



Regan Plumb shows a kestrel to a captivated audience.

FIONA HICKS

When I embarked on this land trust adventure, I did so with the hope of benefiting wildlife by conserving their habitat. I didn't imagine that I would be practicing people preservation too. This is a new spin on the web of life. Here's how it works:

Introduce a group of troubled children to the healing effects of nature. Do so in a safe environment with adults they can trust. Let them be touched by the wonder of the woods on their own terms. You will have planted a tiny seed of compassion and familiarity, one that will serve as a subconscious reminder of the significance of that *place* and that will grow throughout their lives.

Try this: Walk alongside a medical practitioner who is prescribing outdoor activity to combat chronic illness. Now a new population is discovering the surprising health benefits of being outdoors and moving. Land has the capacity to heal. And if land can heal us, what better argument for protecting it?

Now help a struggling school build a new and innovative curriculum, one that unfolds on the land. Involve community members with a range of outdoor passions and pursuits, from wetlands health and forestry to orienteering and nature connection. Perhaps just one new future forester has sprouted, but a small army of teens is engaging with land in a powerful way.

These are programs that have been built at my little land trust over the past year. While one side of my brain is still happily mired in project diligence and easement drafting, the other is now constantly seeking new ways to use land differently: as a balm for all manner of community challenges.

Where to begin? If you are like me, you can already discern the sound of the warbler from the wren. You love to lose yourself in the babble of a brook or the peace of perfect stillness. Now we have an opportunity to practice a different sort of listening. Listen for the struggles and frustrations in your community. Isolate one small voice at a time from the commotion of the crowd—you already know how to do this. Then extend an invitation to walk together on the land.

Perhaps we land folks hadn't realized that we hold the key to so many puzzles completely unrelated to land protection. Or are they? 🌿

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A NEW SPIN ON THE WEB OF LIFE

The natural world has always been my comfort zone. Birds and bugs. Nitty gritty. Facts and figures. I followed my left brain through college, graduate school and various science-based jobs that involved plenty of quiet study, number crunching and technical writing.

Then one day I found myself on the staff of a small western land trust, having been awarded the peculiar title of land protection specialist. Except this wasn't just any land trust. This one was on the brink of expanding its horizons to seemingly encompass the entire planet. This was a launching pad for what some folks call "community conservation." And my safe science nut was about to crack.

What do displaced children have to do with preserving duck habitat? Or chronic diabetes with a family's land legacy? History teachers and healthy forests? As I was about to learn, the answer is *a lot*.