

Running head: ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARD LEADERSHIP

VOLUNTEER ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARD LEADERSHIP:  
A DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE ON PATHS TO ENGAGEMENT

By

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**Abstract**

This case study explores the meaning making systems of a small group of volunteer environmental steward leaders. Research consists of: 1) an assessment of participants' action logic using the Maturity Assessment Profile; and 2) interviews to identify experiences and interpretations informing participants' environmental stewardship. Results of participants' interviews reveal: 1) foundations of environmental sensitivity, 2) negative emotions associated with environmental stewardship work, 3) deeper meaning attributed to stewardship work, and 4) leadership behaviour associated with environmental stewardship. Additionally, the study draws connections between environmental steward leadership behaviour and participants' stage of action logic. Study results revealed 2 of 9 participants measured at the later-stage action logic, while 7 of the 9 measured at the conventional stage. These results may suggest environmental stewardship behaviour is becoming increasingly part of the societal norm. Finally, it recommends incorporating practices that support adult maturational development into environmental leadership programming.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

What motivates people to take up environmental stewardship? What are the roots of the stewards' concern for and commitment to the environment? And for those people who take up the call to environmental stewardship, where do they lie on the developmental path to leadership? For a world that is currently faced with a multitude of human-induced environmental problems, individuals instrumental in environmental stewardship initiatives provide an example of leadership dedicated to reversing the tide of human-induced environmental degradation (Oskamp, 2000). The life journey of those who engage in environmental stewardship is one well-worth examining as they can provide insight into the types of early experiences and influences that motivate and secure commitment to environmentally responsible behaviour. Chawla (1998a) reasoned that the ultimate goal of research into significant life experiences (SLE) is "to understand how people gain the combination of compassion and knowledge that guides effective environmental protection" (p. 384). However, not only is it important to understand how people gain the necessary knowledge, compassion, and drive for effective environmental protection, of equal importance is understanding how their self-understandings and the ways in which they make meaning of their world ultimately shape their leadership capacities.

My personal interest in "the environmental steward" came to fruition in a round-about way. In 2012, I joined the Cowichan Lake and River Stewardship Society, an environmental group in the Cowichan Valley on Vancouver Island, BC. When I first joined I was struck by the core group of individuals' level of commitment and concern for their community. I wondered

where the drive they exemplified originated from. And, even before I began thinking about possibly focussing my research on environmental stewardship, I found this particular organization and its core members to be very intriguing. These were local citizens, of varying professional backgrounds and not necessarily in the environmental field, who had voluntarily taken on the responsibility of trying to safeguard the Cowichan River and Lake. They were organized in a very strategic way. Passion and drive and a sense of responsibility for and attachment to this place seemed to guide them. They appeared to step in where there was a noticeable gap in leadership. They took what was initially brought up as a community concern – littering of the river and disrespectful behaviour on the river – and transformed it into a strategic environmental vision for the community.

Prior to embarking on this research journey, I originally wondered how their sense of attachment to this place had shaped their motivation to protect it. For some, the attachment to the natural beauty of this place was rooted in their long history in the area spanning several generations. For others the relationship, though perhaps not so lengthy, was equally deep as evidenced by their motivation and commitment to safeguard the natural beauty and special qualities of this place. However, underlying all these factors such as motivation, commitment, and attachment to place, within the group there was a collective drive and desire to lead the community in ensuring that the health of the natural local environment was preserved for future generations.

This research explores environmental stewardship behaviour from the perspective of leadership development. My interest lies in understanding the worldviews, meaning-making systems, and action logics (Rooke & Torbert, 2005) of the individuals engaged in stewardship behaviour. By worldview, I refer to the dimension of human consciousness that encompasses

