



New Bearings

*Conservation-Based Development
In the Rain Forests of Home*

The Strategic Vision of Ecotrust

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Acknowledgments

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Gary Miranda contributed great insight and countless hours in writing this paper. We are also grateful to Barbara Stafford for creating the cover watercolor, which shows the original extent of coastal temperate rain forest in North America.

Ecotrust strives to be a learning organization, constantly seeking the experience of others who are attempting to integrate conservation and development. We anticipate changes in our course over the next five to ten years, but hope that our principles and overall vision will remain constant. We invite and welcome any thoughts on our strategies for conservation-based development in the rain forests of home.

Beginnings

Any hopefulness for the future of civilization is based on the reasonable expectation that humanity is still only beginning its course.

—W. R. Inge

Introduction

Beginnings and hopefulness go together: to begin anything assumes hope. To remain an organization that hopes to find common ground between conservation and development may seem at first to be going beyond the bounds of “reasonable expectation.” The perceived antagonism between ecology and economy is so deeply ingrained in the public imagination that finding common ground is not an easy task. We at Ecotrust believe it to be a necessary task, however, if environmentalism is to move beyond protest.

As Ecotrust begins its course, we know that we are hoping for a lot — a future in which people with diverse interests will pool their knowledge and resources for their mutual benefit. That future is uncharted territory. We have no maps. What we do have

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is a philosophy, a kind of mental compass by which communities can take new bearings in relation to their surroundings and move toward a future of ecological and economic soundness. This paper is an attempt to describe that future and to explain how we hope to get there.

Ecotrust is a private, nonprofit organization with a committed board of directors and a small staff of professionals with expertise in economic development, institution building, ecosystem science, policy, and fund raising. The settings for our work are four coastal communities that represent a range of ecological, cultural, and social conditions along the north-south continuum of the temperate rain forests of North America: Willapa Bay in southwest Washington; Clayoquot Sound and the greater Gardner Canal/Kitlope ecosystem, both in British Columbia; and the Prince William Sound/Copper River area of the northern Gulf of Alaska. This choice of setting is not incidental to our vision or to our beginnings. In March of 1991, realizing that credibility in the tropical rain forests around the world hinged on practicing at home what was being preached abroad, the founders of Conservation International helped create Ecotrust to work in the largest area of temperate rain forest left anywhere in the world, the western coastal forests of North America.

It is in the rain forests of home, then, that we plan to take new bearings and set new directions. We say "new," but in fact the bearings we refer to have been plotted by others before us. Over forty years ago, for example, the pioneer environmentalist Aldo Leopold urged a change in "the role of Homo sapiens from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it." As the intervening four decades have demonstrated, however, that change has been slow in coming — largely because conservationists and developers have traditionally seen each other as natural enemies rather than potential allies. But when two things are said to be opposite, it is often wise to look closer, and to find out what they have in common.

Acknowledging humankind as an inseparable part of the natural world, Ecotrust proposes a new alliance between conservation and development.

Unlearning the Old

The real difficulty in changing the course of any enterprise lies not in developing new ideas but in escaping from old ones.

— John Maynard Keynes

Conservation and Development: The Fundamental Flaw

Three centuries ago, the English philosopher Francis Bacon sounded the battle cry of a “New Science” based on “the power and dominion of the human race over the universe.” “We must put nature to the rack,” Bacon proclaimed, “and compel her to answer our questions.” It was a prophetic metaphor, one that would become more telling as the new science begat new technologies, which in turn begat industrial development.

Science has indeed wrested much information from nature since the time of Bacon, and industrial development has used much of that information to the benefit of us all. But we have accomplished these feats and gained these benefits at a great price. By setting ourselves up as the interrogators and manipulators of nature, we have lost our sense of oneness with the rest of the natural world — with plants and animals, mountains and forests,

rivers and seas. We have accumulated more information about these things than in any previous era of human history, but we have forgotten what is perhaps most important — that plants and animals, mountains and forests, rivers and seas are all parts of the one planet on which we too draw our breath as natural beings.

