, ... I can count on them.... It ends up being great, because we have a good time with everybody. They’re excited to see us, we’re happy and excited to see them, and we get some work done.”

Rob Lynch and Meghan Arquin of Riverland farm talked about being a part of the local community, through the potlucks they host, and being a part of the farming community which supports each other, emotionally and by vegetable trades, through hard times. Tony Coyler-Pendas talked about how he and his wife are excited to bring a child into his small rural

community, where his connections to people are much stronger than in Miami, where he grew up.

All of these examples definitely inspired me to want to keep working in land stewardship as a way to build social capital for myself where I now live. I would hope that it will help other see, as Peter Forbes said, “what really matters and how they can get more of it.”

Early Experiences in Nature

Because I was concerned about Nature Deficit Disorder, as I mentioned in the introduction, I asked all of my interviewees about their early experiences in nature. Children’s lack of opportunities to go outside is considered to be a bad thing for the future of the environment, because if children are not connected to it early on, they will not want to protect it. What I found out from my interview subjects surprised me quite a bit. Though everyone I interviewed had dedicated their professional and/or personal lives to taking care of land, they had not all formed a bond with that landscape as a child.

Terry Blunt did grow up on a farm and spend a lot of time outdoors as a young person. Jim Caffrey also spent a lot of time on his uncle’s farm and in the woods. The rest of my interview subjects, however, did not. Sarah Charlop-Powers grew up in the South Bronx, without even a yard. She talked about early experiences at the New York Botanical Garden as being her only early experiences in nature. Paul Strasburg grew up in Southern Arizona, “a very hot, dry place” completely unlike the woods of Western Massachusetts that he now is focused on protecting. Tony Coyler-Pendas grew up in Miami, Florida, playing “stickball and manhunt” in streets and allies, abandoned housing projects and construction dumpsites. Phil Stanway laughed when I asked him about his early experiences in nature, and said, “I lived in the city. I didn’t even start hiking until I was twenty two.” Even Meghan Arquin of Riverland Farms, though she now grows vegetables for a living, said that she “grew up eating chicken fingers and French fries and Coke. I did not like my vegetables at all.”

Yet all of them formed a deep connection to their landscape when they encountered it as adults. Paul Strasburg said “I’ll never forget the day I set foot in New England. I felt like I’d come home, like something had been missing from my life all along.” When Phil Stanway started hiking, he “loved it.” Tony Coyler-Pendas said that once his wife introduced him to nature, he “wanted to do something related to the outdoors, to be able to give something back.”

Many of them felt like their experiences were unique, because they thought that everyone in the land conservation movement formed early bonds to nature. Tony Coyler-Pendas said, “I think I’m somewhat of an anomaly.” Phil Stanway thought he was “very different than probably most... [though] a large majority of our site stewards are the same way. We’re not woodsy crunchy.” Yet they were not anomalies in my sample. Though, as I mentioned above, my sample was in no way representative or scientific, this finding did make me wonder whether our ideas about land conservation professionals and volunteers are true. Perhaps people who are introduced to nature later in life are more able to appreciate it and less able to take it for granted. Also, maybe, because they can remember the moment they were introduced to nature, they are more interested in connecting others to land. In particular, all of my interview subjects mentioned connecting the next generation to the outdoors as being very important to them.

Connecting the Next Generation to Land

When I asked Paul Strasburg about his hopes for the future of his property, he brought up his wish that his own children would one day want to live there and take care of it, but concluded that was unlikely. He was glad, though, that either way, by protecting his land he knows that future generations of owners will have to care for it well.

Tony Coyler-Pendas and Jim Caffrey talked proudly about the environmental education programs of their organizations. Terry Blunt said that a project that allows inner city youth access to nature was “one of the better, more satisfying projects” that he has done. Phil Stanway’s Open Space Stewardship tries to involve scouts. He’s also stopped the parks from being a gathering place for youth to drink beer and dump trash. Riverland Farm’s Meghan Arquin reaches children more directly. Children whose families have farm shares get to pick their own vegetables, which makes them more likely to eat them. She says, “That’s my interest originally in farming.... It’s really sweet to see how they’re learning at the farm and how excited they get.”