“beliefs, assumptions, attitudes, values, and ideas” that shape an individual’s internal “model of reality” (Schlitz, Vieten, & Miller, 2010, p. 19). Meaning making is described as the process of interpreting and making sense of our experience and the meaning we make of our experiences tends to define and shape our worldviews (Mezirow, 2014). The term action logic, used in a leadership context, refers to the “developmental stage of meaning-making that informs and drives an individual’s reasoning and behaviour” (Brown, 2011, p. 34). Research into the worldviews and meaning-making systems that inspire environmental steward leadership is important for understanding how to foster the conditions for developmental growth that lead to effective environmental leadership. In particular, worldviews and the routes to engagement in environmental leadership of non-environmental professionals expand our understanding of pro-environmental engagement (Howell, 2013). To some extent I am assuming that individuals involved in stewardship initiatives are accessing ways of knowing and understanding the world that may well be suited to the “complex demands of environmental leadership” (Boiral, Cayer, & Baron, 2009, p. 496). The study broadens the scope of environmental leadership in that it examines the worldviews and meaning-making systems of citizens involved in environmental stewardship initiatives. What these study participants identify as pivotal moments and formative influences along their path to environmental stewardship extends our understanding of the development of an environmental ethic. To date, research into the connection between environmental leadership and action logics has been limited to the study of organizational leaders in business, government, and civil society (Boiral et al., 2009; Brown, 2011; McCauley, Drath, Palus, O'Connor, & Baker, 2006). With this study, I have added to the growing body of research in this field by exploring the connections between volunteer stewardship behaviour, adult development, and environmental leadership.

**Research Questions**

1. How does environmental steward leadership behaviour relate to the stages of leadership development as presented through a constructive-developmental theory perspective?
  - a. *What action logics shape environmental steward leaders?*
2. What is the environmental responsibility meaning-making system of an environmental steward leader?

While stewardship behaviour can apply to many different realms, for the purpose of this study, I will be using the term stewardship or steward to refer specifically to environmental stewardship or the environmental steward.

**Significance of the Research**

The purpose of this study was to further contribute to research in the field of environmental leadership. The study examined stewardship behaviour from the perspective of constructive-developmental theory using Torbert & Rooke's stages of leadership development (2005). This research provides insight into the action logics of individuals who are deeply involved and instrumental in community environmental stewardship initiatives and contributes to our understanding of how committed environmental stewards interpret their world and how their self-understandings are able to transform knowledge and attitudes into effective action (Chawla, 1998a). This research provides a targeted case study by which to analyze the connection between the action logics of a the environmental steward and environmental leadership (Boiral et al., 2009). As is suggested in the constructive-developmental literature on leadership development, individuals in possession of late-stage action logics are most effective at promoting proactive environmental leadership (Boiral et al., 2009); they possess well-developed abilities to

“manage complexity, integrate contradicting points of view, and consider the expectations of a broader range of stakeholders” (Boiral et al., 2009, p.493).

As it stands now, humanity is facing imminent global decline (Diamond, 2005). We are urgently being called upon to address environmental, as well as economic and social, challenges if we are to avoid a worldwide downward trend. With regard to environmental leadership, achieving the necessary behavioural and systemic changes will require effective leadership capable of influencing and mobilizing people to alter their ways of thinking and acting so as to realize the goal of long-term sustainability (Boiral et al., 2009; Brown, 2011).

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **Roots of Stewardship**

The call of the steward reflects the sense of obligation to duty to others, adoption of pro-social and pro-environmental actions guided by values, attitudes, behaviours, and actions that benefit the long-term welfare of others (Hernandez, 2012). In the business world, the view of managerial motivation, termed stewardship theory, postulates that an executive manager essentially wants to do right by his shareholders and ultimately “be a good steward of the corporate assets” (Donaldson & Davis, 1991, p. 51). Indeed, the original meaning of the word steward describes the role of the servant who cares for the landed estate (Welchman, 2012). Stewardship is commonly viewed as a form of ongoing guardianship requiring limits to the pursuit of personal interests; stewardship is traditionally associated with caring for landholdings of others and in doing so the steward adheres to a high level of moral virtues such as loyalty, integrity, and prudence (Welchman, 2012). Over time, the term steward has evolved to be associated with a range of activities and occupations primarily concerned “caring for things or persons on another’s behalf” (Welchman, 2012, p.299).

In the past, traditional stewardship, as opposed to environmental stewardship, was an occupation of sorts performed for “financial or other remuneration and for a limited period of time” (Welchman, 2012, p. 299). However, environmental stewardship diverges from the traditional notion of stewardship as it calls upon humanity to adopt prudent and respectful attitudes and behaviours towards nature that are not tied to any other individual, time restraint, or remuneration (Welchman, 2012).