The excesses of industrial development have led many conservationists to the conclusion that they must “save the planet” by separating undisturbed natural areas from human threats and pressures. As a protest movement, this “museum science” approach to conservation has been both necessary and effective in raising public awareness of the dangers that industrial development poses to the environment. But as a long-term policy it will not work, and for a simple reason. By defining itself as a reaction to the excesses of traditional economic development, traditional conservation enters the game on development’s terms. Traditional development separates humankind from nature with the aim of exploiting the latter for the benefit of the former; traditional conservation accepts that separation with the aim of protecting nature from human exploitation. “Conquer nature” and “Save the planet” are flip sides of the same fundamental flaw.

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We at Ecotrust believe that conservation must base its mission on a new approach, one that engages the forces of social and economic development not on the footing of enemies in attack or retreat, but of allies who recognize humanity as an inseparable part of the natural world.

The Grounds for Partnership: Local People

Ecotrust’s mission is to integrate conservation and development by building on the cultural and economic traditions of local communities. Why local communities? Because local people cannot afford to see their environment as an object to be exploited or saved. Their economic well-being, and indeed their social well-

being, is interwoven with the environment in such a way that either developing or saving their environment means developing or saving themselves in that environment. Local people don't want to save the environment any more than they want to conquer it; what they want to do is live in it. If they are to do this, they must concern themselves with conserving and restoring the natural resources on which their lives and livelihoods depend.

Ecotrust's primary interest lies in the business of conservation, not in the conservation of businesses. This interest is not driven by an abstract respect for natural ecosystems, but by a passion for places in which we have witnessed a beauty and have sensed an integrity that speaks to a potential, or perhaps lost, integrity within ourselves and those around us — places in which we have fished, farmed, or grown up. Intuitively or otherwise, we recognize that our health as human beings depends on conserving and restoring such places.

In this respect, our motivation is not much different from that of traditional conservationists. The difference lies, rather, in the recognition that our interests are not only compatible with, but inseparable from, the interests of the local people who depend on these places for their livelihoods. We recognize, in short, that their goal, long-term economic prosperity, is inevitably bound up with our goal, the conservation and restoration of ecosystems.

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The Partnership in Context: The Rain Forests of Home

The communities in which Ecotrust works span a wide range of geographic, biological, and cultural differences, but they also share a common feature: their means of livelihood—and, in the case of indigenous peoples, their ways of life—bind them inextricably to the destiny of their ecological systems. This choice of setting is an important part of our strategic vision: if we are to foster ecologically and economically healthy communities, we need first

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to investigate existing systems in which the relation of the parts to the whole remains relatively in balance. Only by understanding the dynamics of healthy ecosystems and, within those ecosystems, human communities that are able to engage in economic activity without destroying the ecological base on which that activity ultimately depends, can we hope to support and replicate such ecosystems and communities.

We begin, therefore, in the temperate rain forests of western North America, which stretch from the Alaska Peninsula to the coastal redwoods of California. Small, and getting smaller, these coastal forests constitute the largest area of temperate rain forest remaining anywhere in the world. Though always relatively rare, temperate rain forests could once be found in various places around the globe: in Europe and Asia, Japan, Tasmania, and New Zealand, as well as in North and South America. Today over half of these—including those in Iceland, Ireland, Scotland, and Norway, and those along the eastern coast of the Black Sea and the southwest coast of Japan—have been logged and converted to other uses. The largest and most important of those that remain—in New Zealand, Tasmania, Chile, and North America—are in the process of meeting a similar fate.

This story is unfortunately familiar—too familiar. We have all heard it many times and would probably agree that the loss of these forests—whether we see them primarily as natural wonders or natural resources—is an important matter; something should be done about it. But familiarity, combined with the sheer magnitude of the problem, breeds inertia—or, worse, sentimentality. What we need, even more than technological knowhow, is a sense of possibilities—not models, exactly, but examples that serve as a basis for hopefulness and action. To find them, we need to enter the rain forests of home, and to look closer.

Natural ecosystems, like many traditional native cultures, provide a working example for modern communities, an example in which living beings fulfill their needs without exhausting the resources upon which they depend.

Learning from the Land, Learning from the People

Good agriculture and forestry cannot be “invented” by self-styled smart people in offices and laboratories and then sold at the highest profit to the supposedly dumb country people. That is not the way good land use comes about.

