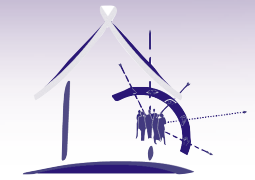


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Sustainability begins at home

The Bioregion: Our Place in the Natural World

We all live in a bioregion, a place defined by natural boundaries such as mountains and rivers and home to particular plant and animal species.

Bioregions contain the resources that we depend on to produce the food we eat and the materials we use in manufacturing, along with our energy sources and drinking water. A healthy local bioregion is one that provides its inhabitants with much of the necessities to sustain life.

This doesn't happen automatically, we have to be aware of our impact on nature and the way we affect nature's ability to provide for us. It is possible for us to live in a mutually beneficial relationship with the planet but only if we start to appreciate the way nature works and rather than take a human centred approach try to learn from nature's solutions to our long term sustainability.

Mapping your Bioregion

A properly surveyed bioregion can give a sense of where the opportunities lie for enhancing a region's productivity and self reliance. When we know what and where our resources are we can make informed decisions about what kind of trade is really necessary to supplement local production.

- *Often the watershed is the best way to mark out a bioregion. The watershed is the land area that drains water into a specific river or lake; living things in a watershed form a closely interconnected web of relationships. See if you can map*

out your watershed and look for the ways living things support each other in it.

- *Survey the characteristic flora, fauna, geology and climate of your area. Where, on the map, do these elements become markedly different?*
- *In the past culture and nature were closely linked, we built with local materials and wore clothes made from fibres that grew in our area. Studying the cultural history of your area can reveal differences between where you live and other places in Ireland. See how these differences correspond to materials and resources of the local area.*

Did You Know:

- *Only 1% of Ireland's original forest had escaped destruction by the early 20th century (www.agriculture.gov.ie/forestry/files/lufrop.doc)*
- *With just 9% of its area under forest, Ireland is the least forested member of the European Union. (www.agriculture.gov.ie/forestry/files/lufrop.doc)*

Activities

- *Start a local mapping group: Making a map can be a powerful way of re-acquainting ourselves with the natural features that occur in our bioregion. You could start small, maybe with a nearby stream or park. Include on your map:*



vegetation, natural resources, animal and insect species and soil type, along with information on local micro-climates and the nearest watershed.

- **Learn about the original Irish name given to your local area:** Local names often say more about the natural and wild elements of the land than current names which were often applied later by colonisers or town planners.
- **Make a calendar of the seasonal cycles as they appear in your area:** By asking questions such as when do the migratory birds arrive and when do the native plants bloom a calendar containing information specific to your locality can be developed.
- **Tell the story of your area:** Learn the natural and human history of your bioregion and turn it into a story that will interest both adults and children.
- **Look for an aspect of the bioregion that needs your help:** it shouldn't be too hard to find! Help clean up a polluted waterway or a deteriorating neighbourhood, school, park, or wild place. Create a team of people who share your concern and meet regularly to have work parties.



A healthy bioregion contains diverse communities of plant and animal life; utilises its resources in a way that ensures their continued productivity; finds local solutions for materials used in manufacturing; and celebrates its local culture and history. This makes the area more self-reliant and less destructive of habitats around the world, while providing new economic opportunities for local residents.



Sustainable Solution

Coppicing

Coppicing is a technique of harvesting wood from living trees. For example, trees such as hazel respond well to being cut back to the stump, sending up very straight poles of wood that can be removed and used for fencing among other things.

The ancient practice of coppicing is a bioregional solution that benefits

humans and wildlife alike. Numerous small businesses from charcoal manufacture to mushroom growing can make use of coppice-managed woodlands, giving us good reason to preserve these natural habitats for future generations.

Social Connections

Many of Ireland's remaining woodlands have become neglected and underused. But a properly harvested woodland becomes more accessible and interesting to the public. These managed woodlands have much educational and recreational value.

Environmental Connections

Native Woodlands now only cover 1% of the Irish countryside with many native species now threatened with extinction due to lack of habitat. Encouraging coppice industries provides a managed version of the natural forest growth cycle (which features many and varied habitats of both sun and shade) allowing a diversity of species to flourish.

Economic Connections

Viable economic enterprises derived from coppicing include charcoal manufacture, firewood (from thinnings), furniture making and wild food production. Many rural jobs can be created through networks of managed woodlands supplying local markets while also reducing the need for expensive and polluting transportation.

Resources

Sustainable Ireland
Online sustainability directory
www.sustainable.ie/directory

Great River Earth Institute
A non-profit organisation dedicated to fostering personal and cultural transformation through grassroots study and discussion.
www.greatriv.org/bioreg.htm

Commonground
Linking nature with culture, focussing upon the positive investment people can make in their own localities.
www.commonground.org.uk/

The Place and the Story
The emerging ecological worldview (article by Ralph Metzner)

www.rmetzner-greenearth.org/ecopsych.html

The Bioregional Congress
Congress to envision and develop a realistic, restorative bioregional way of life
www.bioregionalcongress.org/

The Ancient Art of Coppicing
Information on coppicing and its history.
www.coppicing.com

Hedge Management and Regeneration
Coppicing and other methods of hedge management.
www.teagasc.ie/publications/forestry/hedges.htm



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