**Judeo-Christian Dimensions of Stewardship**

In many ways, dimensions of environmental stewardship are echoed in spiritual and religious teachings that draw upon the significance of connections to the natural environment, to ones' place in it, and to ones' relationship to it. Within, for example, the Judeo-Christian tradition the earth is conceived of by God and thereby given to all of humanity who, in turn, are responsible to care for it for the benefit of all future generations (Dobel, 1997). Central to the Judeo-Christian moral principle is the belief that God has entrusted humanity to ensure that earth and all its resources and bounty endure into the future (Dobel, 1997). It should be noted that Lynn White Jr. (1967) disputes this interpretation and claims our ecological crisis is, in fact, rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition with God's will being "that man exploit nature for his proper ends" (White, 1967, p. 1205). However, Dobel (1997) argues that each generation is seen as a "sojourner" upon the Earth and has certain responsibilities to hold the Earth's resources in trust for future generations (Dobel, 1997, p. 908). Some interpretations of the Judeo-Christian tradition hold that Earth was made to last and to that end "the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (Genesis 2:15 New International Version). Ensuring the responsible care for the earth requires that humanity "respect the limits upon ourselves, our use of resources, our consumption, our treatment of others and the environment with its delicate ecosystems" (Dobel, 1997, p. 908). Stewardship can thus be seen as a form of caring which encompasses concern and connection on behalf of the steward, yet is devoid of any notions of ownership (Kool, 2008). This caring is a reciprocal relationship between the steward and the charge in need of care. In light of the detrimental human impact on the Earths' natural systems, clearly, the natural environment, upon which human and non-human life depends, is in need of a more caring and connected relationship with humanity (Kool, 2008).

Such sentiments of respect for nature are relayed in the United Nations' Millennium Declaration of 2000 when it states that:

Prudence must be shown in the management of all living species and natural resources, in accordance with the precepts of sustainable development. Only in this way can the immeasurable riches provided to us by nature be preserved and passed on to our descendants. The current unsustainable patterns of production and consumption must be changed in the interest of our future welfare and that of our descendants. (p.2)

If there is to be any possibility of reducing the damaging impacts of human development of the natural environment, it is incumbent upon those in the developed world to adopt an environmental stewardship ethic and work collectively toward a sustainable future (Oskamp, 2000).

### **Servant Leadership**

According to Greenleaf's 1977 theory of servant leadership, the servant leader leads by prioritising "other people's needs, aspirations and interests above their own" (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002, p. 57). In essence, what calls this person to lead is a desire to first and foremost be of service to others. It is through this act of serving, filling a noticeable void, or facilitating the process that a person leads others to achieve and grow (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). Servant leadership closely parallels stewardship in that the servant leader chooses service over self-interest and entrusts herself with building the capacity of others to empower themselves (Lunenburg, 2012; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). The steward is the one willing to serve and to be accountable for the betterment of those she leads (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). Leading from this

perspective involves sharing of responsibility and authority with others and facilitating a participatory leadership process for the benefit of the larger community (Russell & Stone, 2002).

### **Motivation and Commitment**

Some people will choose to spend their free time performing all sorts of unpaid activities that benefit the natural environment. A study done by Measham and Barnett (2008) synthesizes various similar categories of volunteer motivations into four broad areas: contributing to community, social contact, personal development, and pursuit of personal interests. These motivational categories apply to the environmental volunteer with the addition of two others: care for the environment and attachment to place (Measham & Barnett, 2008). The desire to help the environment by taking meaningful action and the desire to learn new things rank as substantial motivating factors amongst environmental volunteers (Grese, Kaplan, Ryan, & Buxton, 2000; R. L. Ryan, Kaplan, & Grese, 2001).