Jim Caffrey summed up the importance of environmental education, particularly of minority children, as “That’s the population that are [sic] going to be the opinion makers in the world to come. And if we don’t make connections with them, the natural world is not going to be foremost in people’s minds. So, that’s a really good group to work with.”

Conclusion

The people I interviewed for this project are some of the most passionate people I have met. They are engaged, day to day, in some of the most important front-line environmental work: saving plants, animals, and ecosystems. Yet, several of them described themselves as being different from the stereotypical “woody crunchy tree hugger” (as Phil Stanway put it). They are more motivated by the physical work they do, the relationships they form with others through doing it, and the joy of introducing people to the land.

I hope that this aspect of my stories will make them more suited to reaching new audiences, who are not already committed environmentalists. But more importantly, if the stories environmentalists are telling alienate even people who do environmental work, then Shellenberger and Nordhaus and others are right: there definitely needs to be a new story.

The stories of gloom and doom, from which only environmentalists can save us, are not the stories we should be telling. Since Josh Stearns and I both felt that the calls for new storytelling were deficient in instructions on how to do it, I thought I would conclude my project by providing instructions for the elements of a good stewardship story. It should be about:

1. “The relationships of people to each other” and how they work together.
2. “The relationship of people to the land.”
3. How people and land influence each other and both change over time.
4. The funny things and quirky creative solutions that emerge along the way.

The stories should be hopeful. But even more specifically, they should be focused around people.

Even the new, hopeful stories told by land conservation organizations begin with sweeping views and descriptions of the wildlife and beauty of the place. I thought that the stories I told would be like that, but those things almost never came up in my interviews. The people I interviewed really were not motivated primarily by their passive connection to a beautiful landscape. That landscape was the setting for active engagement – forestry, farming, maple syruping, building trails, teaching children – and the important relationships that they formed while doing that work. Their connection to the land is part of what motivates them. But a connection to other people, through land, is more what keeps them going and what made their stories fun to listen to. Land conservation organizations need to remember that key element in their storytelling and in how they choose to work.

Annotated Bibliography

Works Cited:

Doremus, Holly. Washington and Lee Law Review. Winter 2000, V57N1. Lexington, Virginia: Washington and Lee University. The Rhetoric and Reality of Nature Protection: Towards a New Discourse, pp 11-73. (From Community Forestry Reading Packet).

Forbes, Peter. The Story Handbook: Language and Storytelling for Land Conservationists. San Francisco, California: A Center for Land and People Book, Trust for Public Land, 2002.

Louv, Richard. Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder. Algonquin Books, 2008.

Putnam, Robert D. Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000.

Shellenberger, Michael and Ted Nordhaus. 2004. "The Death of Environmentalism." Environment V. 3 pp 3-37. (From Community Forestry Reading Packet).

Stearns, Joshua. 2006. "Speaking of Nature: Bridging the Gap Between Environmental Activism and Environmental Rhetoric." Unpublished Paper.

Helpers:

These people and organizations advised me on the project and got me started.

Anderson, Will Sloan. Land steward at the Franklin Land Trust, was a sounding board and encouragement in the early stages of the project and suggested a lot of people for me to speak with.

Burch, William. Yale University. My official advisor, Bill Burch was full of enthusiasm and support.

Catanzaro, Paul. www.masswoods.net. Teaches a class at the University of Massachusetts on Land Conservation. He gave me advice, early on, on interviewing techniques and how to find more information.

Forbes, Peter, Executive Director of the Center for Whole Communities www.wholecommunities.com . We spoke on October 30 and he gave me some good advice. Among the things he said were to not be afraid to shy away from dark subjects. He said that often people want stories to be inspirational and light, but that the dark and difficult things are often where the meat of the story really is and what people really connect to. When I reflected upon the stories that have most inspired me, I realized he was right. That advice definitely influenced the questions I asked and the final stories I produced.

