



Everything I ever needed to know about Ecosystem Based Management and living I learnt in kindergarten

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You have likely noticed that the management of ecosystems requires a complex balancing of social and economic interests with dramatically changing ecosystem characteristics. The stressors and influencers that our ecosystems face are much larger than our provinces or nation. They are global.

If we think about it, for every ecosystem manager we hire in Canada there may be tens of thousands of people who never think –or even care- about ecosystems. These masses are often not even aware that they are a crucial part of ecosystems. Somewhere between birth and adulthood the message has been lost that we are all responsible for the well being of this planet and it is not just the ‘ecosystem managers’ we hire who are responsible for stewarding ecosystems.

There seems to be an urgent need to convey to society that ‘ecosystem based management by the few’ will only succeed when coupled with ‘ecosystem based living by the many’. While the complexities of integrated social-economic-ecological systems can seem daunting to anyone, the principles needed to live in balance with such complexities are quite simple. Matter of fact, we learnt them in kindergarten.

I realized this in reading Robert Fulghum’s 1988 book, “Everything I ever really needed to know I learned in kindergarten”. While his lessons are simple; we all struggle to live mindfully aware of them. Yet for ecosystem managers to have long term success with ecosystem based management anywhere, it is crucial that all aspects of society integrate common practices for ecosystem based living into their day to day choices and lifestyles.

Below are ecosystem based management and living lessons that we can draw from Fulghum’s kindergarten lessons. Now, just as in kindergarten, the challenge is to live them.

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Fulghum's Lessons	Lessons for Ecosystem-based Management and Living
Share everything.	Share knowledge, responsibility, accountability, stewardship, resources, benefits, downfalls ...and food, good fortune, and compassion. Share nature's bounty with all, but only within the limits to which nature can replenish them.
Play fair.	Treat everyone equally, in a respectful manner. Don't stack things to your benefit by withholding information, resources or even acknowledgement of a job well done. Treat all of nature with the same respect you would like to receive.
Don't hit people.	Don't intimidate, undermine, marginalize, manipulate or use violence to get the outcomes you want. All people have feelings. Work out problems so that the interests and dignity of all people and nature are maintained.
Put things back from where you found them.	Use resources with care so that ecosystems are not riddled with gaps or impairments. If you take away trees, replant them; if you take away fish only do so at the rate that fish can restock their species; if you take away oil or coal, do so with the greatest of care, and repair the damage done in taking them.
Clean up your own mess.	If possible, don't make big messes. Be careful and use things sparingly. When we draw upon ecosystem resources also rehabilitate the area. If we off source the production of our consumer goods to poorer countries, clean up the environmental mess we create there. Always remember that nothing and no one is disposable.
Don't take things that aren't yours.	While we may be the most aggressive species to claim it, nature does not belong to people. Do not exploit natural systems without expecting repercussions. Do not compromise the health of other people and their ecosystems for the sake of our own lifestyles, without also expecting repercussions, sooner or later.
Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody.	Saying you are sorry plays an important role in moving past remorse and onto positive healing actions. When we acknowledge a wrong, be it social or ecological, we create a space that enables restitution, the repairing of the harm that has been done. This contributes to resilience in own communities.
Wash your hands before you eat.	Unknowingly disease can be spread and damage can be done to our own and other systems if we are not careful. Have safety measures so that systems maintain their health. Make sure all people and life have access to clean water.
Flush.	If we create waste, know how to get rid of it in a manner that does not degrade our homes or the homes of others. Be innovative in advancing closed systems that reuse the by-products of our bodies and ambitions.
Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you.	These 'comfort' foods enable us to feel safe, loved and included. Equally as important is ensuring that other people around the planet and other species have the food they require to feel safe, loved and included.
Live a balanced life – learn some, think some, draw some and paint, sing and dance, play and work every day.	We are complex beings with complex abilities. Explore all our abilities; don't become too fixated on one aspect of your being. This can lead to poor health in yourself and the world around you. Simply enjoy all of life...and through simplicity all of life will become more balanced.
Take a nap in the afternoon.	Pace yourself. If we use all the world's resources now, what will be left for future generations? Slow down, listen to your inner knowing, it always tells you when you need to be more careful, when we are not playing fair, when you and life around you are tired, and many other things.
When you go out into the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands and stick together.	There are dangers and risks in life, but this should not hinder us from exploring our great world; but do so with care and caution so that no one (human or non-human) gets left out or hurt in the process. Look out for one another.
Be aware of wonder.	The complexities of our world are so multi-dimensional that we will never fully understand them. Accept this, and smile at simply appreciating they exist and that you are part of it.
Goldfish, hamsters, mice, the little seed in the Styrofoam cup all die. So do we.	Life is a process with a beginning and end. Our goal is not to live the longest but to enjoy the process in a way that shows respect for all of life. Always remember 'we are nature'. It lives both inside and outside of us. We are only part of nature's processes.
Remember the Dick-and-Jane books and the first word you learned – LOOK.	Look and see, with compassion, what is going on in this world around us. See both the despair and wonder in the interconnections amongst all life and be aware of your influence on the bigger picture. Then 'be' the world we need to become.

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Communities



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