However, individuals' motivations for volunteering may change over time (R. L. Ryan et al., 2001). Although altruistic motivations may be an important catalyst for volunteering initially, in the long-term more self-interested motivations, such as social interactions, have significant impact in terms of lasting volunteer commitment and participation (R. L. Ryan et al., 2001). In a study of the influence of motivations of commitment to voluntary urban conservation, Asah and Blahna (2013) found that as volunteers' desire to socialize with others increased the more intense their emotional attachment, identification, and involvement with volunteering became. Volunteers' desire to help the environment was a significant predictor of commitment only when combined with volunteering activities that also fulfilled dimensions of social interaction and community building (Asah & Blahna, 2013).

It has been argued by Howard and others (as cited in Nisbet, Zelenski, & Murphy, 2008) that the environmental crisis we find ourselves in now has its roots in human disconnection and alienation from nature. The personal relationship an individual holds with nature can provide insight into how he or she treats the natural environment (Measham & Barnett, 2008; Nisbet et al., 2008). Research suggests that simply knowing about environmental problems is no guarantee of behaviour change (Maiteny, 2002). Direct experience of relationship with nature is more likely to produce a sense of being part of nature and its ecological processes, thus any harm to nature is experienced as harm to oneself (Maiteny, 2002). There is some evidence to support the idea that emotional involvement coupled with experience of nature are important aspects of continued “pro-environmental values and behaviour” (Maiteny, 2002, p. 305). Moreover, how individuals prioritize their values with regard the natural world, whether seen as part of or apart from nature, will likely determine attitudes towards the environment and the level of concern and commitment to engage in environmentally protective behaviours (Nisbet et al., 2008; Schultz, 2001; Schwartz, 1994).

Clearly, engagement in environmental stewardship activities which inspire people to identify with and care for nature in and of itself, while at the same time fulfilling other interests as mentioned above, hold significant value (Lerner, 1994). Value-belief-norm theory postulates that the values one holds, in this case altruistic and biocentric, foster an ecological worldview leading one ultimately to a feeling of obligation to act in a pro-environmental manner (Gifford, 2014). Additionally, involvement in environmental stewardship groups can spur individuals on to become more politicized; the realization that government agencies are neither able nor willing to support their efforts can motivate groups to become “an effective voice in the decision-making arena” (Lerner, 1994, p.1). Such engagement can act as a source of environmental adult

transformation, which Finger defines as “a permanent process involving a shift in environmental consciousness” whereby an individual acquires the environmental awareness in addition to the “skills, commitment, and determination” necessary to take protective action (Bush-Gibson & Rinfret, 2010, p. 72). Environmental adult transformation may give rise to what Lerner describes as the “environmental vanguard” (Lerner, 1994, p.1) in that the individual’s frame of reference transforms from environmental knowledge to commitment to environmental protection and finally to protective action (Bush-Gibson & Rinfret, 2010).

Those actively involved in environmental stewardship have become the self-appointed “watch-dogs” compelled to care for and safeguard natural features that are common to all. The transformation of an individuals’ environmental frame of reference may bring forth a sense of calling. In this case, calling refers to a feeling of purpose or meaningfulness which leads one to a kind of “personally fulfilling or socially significant engagement” driven by “other-oriented sources of motivation” (Dik & Duffy, 2009, p. 427).

And yet, stewards as “watch-dogs” haven’t simply materialized out of nowhere. Stewardship groups often emerge within communities when special places, cherished species, and ways of life are seen to be degraded and/or threatened by adverse human impacts (Lerner, 1994). In acting as gatekeepers, such groups contribute their desire and determination in demanding “comprehensive proactive community” involvement with regard to local environment issues (Lerner, 1994, p. 1). These groups’ initiative in orchestrating the active care and protection of the threatened environment as well as their advocacy for environmentally responsible action, authorizes them to effectively “keep the gate” in an effort to promote the public good. To this end stewardship groups may often find it in their interests to work in partnership with local government to achieve their ends (Lerner, 1994).

