

# Understanding the Bond we have with trees

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Albert Einstein once said, "Look deep, deep into nature, and you will understand everything." Through my involvement as a land developer dating back to the early 1970's, I've come to understand at least a few things about how this statement holds important truths for our industry.

Examining the fundamental attraction that all people have toward trees &ndash; especially big trees &ndash; provides unique insights into effective land development and sustaining &ndash; even improving &ndash; the quality of life to which we've become accustomed. Over the years, I've experienced how this bond can be capitalized on &ndash; while "doing good" at the same time. Strategic preservation and restoration of healthy, long-lived tree canopy not only decreases development costs, but increases demand (and property values) by 30% or more.

## The Tree of Life

The mythology of the Tree of Life has been an important component in the evolution of nearly every culture &ndash; and for good reason. With its branches reaching into the sky, and roots deep in the soil, it is a link between heaven and the earth and it symbolizes unity between our past, present and future.

Since the dawn of recorded time, trees have provided food, shelter and a bond with nature. They enrich ecosystems, sequestering carbon, producing oxygen, cleaning air and water, and creating and stabilizing soil. Trees are inextricably and productively engaged with our systems &ndash; providing for, propagating, and participating in the sustenance of life. Trees are, in fact, the unsung heroes of the technological revolution that has brought us from the stone age to the space age. Throughout the ages trees have provided the material to make fire, the heat which has allowed our species to reshape the earth for our use.

## Our Alteration of the Global Environment

Between one-third and one-half of the earth's land surface has been transformed by human action; the carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere has increased by nearly 30 percent since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution; more atmospheric nitrogen is fixed by humanity than by all natural terrestrial sources combined; and more than half of all accessible surface fresh water is put to use by humanity. By these and other standards, it is clear that we live on a human-dominated planet.

With all our ingenuity, we now have the capacity to build "designer ecosystems" and replicate the natural systems that have evolved over 4 billion years on this planet to build the very conditions necessary for life as we know it to continue indefinitely. From water filtration to climate stability and soil fertility, there is intelligence embedded in our natural systems that we learn more about with each passing day. Unfortunately, this knowledge is not now widely disseminated to those in position to act on it, and it is certainly not being utilized to the extent that it must be.

For example, we have known for some time how to improve the quality of life in an urban ecosystem by using trees to mitigate carbon dioxide emissions, air pollution, and storm water runoff; reduce energy costs, crime, and medical bills; and enhance biodiversity. Capitalizing on these capacities requires a holistic approach incorporating state-of-the-art, green industry best management practices and comprehensive ecosystem management. So far, continuing declines in key urban ecosystem health indicators clearly show that we are not implementing these best practices. A major reason for this is that all the scientific knowledge in the world won't protect natural services unless the public understands that they are vital to our health and well being.

## Restoring a Sense of the Sacred

Beyond examining the ecological facts and historical record, the question of our cultural responsibility comes up in terms of identifying causes and seeking solutions for the state of our world. One easy solution is for us to understand the fundamental bond people have with trees &ndash; for good reason &ndash; and embrace this dynamic to the greatest extent possible in our developments. The benefits come to everyone involved, for all time.

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Tree of Life