Long Haul Productions. <http://www.longhaulpro.org/> - Dan Collison and Elizabeth Meister run this company. They do audio for NPR and other radio, much of it about the environment. They gave a presentation, which I attended at the LTA Rally in September, in which they suggested picking people who are “self starters” and good talkers. They recommended not interrupting your interview subject and leaving silence – because people say the best things when you leave some silence. I found that to be true.

McMahon, David. My partner, is a musician. He provided expert help in sorting through advice on digital field recorders and helped me pick the best one. He gave me a tutorial in how to use Audacity, pointed me towards archive.com, and he provided detailed feedback on all of my creations.

Saunders, Laurie. Does a show about nature on NPR called “Field Notes.” www.wfcr.org/field_notes/team.html. She gave me extensive advice about how to do interviews (she suggested to make sure to collect the background noise, for ambiance, and to not interrupt people) and about what equipment to get.

Transom. www.transom.com a website about independent radio. They provide a lot of tips about how to interview. Their technology section is what led me to pick my recorder.

Tucker, Jesse the creator of the videos at <http://www.mississippivalleyconservancy.org/videos.html> gave me encouragement and technical advice about equipment.

Technical How To:

I read these sources at the beginning of the project to learn how to use technology to tell stories online with audio and pictures. They helped me figure out what hardware, software and services to use and, more broadly, what the conventions are for telling stories online.

Boutell.com <http://www.boutell.com/newfaq/creating/makevideopodcast.html> How to distribute video online.

Geek Brief. <http://www.geekbrief.tv/about/how-to-start-a-podcast>. Specific to audio podcasting.

<http://www.how-to-podcast-tutorial.com/> The one I most used, a simple tutorial on how to create an audio podcast and get it distributed.

iLounge <http://www.ilounge.com/index.php/articles/comments/beginners-guide-to-podcast-creation/> Specific focus on audio podcasting.

Story Center, The. <http://www.storycenter.org/cookbook.pdf> - intro chapters of how to do “Digital storytelling” including some basics about the methods.

Story Photography. http://www.storyphoto.com/multimedia/multimedia_links2.html

Tech Soup. <http://www.techsoup.org/learningcenter/internet/page5510.cfm>. Technology advice for Non-Profits, how to do podcasting.

Web Services and Software:

These are the programs and web services I used to create and distribute my stories.

Archive.org provides free audio hosting as it attempts to create a permanent catalog of the internet. It has a good mission, which I support, of making information free and available to everyone. However, its interface is very quirky and difficult to use and the site is often down or slow. I do not think that there are any free alternatives that do not put their own advertisements into your audio, however.

Audacity – at <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/> - is a free audio editing software. It was the universal recommendation from all of my helpers. It is very easy to use and quite powerful – a good combination.

FeedBurner.com – the easiest way, based on what I read, to make your podcast available to iTunes and other podcatchers. It is free and easy to use.

iTunes – I wanted my podcast to be on iTunes, because that seemed like an important way that people find podcasts. Getting your podcast on iTunes is not a terribly easy process. Also, you cannot host your podcast on iTunes, it must be hosted elsewhere (thus, Archive.org). They do not provide usage information, so I do not know whether anyone has found my podcast on iTunes. They provide information on their rules here:
<http://www.apple.com/itunes/whatson/podcasts/specs.html>

Windows Media Player. Technically not free, but it was already loaded on my computer, so I used it to create the “videos.” It was more powerful than I needed, though probably not good enough for real video editing. It was easy to use.

Wordpress.com provides free web hosting and a platform for blogging. It made it easy to create my website (www.stewardshipstories.com) without knowing any html or computer programming. If I paid money, I could have hosted all of the audio and video on there as well, but I did not want to do that, so I used some of these other free services. They have a user forum for help with the more complicated features, and I used that quite a bit.

YouTube.com provides free hosting and another way for people to find video creations. I posted my videos on YouTube. It also allowed me to find other groups doing similar things and link to them.

Online Communities:

In addition to contacting my friends and colleagues directly, I used these online communities to let people know about my project.