**Self-efficacy**

The desire to lead through service to ensure the well-being of a larger community arises from some form of deliberate intention. Some models of environmental behaviour consider “the intention to act” as a direct determinant of pro-environmental behaviour (Bamberg & Möser, 2007, p. 15). Intention to act is a core principle of human agency; human agency being our ability to “intentionally influence” our actions (Bandura, 2006, p. 164). Bandura (2006) further describes the belief in personal efficacy as the “foundation of human agency” (Bandura, 2006, p. 170). He proposes that:

Unless people believe they can produce desired effects by their actions, they have little incentive to act, or to persevere in the face of difficulties. Whatever other factors serve as guides and motivators, they are rooted in the core belief that one has the power to effect changes by one’s actions. (p. 170)

Believing in oneself and in one’s ability to influence your world (personal efficacy) is critical to personal growth and change. How we think, how we feel, how we make decisions, these processes are all impacted by how capable of affecting change we perceive ourselves to be (Bandura, 2006). How capable an individual believes herself to be in influencing her world has an affect on how she frames her thinking, that is to say whether it be empowering or disempowering (Bandura, 2006). How an individual judges her capabilities will impact her goals, her level of motivation, and her ability to persist through difficulty (Bandura, 1982, 2006). High personal efficacy equates to deep inner resilience wherein obstacles are perceived as possible to overcome; such beliefs contribute to the level of “motivation, emotional well-being, and performance accomplishments” of an individual (Bandura, 2006, p. 171). The volunteer

environmental steward leader exhibits a high level of personal efficacy demonstrated by embracing a pro-active role in serving and affecting tangible change in the local community.

### **Transformative Learning**

Mezirow (2014) described meaning making as the process of interpreting and making sense of experience. Meaning making becomes learning when interpretations shape decisions and action (Elo et al., 2014). Mezirow (2014) further defines learning as:

...the process of making new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an experience, which guides subsequent understanding, appreciation, and action. What we perceive and fail to perceive and what we think and fail to think are powerfully influenced by habits of expectation that constitute our frame of reference, that is, a set of assumptions that structure the way we interpret our experiences. (p. 1)

As human beings, we are driven to make meaning of our experience and the subsequent “associations, concepts, values, feelings, conditioned responses” that emerge create a “frame of reference” defining our worldview (Pearce & Sims Jr, 2002, p. 5). Transformative learning takes place when the frame of reference is altered to accommodate new interpretations that are more “inclusive, discriminating, self-reflective, and integrative of experience” (Pearce & Sims Jr, 2002, p. 5). Critical reflection plays an important role in becoming aware of and questioning our own assumptions about our world. If the frame of reference or established patterns of meaning making no longer accommodate new experience, then the individual may rethink them (Spears, 2004). In Kovan and Dirkx’s (2003) examination of the lives of committed environmental activists, they relate these individuals’ journeys to an ongoing transformative learning process of becoming increasingly self-aware and more capable of integrating different aspects of self-awareness into one’s consciousness. Transformative learning has the power to expand

individuals' consciousness as alternative ways of seeing the world emerge through the process of critical reflection of biases and assumptions which in turn can shift one towards a more inclusive worldview (Elo et al., 2014; Pearce & Sims Jr, 2002; Spears, 2004; White, 1967).

### **Constructive Developmental Theory, Leadership Development, and Action Logics**

Constructive developmental theory (CDT) expands our understanding of adult maturity development by providing insight into "how adults develop more complex and comprehensive ways of making sense of themselves and their experience" (McCauley et al., 2006, p. 634). CDT is concerned with human psychological growth and reveals patterns in the ways adults mature as earlier ways of meaning-making are incorporated in later ways (McCauley et al., 2006).

Loevinger's constructive-developmental framework proposes stages of progressive ego development whereby each stage of progressive maturation represents "a restructuring of the self-system toward greater self and interpersonal awareness, conceptual complexity, flexibility, personal autonomy, and responsibility" (Gilmore & Durkin, 2001, p. 3; McCauley et al., 2006). Loevinger's framework uses the Washington University Sentence Completion Test (WUSCT) as its measurement tool to assess an individual's developmental stage based on responses to a series of 36 sentence stems dealing with "self-perceptions, social situations and interpersonal relationships" (McCauley et al., 2006, p. 642).