— Wendell Berry

Ecosystem as Example: The Kitlope

We enter, first, the greater Kitlope ecosystem, which has for millennia been the home of the Haisla, the First Nation people in the Gardner Canal area of British Columbia’s north coast. The greater Kitlope ecosystem stretches from Cornwall Point in the north to the majestic ice fields and striking glacial landscape at the headwaters of the Tezwa and Kitlope rivers in the south. Its million acres constitute the largest known undisturbed temperate rain forest watershed complex in the world.

Like all temperate rain forests, the Kitlope is a self-organizing, self-regulating system in which living beings actively share

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in developing and maintaining the environmental conditions that sustain them. Forest, river, estuaries, ocean, and people are inextricably linked in a continuous cycle of exchange, a cycle for which the salmon that traverse these waterways are a dramatic symbol. What one first notices upon entering a temperate rain forest, however, are the trees — spruce, hemlock, fir, and cedar — among the largest and oldest in the world. Every part of these trees, living or dead, is home to a whole community of plants, insects, birds, and mammals. This includes the roots. It includes the snags, standing dead trees whose cavities serve as dens for mammals as large as black bears or, higher up, as nesting sites for many of the forest bird species and as dens for squirrels, martens, and bobcats. It includes the fallen “nurse logs,” which incubate seedlings and recycle organic matter back to the life of the forest.

Such cycles are the heartbeat of the temperate rain forests of North America. In the summer, warm air currents meet the cold Pacific Coast waters and create dense fog banks, providing moisture for the trees and preventing the catastrophic fires that ravage other kinds of forests. In the winter, fierce storms whirl out of the north and west, encounter and sweep over the coast, and are forced up into the cooler air of the coastal mountain ranges. Water condenses, deluges the trees, and by way of the forest rivers returns to the sea. As the rivers near the sea, forest life imperceptibly changes to marine life. At the mouths of the rivers, the subtle exchange between forest and sea is complete. The forest reaches out to influence and nourish life in the sea; the sea furnishes the wind and rain necessary for the trees to reach their enormous height and age.

Among the temperate rain forests of the world, the Kitlope is nearly pristine, which makes it an ideal setting for scientific research on natural ecosystems. Equally as important, however, it supplies a working example of living beings fulfilling their own needs while nourishing other life — a kind of dynamic tension between self-interest and altruism. Nature teaches by example, and what it can teach us is nothing less than how to live with one

another and with the ecosystems of which we are a part.

This is no sentimental fantasy. For thousands of years, in fact, the Haisla people have been applying these lessons of the Kitlope to their human economy. The Haisla economy is based on a recognition of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all living things. Intrinsic to this view is the concept that human beings are but one part of nature and not dominant over it. If we are to avoid turning the quest for scientific knowledge into merely another form of exploitation, we would do well to take our bearings from such cultural values.

Gift Exchange as Example: The Haisla

The Haisla people's relationship with the land is expressed in a document called the "Kitlope Declaration of the Haisla Nation." The Kitlope Declaration is not a "Bill of Rights;" in fact, the word "right" is not mentioned at all. Instead, the Declaration speaks of the Haisla's obligations—of "a trust" and "a solemn, sacred duty." It implicitly recognizes that the rights of the Haisla are based on obligations, which in turn are based on certain gifts. The land "is given to us" as a trust to "nourish our bodies and spirits with its gifts." Again: "Our laws require that we make you welcome, and share our most precious gifts with you."

The central concept of the Kitlope Declaration is summarized in the statement: "For we do not own this land so much as the land owns us. The land is part of us, and we are part of the land." To understand this concept, we need to realize that we are dealing with a culture and an economy based on gift exchange. A basic principle of this economy is that the abundance that comes as a gift must be shared with others and given back, not kept as if it were the return on private capital.

Perhaps the simplest illustration of the principles involved in gift exchange is the ancient tribal ceremony associated with the

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first salmon of each season. In most coastal cultures, the first salmon to appear in the rivers was given an elaborate welcome, as though it were a visiting chief from a neighboring tribe. The ceremony included a formal speech of welcome and songs, after which everyone was given a piece of this fish to eat. Then—and here is where the gift exchange comes in—the bones of the salmon were returned to the water. The belief was that the bones would reassemble once they had washed out to sea and that the fish would return to its home and revert to a human form. If this ceremony was not followed, the salmon would be offended and might not return the following year with their gift of winter food.