Conservation Common. www.conservationcommon.com A website run by the Putnam Conservation Institute of the Trustees of Reservations. It is open to anyone working on land

conservation in Massachusetts. I posted on there with a request for interviewing people and then used it to get listeners.

Land Trust Alliance list-serv. <http://www.landtrustalliance.org/resources/listservs>. An email list of land trust professionals, with several thousand subscribers. I emailed them to let them know about the project.

Nature Conservancy, The – Stewardship Email List. I emailed my former colleagues at the Nature Conservancy and asked them to send out information about the project to this email list of land stewardship professionals who work for the Nature Conservancy.

Examples of Stories

When I was starting the project, I looked around for examples of people telling stories online, as inspiration for my own storytelling.

General Stories:

Moth, the. www.themoth.com. Good stories, which are told online with only audio. It is a very popular website.

Story Center. <http://www.storycenter.org/stories/>. Stories with the “Digital Storytelling” method.

Stories about Land Conservation:

I found what I thought to be surprisingly few land trusts using the internet to tell stories about land. These are the ones I found.

<http://conserveland.org/stories/> - html text and pictures

http://www.protectcoastalmaine.org/Choices/Story_01.htm - videos about land protection

<http://www.greeninfo.org/html/googleEarth.html> - using google earth

<http://www.sjpt.org/stories/?tab=18> – text and pictures

<http://www.landtrustalliance.org/LTA/www/community/Regions/northwest/success-stories/island-community> - success stories - text and pictures

<http://support.nature.org/site/PageServer?pagename=podcast> - Nature Conservancy stories of people and place – audio only

<http://www.mississippivalleyconservancy.org/videos.html> - “video podcasts” about what they’re doing

http://www.masswoods.net/future_land/cases/ - Massachusetts case studies of conservation, most with text and pictures, some with audio, one with video

http://hci.thetrustees.org/pages/30771_my_place_is_the_highlands.cfm - text and pictures, western mass focus

<http://massacorn.net/> - more western ma focus

http://www.wfcr.org/field_notes/team.html. Laurie Saunders and others tell stories about Western Massachusetts nature. A traditional radio show that I listen to.

Appendix 1 – Interview Questions for Each Interview Subject

Interview 1: Paul Strasburg

I used the general interview questions, and realized I should have tailored them more to him. So, I rewrote the interview questions for each interview after that.

Interview 2: Tony Coyler Pendas

- How long have you been involved with the Columbia Land Conservancy?
- What was your first experience in nature? Who got you involved in this kind of work?
- What do you do with them?
- Can you tell me some about the history and philosophy of CLC? In particular, I notice that your mission statement includes “strengthening connections between people and the land” – how does the organization do that?
- Can you describe the landscape that CLC protects?
- Can you tell me some stories of some recent projects?
- What motivates you to do this work?
- What is your favorite CLC property?
- What kinds of people use CLC public conservation areas? Why are they called public conservation areas?
- How do you think CLC’s work in land conservation has affected the community? Any specific examples of people who have been affected?
- How has working for CLC changed you?
- What are your hopes for this place in the future?
- Who else do you know who takes care of land, that you think I should interview?
- Pictures – do you have any good pictures of anything we’ve talked about that you could send me? Can I use photos on the website?

Interview 3: Sarah Charlop-Powers

When I wrote these questions, I did not know that she worked on the South Bronx Greenway. That ended up being a good part of what we talked about.

- Name
- Talk about just scenic Hudson or other things too?
- Your work with Scenic Hudson: Your job title, What you did, How long you worked there
- Goals for the future after school
- What was your first experience in nature? Who got you involved in this kind of work? What motivates you to do this work day to day?
- Can you tell me some about the history and philosophy of Scenic Hudson?
- Can you describe the landscape that Scenic Hudson protects?
- Can you tell me some stories of some of your projects and events? A big success, something that was difficult, an interesting person.
- What do you call Scenic Hudson properties and why?
- What kinds of people use Scenic Hudson Properties?
- How do you think Scenic Hudson’s work in land conservation has affected the community? Any specific examples of people who have been affected?