William Torbert and Suzanne Cook-Greuter have applied a modified version of this framework in the context of managerial work and leadership development (April & Peters, 2013, p. 64). The term "action logic", used in a leadership context, describes the "the developmental stage of meaning-making that informs and drives an individual's reasoning and behaviour" (Brown, 2011, p. 34) The framework includes seven action logics- Opportunist, Diplomat, Expert, Achiever, Individualist, Strategist, and Alchemist - representing the different

developmental stages through which an individual can progress (McCauley et al., 2006; Rooke & Torbert, 2005). The action logics are grouped into three levels: 1) the *pre-conventional* (Opportunist), 2) the *conventional* (Diplomat, Expert, Achiever), and 3) the *post-conventional level* (Individualist, Strategist, Alchemist) (Boiral et al., 2009; Cook-Greuter, 2004). Each stage of development influences what a person can become aware of and thus capable of changing (Cook-Greuter, 2004). As individuals progress sequentially through the different stages they develop increasingly complex and inclusive worldviews (Boiral et al., 2009; Brown, 2011; Rooke & Torbert, 2005). The following briefly describes characteristics of action logics and their associated leadership styles.

**Opportunist action logic/pre-conventional level.** The Opportunist tends to focus on meeting his immediate needs and views the “world and other people as opportunities to exploit” (Rooke & Torbert, 2005, p. 68). Feedback is perceived as an affront, blame is diverted, and poor behaviour is legitimized in what is seen as an “eye-for-an-eye world” (Rooke & Torbert, 2005, p. 68).

**Diplomat action logic/conventional level.** The Diplomat tends to avoid conflict and looks for approval from “higher-status colleagues” (Rooke & Torbert, 2005, p. 68). Feedback is understood as “disapproval or as a reminder of norms” (Cook-Greuter, 2004, p. 7). They influence others through encouragement and are inclined to favour conformity and adherence to protocol (Cook-Greuter, 2004).

**Expert action logic/conventional level.** The Expert focusses control by perfecting personal knowledge. Clear and logical thinking is important to the Expert. Finding security in their expertise, Experts feel they are on solid footing from which to solicit “consensus and buy-

in” from others (Rooke & Torbert, 2005). They are able to give personal attention to detail, may seek perfection, and may be sensitive to feedback (Cook-Greuter, 2004).

**Achiever action logic/conventional level.** Achievers shape a positive working atmosphere and are focussed on delivering results (Rooke & Torbert, 2005). They have a more intricate worldview, willingly receive feedback, and are aware of how misunderstanding and uncertainty arise from different perspectives and interpretations (Rooke & Torbert, 2005).

**Individualist action logic/post-conventional level.** The Individualist recognizes that our identity and how we see the world are mutable constructions (Rooke & Torbert, 2005). They interpret their reality in relationship to and as interaction within a system (Cook-Greuter, 2004). Feedback is viewed as an opportunity for self-development and revealing unseen facets of their behaviour (Cook-Greuter, 2004, p. 7). For the individualist, rules are flexible and open to interpretation and discussion is encouraged (Cook-Greuter, 2004).

**Strategist action logic/post-conventional level.** The Strategist is adept at dealing with conflict and people’s “instinctual resistance to change”, and is also skillful at conceptualizing a common vision amongst those of differing perspectives, that can foster personal and organizational transformation (Rooke & Torbert, 2005, p. 71).

**Alchemist action logic/post-conventional level.** Alchemists are masters of reinvention and can transform themselves and their organizations in “significantly historical ways”; feedback is welcomed and viewed as an essential part of the learning and change process (Cook-Greuter, 2004; Rooke & Torbert, 2005, p. 72).

### **Environmental Steward, Environmental Leader**

Torbert’s action logic framework provides a lens through which to understand the personal capacities required of environmental leaders; that is to say how they experience,

interpret, and act upon their world (Boiral et al., 2009). It may be that certain types of action logics are more favorable than others to environmental leadership. Environmental leaders are seen as more ecocentric in their values, adept at integrating multiple stakeholder views, committed to affecting change, and able to mobilize people to achieve a pro-environmental vision (Boiral et al., 2009). In light of some of these qualities of effective environmental leaders, individuals who are deeply involved in environmental stewardship initiatives may in fact be assuming the role of environmental leader. Committing to environmental stewardship and organizing in its cause are akin to environmental leadership as defined by Egri and Herman (2000) “as the ability to influence individuals and mobilize organizations to realize a vision of long-term ecological sustainability” (p. 572). To some extent environmental stewardship mirrors environmental leadership as “the enactment of eco-centric values in organizational processes, activities, and relationships” (Egri & Herman, 2000, p. 572).