Now, the essential economic wisdom of the first salmon ceremony lies not in the details of the ceremony, but in two underlying principles: first, part of the gift is consumed and part is given back, and second, the objects of the ritual remain plentiful precisely because they are treated as gifts. The essence of the ceremony is to establish a formal give-and-take relationship with nature that acknowledges human participation in, and dependence on, natural abundance. When such a relationship is established, we respond to nature as part of ourselves, not as an alien object to be exploited. That is, the economy of gift exchange brings with it a built-in check on the destruction of its resources, since to destroy nature's renewable wealth is to destroy ourselves.

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From Gift Exchange to Market Economy

Most modern communities are a far cry from indigenous people who for millennia have lived in equilibrium with their environment according to the principles of gift exchange. How can we apply the lessons we learn from the Kitlope and the Haisla to modern market conditions—specifically, to rural communities whose economies are based on natural resources and whose markets may be national and even global in reach?

Through careful stewardship and harvesting, such communities can export ecosystem goods and services and use some of the revenues to maintain the productivity of their ecosystem—gift exchange on a grand scale. On the national and global scale, certainly, the demand for such goods and services—high quality timber, organic farm products, fish and shellfish, wild areas for tourism—is increasing even as the supply dwindles. Those who can fill this demand—not to mention the growing public demand for clean air and unpolluted water—will enjoy an increasing advantage in the marketplace. Moreover, the current expansion in socially responsible investing may well give ecologically sound businesses greater access to capital, offsetting the competitive edge of exploitive businesses. Just as the Kitlope and the Haisla economy of gift exchange provide a working example for modern rural communities, such communities can, by embracing similar values, provide a working example of ecologically sound business practices in a market economy.

We don't pretend that any of this will be easy. We do contend that it can be done. Ecotrust is founded on the belief that local communities can and must build the capacity to meet the economic and social needs of the people who live there while replenishing the natural resources on which the future of the community depends.

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A Case in Point: Willapa Bay

We enter, in this spirit, Willapa Bay, which is located on the southwest coast of Washington State, just north of the mouth of the Columbia River. While far more altered by human activity than the Kitlope, the 680,000-acre Willapa Bay estuary and watershed remain perhaps the most productive ecosystem in North America. It is one of the five largest oyster-producing areas in the world and is among the cleanest of the large estuaries

in the continental United States. The people here may not talk about “gifts” and “sacred trusts,” but they take pride in their stewardship of the national treasure in their back yard.

The nineteen thousand people who live in the Willapa Bay ecosystem depend for their livelihoods on farming, forestry, fishing, and tourism. All of these industries depend in turn on the health and quality of the Willapa ecosystem — the first three by exporting natural resources or crops; the last, tourism, by temporarily importing people and thereby supporting jobs that depend on the health and attractiveness of the physical environment. Not many people here get rich, but the ecosystem on which they depend gives them choices, some sense of security, and a cherished way of life.

But that way of life has been compromised by past changes and is threatened by omens of changes to come. The native shellfish have been outnumbered by exotic species, and current oyster farming is threatened by sedimentation, exotic saltgrass, and epidemic populations of sand and mud shrimp. The original, immense, varied old growth forests have been replaced by genetically selected, single-aged stands of Douglas fir and western hemlock, all slated to be clearcut at forty-five to fifty-five years of age. Native runs of chum, chinook, and coho salmon in many streams were destroyed years ago by the conversion of wetland to farmland and the installation of tide gates, as well as by flood logging, overfishing, and fish hatcheries. Biocides are being used in forests, farms, and the estuary, with insufficient understanding of downstream or long-term effects. Sewage systems have leaked into the bay.

Each of these threats to the ecosystem represents a threat to the quality of life.

Each of these threats to the ecosystem represents a threat to the economy and to the quality of life of the Willapa Bay communities. The ecosystem’s principal county is among the bottom third of Washington State in per capita income and above the average in unemployment. To the people of the Willapa Bay community, these statistics translate into the fact that they are losing what may be their most important natural resource of all, their

young people. Lured away by brighter prospects in the cities, these young people may also be replaced by their non-indigenous counterparts—relatively affluent refugees from the cities—but in terms of their instincts for the ecosystem, they are irreplaceable.