- How did working for Scenic Hudson change you?
- What are your hopes for Scenic Hudson and the Hudson Valley in the future?
- Pictures – do you have any good pictures of anything we’ve talked about that you could send me? Can I use photos on the website?

Interview 4: Terry Blunt

Terry was great at telling stories. I asked him all the questions, but he spent most of our time answering, “Can you tell me some stories of some of your projects.”

- Name and what you do.
- Your work with the state: Your job titles, What you did, How long you worked there
- What was your first experience in nature? Who got you involved in this kind of work? What motivates you to do this work day to day?
- Can you tell me some about working for the state? What were the history and philosophy of the state programs you worked on?
- Can you describe a typical day of work for the state? What did you do?
- You’ve been focused on the Connecticut River Valley for much of your career. Can you describe this place and what’s important about it?
- Can you tell me some stories of some of your projects? A big success, something that was difficult, an interesting person.
- The land that you’ve protected – how much land, where? What kinds of people use it?
- And tell me about your current business – Conservation Works – what do you do day to day in that? Some interesting projects in that?
- How do you think your work in land conservation has affected the community? Any specific examples of people you’ve met who have been affected?
- How has your work in land conservation changed you?
- What are your hopes for the Connecticut River Valley in the future?
- Pictures – do you have any good pictures of anything we’ve talked about that you could send me?

Interview 5: Phil Stanway

Phil did not allow me to ask a question from my list until we were almost done with the interview. He has his story and he started telling it as soon as I got there.

- What is the history of the Chelmsford Open Space Stewardship Program?
- What is your history?
 - How long have you lived in this town?
 - Where are you from?
 - How long have you been working with the Chelmsford Open Space Stewardship Program?
- What does the Chelmsford Open Space Stewardship Program do? Can you tell me about some of your recent events and projects?
- What motivates you to do it?
- What was your first experience in this kind of work? Who got you involved?
- What is your favorite Chelmsford property?
- What kinds of people use Open Space in Chelmsford? Who helps you with it? How do you think this property affects other people?

- How has working on this project changed you?
- What are your hopes for this place in the future?
- Who else do you know who takes care of land, that you think I should interview?

Interview 6: Jim Caffrey

This was probably the most straight up interview. We went through all the questions, in order.

- Name and what you do.
- Your work with the Trustees: Your job titles, What you did, How long you worked there
- What was your first experience in nature? Who got you involved in this kind of work? What motivates you to do this work day to day?
- Can you tell me some about working for the Trustees of Reservations? What is the history and philosophy of the organization?
- What does the Trustees call its properties and why?
- Can you describe a typical day of work for the Trustees? What do you do?
- Can you describe the region your work has been focused on? What does it look like? What are the people like? What's important about it?
- Can you tell me some stories of some of your projects? A big success, something that was difficult, an interesting person.
- Can you describe some of your favorite properties that you take care of?
- How do you think the reservations affect the people living around them and visiting them? Any specific examples of people you've met who have been affected?
- How has your work in land stewardship changed you?
- What are your hopes for this region in the future?
- Pictures – do you have any good pictures of anything we've talked about that you could send me? Do you think I can use the photos on the website?

Interview 7: Riverland Farm

This was the only interview where I interviewed two people. I think that added a really nice dynamic to the audio, because I was able to capture their relationship as well as their story.

- Name and what you do.
- What is the history of this farm and how long have you had it?
- The farm is permanently protected as farmland, right? How does that affect your work? How do you feel about it?
- What first got you involved in farming? How long have you been doing it?
- What do you do on the farm? What's a typical day like for the different seasons? What do you grow?
- What motivates you to work on this day to day? What do you like about farming?
- Can you talk some about this region? What is it like as a place to farm? A place to live?
- Tell me about the CSA. What is a CSA? How many subscribers do you have? How do you think the CSA affects their lives?
- What are some of your favorite places on the farm?
- How has your work as farmers changed you?
- What are your hopes for this region in the future?

- Pictures – do you have any good pictures of anything we've talked about that you could send me? Do you think I can use the photos on the website?