

Citizen—or Member?

Reading Paul Gobster and Bruce Hull's new book, *Restoring Nature: Perspectives from the Social Sciences and Humanities* this fall, I have been fascinated by the broadened perspective it offers, the questions it raises, and the trains of thought it sets in motion.

In his chapter on the "Chicago controversy," for example, sociologist Reid Helford carefully juxtaposes the claims of restorationists and their critics to a voice in planning for the management of Chicago's publicly-owned Forest Preserves. Helford quotes restorationists arguing, in effect, that by accepting responsibility for the condition of the preserves and participating in their ecology, they earn a special, insider's right to speak in their behalf.

He then notes that critics of restoration have often rejected this claim, insisting that all should have an equal voice in planning for the preserves simply because it is public land and all voters are equal.

Reading this, I was reminded of the distinction I recently came across between the ideas of "citizen" and "member." Though Aldo Leopold conflates these two ideas in his often-quoted suggestion that we learn to think of *Homo sapiens* as a "plain member and citizen" of the land community, the two ideas are in fact quite different.

The idea of the "citizen" came into the foreground of political thought following the French revolution. It represented the claim of the disenfranchised classes for a role in their own government. Derived from the Latin word "civitas," or "city," "citizenship" denotes a relationship to the polity that is relatively abstract.

As a citizen I pay taxes, vote and claim a right to participate in debate over issues of general concern to the polity. Equally significant, citizenship is a birthright. It is not something I have to earn or be judged worthy of, but is simply a condition of existence—at least in a democratic state.

"Membership" is different. Here the root metaphor is that of the parts—or members—of the body, and the relationship the idea implies is more intimate and more demanding than that of the citizen. While citizenship is a birthright, membership is something I have to *earn* through behavior consistent with the interests and tastes of the community, through the exchange of gifts with other members, and through the rituals of initiation that necessarily define any group—fish, fowl or human—that approaches the depth and intensity of relationship known as community.

One is, in other words, a citizen of a state or nation, but can be a member only of a community.

Much confusion arises from this mixing of metaphors and the failure to distinguish between the two very different modes of

relationship it reflects. For one thing, it allows us to claim our rights as citizens while overlooking or downplaying the obligations associated with membership in a community.

The disagreement Reid Helford documents in Chicago is an example. Here the critics of restoration are claiming their rights as citizens to equal treatment with respect to public land. More deeply, perhaps, they have in mind a conception of nature itself as a birthright, an idea of nature as free—free for the taking, so to speak—that reflects the experience of the frontier.

The restorationists, on the other hand, are insisting on a very different idea. Having discovered restoration as a way of achieving actual membership in the land community, they are moving enthusiastically toward the creation of communities of a sort.

I believe the restorationists are on the right track. In traditional, community-based cultures individuals do not take nature for granted as a birthright. The right to participate fully in the life of the community, by raising a family, for example, or killing animals, is not inalienable. It is a right that one earns by learning and discipline and that is conferred on one through the rites of initiation.

Something like this, I think, should prevail in public natural areas, where, perhaps, access to the commons should be free for all, but special intimacies and privileges, such as killing, for example, or stepping off a trail, or planning for management, have to be earned through the taking on of special responsibilities, through participation in activities such as study, art, disciplined observation and woodcraft—and, of course, restoration.

As one of Helford's restoration informants notes, we do this all the time—in hospitals, for example, or in art museums—or, I might add, on public golf courses. As citizens, we all have equal access to these resources. Yet we all recognize a system of graded relationships with them that depends on the acquisition of knowledge and skill and the performance of certain rituals.

Restoration can provide a basis for such rituals of initiation. But thinking about restoration in this way raises troubling questions about the very ideas of membership and community. If, in contrast with citizenship, membership has to be earned, it necessarily entails a measure of inequality and exclusiveness if some belong, others do not, or not in the same degree. Hence the temptation to blur the distinction, allowing ourselves the comforting thought that membership is essentially the same as citizenship and can be achieved in the same way.

Controversies like the one that erupted in Chicago four years ago arise in part because of our failure to think carefully about the relationships we set up and claim for ourselves through acts such as restoration—or, for that matter—voting and paying taxes. To

deal with such problems effectively we will have to learn to distinguish carefully between these modes or degrees of relationship. We will also have to confront the problematic, psychologically and politically challenging aspects of both. And we will have to find equitable, and even beautiful, ways of articulating and institutionalizing the differences and inequalities they entail.

To deal with this problem effectively we will have to distinguish carefully between these modes or degrees of relationship, then find ways of articulating and even institutionalizing means of coordinating the relationships between them.

A Final Note

With this issue of *Ecological Restoration*, we are marking both a milestone and a transition. The milestone marks the journal's twentieth anniversary, and the transition is our first change in editorship. With this issue I am stepping down as editor of

Ecological Restoration, and leaving my job at the University of Wisconsin Arboretum in order to devote full time to creation of what will be the first regional center of the New Academy for Nature and Culture, in Chicago.

I depart with some regret, of course. This journal has been a wonderful and fascinating project, and certainly one of the finest experiences of my professional life. At the same time, I leave knowing that the relationships with friends and colleagues I have formed through this journal will continue through my work with the New Academy.

I also have great confidence in the future of the journal. The new editor, I am happy to say, will be Dave Egan, who has played a major role in the development of the journal since the mid-1980s and who has a deep commitment to its success and to the readers it serves.

William R. Jordan III