Realizing that their ability to expand rather than narrow their choices depends on the health of their ecosystem, the people of Willapa Bay are also beginning to recognize that cumulative pressures on that ecosystem are fast exhausting their natural capital. And this is precisely where the goals and means of the Willapa Bay communities and those of Ecotrust intersect. Local entrepreneurs need access to the information, knowledge, and capital required to develop businesses that will also conserve and restore the natural resources on which those businesses depend. Ecotrust needs the indispensable tools of local initiative, traditions, self-interest, and knowledge that can be supplied only by those who control development within an ecosystem that we hope to see conserved and restored. Here, then, is where the potential for partnership comes into play, a classic case of win-win.

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Means and Ends: The Partnership in Action

In 1991 Ecotrust joined with the people of Willapa Bay to create the Willapa Alliance, a local initiative to promote ecosystem restoration and economic development in the Willapa watershed. The members of the Alliance are local residents, along with representatives of major landowners, The Nature Conservancy of Washington, and Ecotrust. All of the parties are committed to sustaining the diversity and health of Willapa's unique environment, the local economy, and the people who live there.

Shorebank Corporation is a federally regulated bank holding company that has earned an international reputation for its innovative work in Chicago's South Shore neighborhood and elsewhere. In 1992 Shorebank and Ecotrust formed a partnership to

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bring the techniques of community development banking to conservation. Shoretrust, The First Environmental BancorporationSM, will be a Northwest bank holding company, itself a wholly owned subsidiary of Shorebank Corporation. It will comprise a family of related for-profit and nonprofit business development organizations, including a development bank. The first member of this family is ShoreTrust Trading Group, a nonprofit, business-support organization which began operation in Willapa Bay in 1994, offering market assistance, business development services, and access to credit to businesses whose practices conserve and restore ecosystem vitality and diversity. Loans from a high-risk revolving loan fund are provided to businesses which meet both environmental and business criteria. EcoDepositsSM — federally insured money market, checking, and savings accounts, as well as certificates of deposit — in South Shore Bank also support ShoreTrust's environmental lending in the Willapa Bay region.

The Natural Capital Fund

These and other innovative initiatives hold great promise. They also require that Ecotrust have resources to build strategic partnerships such as that with Shorebank Corporation. We have therefore established the Natural Capital Fund, a pool of working capital which we use to leverage innovative program opportunities and to invest in working relationships with other organizations.

Ecotrust helps local communities to identify activities that make economic and ecological sense, and to find the information and the financial resources that are needed to support such activities.

Learning by Going

I learn by going where I have to go.

—Theodore Roethke

Catalyst and Broker

In supporting patterns of economic development that in turn support the health of natural ecosystems, Ecotrust's strategy is to act as catalyst and broker. As a catalyst, we work with local residents and organizations to identify problems, clarify issues, generate ideas, decide on courses of action, and develop step-by-step plans. As a broker, we help them to find the resources and develop their capacity to implement the plans.

Local people, however, are understandably wary of outsiders, especially of those who claim to have their interests at heart. This is why we acknowledge up front that our interests and those of the local communities will be similar but not identical, and that various interests within the community will also be at odds with one another. An important part of our role as catalyst, therefore, is to help ensure that all concerned parties are directly involved in setting the goals, planning the means, and sharing

the accountability and the benefits. Our catalyst role will vary depending on local cultures, traditions, politics, and circumstances, but it invariably involves negotiation.

Our role as broker—helping local people mobilize resources once they have developed a plan—will also vary from site to site and from project to project. Sometimes, though not as often as most people might assume, the needed resource will be money; more often it will be information or education, access to experts in a given field, or opportunities for influencing governmental policy. Sometimes it will be some combination of these, and just as often it will be something we cannot even imagine in advance. Whatever it is, Ecotrust's job is to help the local people identify, find, and use it.

We do not enter a community with goals, models, or agendas to be imposed willy-nilly on the local landscape. Nor do we support every activity that local individuals and institutions come up with. What we do is develop working partnerships with local individuals and groups who are interested in sustaining economic development by conserving and restoring their ecosystems. As we noted earlier, there are no maps, nor are there predetermined destinations. But there are directions in which to move, some of which may be wiser than others.

