Discovering a Sense of Place (The below was created and last revised by the Northwest Earth Institute (NWEI) in 2007)

(sense of place, watershed, bioregion, discovering a sense of place, community, place)

• To understand the meaning of a bioregional perspective, and what it would mean to develop one.

• To consider the benefits of consciously developing an intimate relationship with your place.

• To explore what it might mean to protect the place where you live.

“Of all the memberships we identify ourselves by the one thing that is most forgotten, and that has the greatest potential for healing, is place. We must learn to know, love, and join our place even more than we love our own ideas. People who can agree that they share a commitment to the landscape/cityscape -- even if they are otherwise locked in struggle with each other -- have at least one deep thing to share.” - Gary Snyder

Topics Covered:

1. A Sense of Place: Wendell Berry, America's best-known bioregionalist, says if you don't know where you are, you don't know who you are. With a sense of place, your identity is defined—to a significant extent—by the natural features of the place where you live. Without a sense of place, what will fill the void?

2. Responsibility to Place: There is a difference between living on the land and dwelling in it—understanding its rhythms, its potential, and its limits. Those who develop intimacy with a place over time tend to accept responsibility for it.

3. Knowing Your Bioregion: Your bioregion is a unique place with its own watershed, soils, climate, plants, animals, and history. How much do you know about it?

4. Living in Place: Living in place means consciously trying to satisfy your needs and find your pleasures in your local bioregion and working to assure the long-term health of the bioregion.

5. Mapping Your Place: Mapping can be learned by local groups and individuals to give a new sense of place. Whereas a typical map shows political subdivisions and transportation routes, a bioregionalist's map delineates regions based on watersheds, climate, and plant types, thereby helping people relate to their natural surroundings.

6. Building Local Community: A bioregionalist assumes responsibility for the health and continuity of a place, not only its natural features, but also the social bonds of its people.

7. Empowerment: Knowing a place can inspire and empower one to take action to preserve it or take part in its restoration. How important is individual and group action in modern society?