My personal interest lies in understanding how the environmental steward’s meaning-making systems parallel the stages of leadership development. The way an individual interprets his or her world and whether he or she views challenges as opportunities to grow or threats to avoid, can influence resulting responses to complex environmental problems (Sharma, 2000). By understanding the meaning-making systems and personal capacities of the steward as environmental leader, future stewards may be taught to be more effective (Brown, 2011).

In summary, the literature reviewed in this section focusses on the nature of individuals’ motivation and commitment to caring for the environment, leadership from a stewardship perspective, as well as aspects of adult development, growth, and self-understandings that promote an expanding worldview. The following chapters describe my methodology, present

research findings, and discuss insights that may contribute to the field of environmental leadership.

### **Chapter Three: Research Methodology**

This section presents my methodological approach and explains the rationale for my choice. I also describe the methods I used for data collection and analysis, and address questions of ensuring the trustworthiness of the project. Finally, I discuss selection of project participants.

#### **Methodological Approach**

This study primarily explored the volunteer environmental steward's path to engagement, how they interpreted their experience and the deeper meaning they found within their stewardship work. From the point of view of maturity development, I was interested in discovering action logic stage at which these individuals operated and how their developmental stage influenced how they framed their experience. The qualitative method of inquiry proceeded within a combination of a naturalistic and grounded theory approach. Research within the naturalistic paradigm results in findings allowing phenomena to reveal themselves naturally (Golafshani, 2003). Denzin and Lincoln (2008) define qualitative research as:

...a situational activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world... This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

(p. 3)

The research was intended as an inquiry into how participants interpret and construct meaning through their lived experiences and how these meaning making systems align with the participants' stage of leadership development. Through the environmental steward's "free association narrative", a narrative approach whereby the narrator's story is "open to development

and change, depending on the narrator's experiences", I hoped to render their experience meaningful (Hollway & Jefferson, 2009, p. 6). Eliciting narrative derives from a "biographical interpretive method" which posits that:

...hidden meaning being revealed through the gestalt of a story is analogous to the psychoanalytic concept of free association, in which links between elements in the narrative are provided by unconscious meaning associations, which then provide clues to the significance of the person's account. (Charmaz, 2006, p. 67)

I took this narrative approach to qualitative research within a naturalistic paradigm as it appeared to be most appropriate to the goal of exploration and understanding (Golafshani, 2003; Hollway & Jefferson, 2009).

In addition to the above, I tended to take a constructivist approach to grounded theory. According to Charmaz, the constructivist approach puts the "phenomena of study" first and views "shared experience and relationship" between researcher and participant as co-creating data and analysis (Stern, Dietz, Abel, Guagnano, & Kalof, 1999, p. 130). It acknowledges the interplay between researcher and participant as contributing to research outcomes and that any resulting theories are inextricably influenced by the researcher's worldview (Stern et al., 1999). The constructivist approach is a way of "learning how, when and to what extent the studied experience" fits into a broader context (Stern et al., 1999, p. 130). My research intention was to gain insight into how this particular group of individuals (see Participant Profiles, p. 39) evolve and how they experience and interpret their participation in volunteer environmental stewardship. Throughout this process I have realized the outcomes I have settled upon are constrained by what I am able to see in the data and also not see.

### **Selection of Participants**

Participants were selected primarily through purposeful sampling whereby “the researcher actively selects the most productive sample to answer the research question” (Marshall, 1996, p. 523). I also used snowball sampling, a method by which participants recommend interview subjects who may be potentially useful to the study (Marshall, 1996).

This is an exploratory qualitative case study limited to a specific context- the volunteer environmental steward leader- the sample size was small, consisting of 9 participants, yet large enough to draw some linkages between participants’ meaning-making systems and stage of action logic (Boiral et al., 2009; Cook-Greuter, 2000; Rooke & Torbert, 2005).

The sample population consists of individuals who are currently or have in the past been heavily engaged in volunteer environmental stewardship organizations, in a leadership capacity, located primarily in, but not limited to, the Cowichan Valley on Vancouver Island, BC.