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An Instrument for Action

What Ecotrust brings to the communities, therefore, is a kind of compass, an instrument by which local individuals and institutions can determine their present position, set new bearings that are economically and ecologically sound, and follow the courses agreed upon. The cardinal points on Ecotrust's compass are:

- **Understanding** through ecosystem-level research, monitoring of ecological and economic trends, and education;

■ **Conservation** through protection, careful stewardship, and restoration of soils, waters, plants, animals, and natural ecological processes;

■ **Economic Development** through supporting ecologically sensitive and economically sound businesses;

■ **Policy Reform** through establishing local experience and needs as the basis to inform local, regional, state, provincial, and national government regulations.

These cardinal points represent both a range of directions in which to move and a range of capacities that local individuals and organizations will need if they are to move successfully in those directions. As the local individuals and organizations become more adept at using the compass to set bearings and follow courses, Ecotrust's dual role as catalyst and broker will change. We take it as a given, in fact, that change and the unexpected are both healthy and inevitable. This means, among other things, that as Ecotrust helps the local communities develop their capacity to move in directions that make economic and ecological sense, everyone involved must be ready for surprises and be willing to change course when the situation calls for it.

But mainly it means that all the parties involved must be willing to start out, however scanty our collective knowledge of the terrain. The effort to understand the complex dynamics within ecosystems is still in its infancy, as is the effort to interpret economic trends within communities. But if we wait for new generations to acquire the knowledge we lack, they may inherit so little of the original ecosystems that their greater knowledge will be of less use.

Ecotrust's approach, therefore, is to start out and to learn by going—that is, to increase local knowledge and capacity by helping communities embark on a set of innovative courses. This is why we helped to initiate both the Willapa Alliance and Shoretrust Trading Group. It is why, in Prince William Sound, Alaska, we helped to establish a community-based science center in the

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No amount of outside intervention can substitute for the tenacity and commitment of those who live in a place and who have most at stake in its future.

fishing town of Cordova. It is why, in Clayoquot Sound, British Columbia, we helped to establish the Clayoquot Biosphere Project, fellowships for local leadership, and cooperative fish and shellfish management projects with two of the local native bands. It is why, in January of 1992, we took part in convening a conference of twenty-three conservationists, government representatives, members of the Haisla Nation, and officials from Eurocan, the company that held logging rights to the Kitlope, which led in 1994 to the protection of the last remaining unlogged temperate rain forest of its size on the planet. Implicit in all of these activities and programs is a single underlying principle: no amount of outside intervention can substitute for the tenacity and commitment of those who live in a place and who have most at stake in its future.

Beyond the Local

We have focused throughout this paper on local places, peoples, and strategies. We have said nothing about the doubling of the human population, the unprecedented extinction of species worldwide, the imbalances of the world economy, or the transformation of the global atmosphere. These are not abstractions, but realities, and our failure to address them is not an oversight. Indeed, we would have to live in an area more remote than any we have visited not to be aware of these issues and of their implications for the future of all living things.

