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Discussions about Energy and Our Future

Oil and Larkspur--Personal Reactions to a Disruptive Event

Posted by [Jason Bradford](#) on May 9, 2010 - 10:33am in [The Oil Drum: Campfire](#)

Topic: [Environment/Sustainability](#)

We tend to settle into routines. But once in a while extraordinary events disrupt normalcy. We may question assumptions and be open to new information and change. A grief process is common in these times too.

The accident in the Gulf of Mexico is a disruptive event. Here's an essay that puts it into personal perspective for me. In the comments I invite others to do the same.

The Peace of Wild Things

by Wendell Berry

When despair for the world grows in me

and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.

I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

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I have some good friends in Louisiana. They took their children to the beach last weekend over concern that this may be the last time they would find clean sand in their lifetimes. For the adults, watching shore birds and dolphins was both thrilling and sickening.

Humans can imagine a future that does not yet exist. This can be a blessing and a curse. It is a curse when events spin out of your control and you fear the loss of something precious. It is a blessing when you can plan ahead and change the future by your actions.

Yesterday I walked on our farm and envisioned what it might look like 1, 3, 5 and 20 years from now. It was beautiful.



My imagination is assisted by the stunning places there now, such as the big leaf maple and ash forest on the western edge of the north field near the Marys River. In early May, this forest has an enchanting understory of purple larkspur and cow parsnip--one of the best displays many experienced people have ever seen.

Sometimes I think about (or even witness) the spores of saprophytic fungi that colonize the farm fields and speed the breakdown of organic matter so plants can grow. When I see mounds from ground rodents near the forest edge I smile because I know they bring mycorrhizal spores into ag soils, which dramatically increases the water efficiency of plants and the uptake of often limiting nutrients like phosphorus. Knowing the forest is rich in microhabitats and teaming with critters, I am thrilled by a nearby source of pollinators, ground beetles, spiders, bats and predatory wasps that will make their homes in the shelter of those trees and leaf litter and come onto the fields to do their feeding.

It is functional diversity, and we could estimate some monetary value of pollination, decomposition, or predator-prey regulation services, but part of me wonders if the sense of awe we feel in places like this comes from some genetic understanding. We have a gut reaction that says, "This is right! This is good!"

What do I envision for this farm? A lot, but one line of thought is that it more of it will look like this forest. The banks of the river will be protected so species such as chinook salmon, cut throat trout, spring steelhead, Oregon chub and Pacific lamprey (all rare and threatened) have a better chance to thrive.

In developing more riparian forest it is easy to see how this will protect the fish. But my mind sees deeper connections that extend back to my friends in Louisiana. You see, my goal is to have this farm weaned from fossil fuel dependency so that we don't feel the pressure, as a society, to go after oil in far flung places so we can grow our food.

Here's how it goes...The forest harbors larkspurs. Larkspurs feed hummingbirds. Hummingbirds also eat crop munching insects. Thus, in the long run, through many, many synergies like this, the farm will become less and less dependent on oil-based inputs like pesticides.

Now isn't that beautiful.

Here are some discussion topics for Campfire.

I am a biologist who can see many, many ways in which our current ways of doing things are unnecessarily dependent upon oil. I also see how the energy gluttony of fossil fuels allowed us to forget about so many important relationships because we had available both the awesome power make huge mistakes and to compensate for them. It would be interesting to hear from others along these lines.

What are some of the ways you see to 'get off the sauce' so to speak that are often unseen by others?

As I have learned more and more about energy, economy and society I see connections to oil and fossil fuels everywhere, as in this one on "Oil and Larkspur" that weren't obvious before.

What surprising connections have you made from the profound to the mundane?

The Wendell Berry poem acknowledges grief and explores a means of coping. Feel free to share the ways you deal with these issues.



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