



Ecological Identity

What is Ecological Identity?

When asked to describe the roots of our personal environmental philosophy, many of us might reply, "I have always loved the outdoors.... I enjoy being outside.... I became angry over environmental degradation." These descriptions of our environmental philosophy only skim the surface.

Through deeper reflection we are able to discover the roots that lead to these statements, and how we branch out from our beliefs to take action. This is referred to as our ecological identity. The term ecological identity originally comes from the work of Mitchell Thomas in his book, *Becoming a Reflective Environmentalist*. To express our identity each of us is going to make our own Ecological Identity tree.

Directions: On a blank sheet of paper sketch a tree. Make sure your tree includes roots, leaves, branches and a trunk. For each part of the tree, write one word or phrase that corresponds to your environmental behavior, environmental actions and core values. Below are some guidelines for these terms.

Roots:

The roots of our environmental behavior: how or where we played as a child, experiences solo or with family or friends in the distant and recent past ...actions...events...mentors... Positive or negative experiences... seeing wild places disturbed.

Leaves and branches:

Environmental actions (both personal and professional): jobs, volunteerism... free time...new ways to stretch yourself... environmental actions you plan on taking.

Trunk:

The core values that you hold: the trunk connects the roots with the leaves, just as your core values connect your 'roots' to your actions. Core values might include things like responsibility for the earth, desire to live simply, reverence for living things, etc.