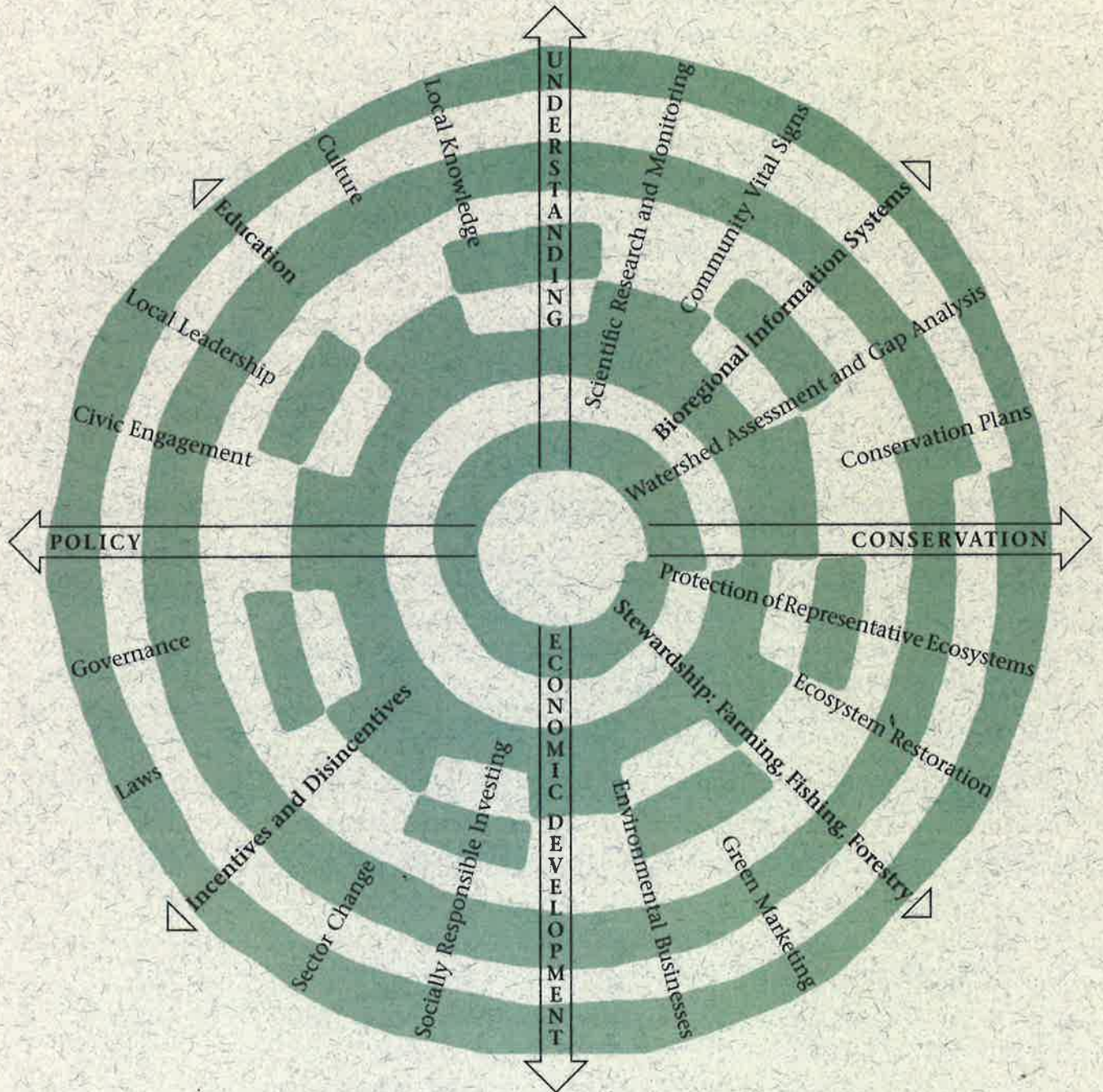
If we wished to, we could extend the concepts we have been discussing to the whole of humanity living on the whole of the planet. The danger in doing so, however, is that we would be more likely to produce bumper stickers than bumper crops. If, in two of the most affluent countries in the world, relatively small communities that depend for their livelihoods on fishing, farming, forestry, and tourism cannot empower themselves to meet their

legitimate human needs without exhausting their ecological resources, what are the prospects for humankind generally?

To those of us at Ecotrust, this is not merely a rhetorical question. We ask it often, and though we don't claim to have all the answers, we believe that answers are possible. We also believe, as Wendell Berry puts it, that "The answers, if they are to come, and if they are to work, must be developed in the presence of the user and the land; they must be developed to some degree by the user on the land." By working with the people on the land, we hope to see put into practice on a modest scale the lessons that we learn from the land and from the people: that development and conservation can chart a course toward a future that includes healthy human communities as an integral part of healthy ecosystems; that the prospects for that future are hopeful; and that we need to begin.

By working with the people on the land, we hope to see put into practice on a modest scale the lessons that we learn from the land and from the people.

New Bearings Compass





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Ecotrust is a nonprofit organization which helps local communities in the coastal temperate rain forest region of North America to create practical examples of conservation-based development. We welcome the support of all who would like to contribute to our work.

Ecotrust Canada was created in 1994 as a Canadian expression of the ideas and principles described in this document. It is an independent organization with a separate charter and its own board of directors. Ecotrust Canada is a registered nonprofit society and welcomes contributions to its work in the communities of coastal British Columbia.

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