Participants were mostly over the age of 50 and many were retired. Their professional backgrounds are varied and not necessarily related to the environmental field. Some participants I interviewed are co-members of my local environmental stewardship society while others are part of a larger network of environmental stewardship organizations on Vancouver Island. I personally contacted potential participants (in person, via email, or through my personal stewardship network) to invite them to take part in the study. This invitation included the description and the purpose of the study in addition to the time commitment expected.

### **Data Collection**

The research involved two phases of data collection. The first phase entailed completion of a psychological assessment tool, in the form of a sentence completion test used to assess the action logics of participants. The second stage involved one semi-structured interview designed

to elicit, in narrative form, the participants' path to engagement in environmental stewardship as well as their meaning-making perspectives.

**Leadership maturity assessment instrument (MAP).** This part of the data collection process began with the administration of the Leadership Maturity Assessment Profile instrument (MAP) (formerly known the SCTi-MAP or LDP), a psychological assessment instrument based on Loevinger's Washington University Sentence Completion Test (WUSCT) (McCauley et al., 2006; Rooke & Torbert, 2005). Using a leadership maturity framework, this assessment instrument assesses the action logics or ways in which participants "reason and behave in response to their experience" (Cook-Greuter, 2004, p. 5).

The Sentence Completion Test Integral – Maturity Assessment Profile (SCTi-MAP) uses a series of 36 sentence stems designed to elicit perspectives on "self-perceptions, social situations, and interpersonal relationships" (Brown, 2011, p. 96). It is designed to reveal a range of mature meaning making systems that inform individual's interpretation, understanding, and subsequent response to a given situation (Cook-Greuter, 2004). Cook-Greuter's website (<http://www.cook-greuter.com>) provides a complete list of all 36 sentence stems used in the assessment. Some examples are "when I'm criticized...", "being with other people...", "when people are helpless...", and "if I were in charge..." The MAP instrument (which is the latest evolution of the WUSCT) is available for download from Cook-Greuter's website and takes approximately 45 minutes to complete. Past dissertations have made use of independent scorers when using the instrument (Brown, 2011; McCallum Jr, 2008; Roberts, 2011). For this small study, Dr. Susanne Cook-Greuter, herself, scored the participants' tests. She is an expert in mature ego-development, a researcher, a psychologist, and an expert scorer of Loevinger's WUSCT (Cook-Greuter, 2000). She, along with William Torbert designed the leadership

maturity assessment instrument (MAP), adapted from Loevinger's WUSCT, to function within the management and leadership world (April & Peters, 2013, p. 64; McCauley et al., 2006). Participants were sent an electronic copy of the MAP sentence completion test. They completed the test on their own time and returned it to me via email. The completed tests were sent in a single batch to Dr. Cook-Greuter to be analysed. I received test scores after I had completed my interviews. The test was used solely to determine the participants' stage of action logic. I chose to proceed with the interviews without knowing participants stage of development because I didn't want the results to unduly influence my initial perceptions.

**Validity.** I chose to use the MAP because it is the latest adaptation of Loevinger's *Washington Sentence Completion Test* (WUSCT), an instrument that is the "most widely used and best validated in the field of personality development" (Cook-Greuter, 2004, p. 2; Lilienfeld, Wood, & Garb, 2000). Validity, in this case, refers to "whether the means of measurement are accurate and whether they are actually measuring what they are intended to measure" (Golafshani, 2003, p. 599). Because the MAP instrument is one of the latest evolutions of Loevinger's Washington University Sentence Completion Test (WUSCT), references to validity will be based the WUSCT. The WUSCT, developed by Loevinger, is a projective technique used to measure ego development (Lilienfeld et al., 2000). Lilienfeld et al.'s (2000) article discussing the scientific status of projective techniques considers the WUSCT to be "arguably the most extensively validated projective technique" (p. 56).

**Interviews.** I interviewed nine participants using a type of lightly-structured depth interview (LSDI) that uses a biographic-narrative-interpretive method (BNIM) approach (Wengraf, 2001). This approach restricts the interviewer to a single question aimed at inducing narrative (SQUIN) (Wengraf, 2001). I chose this method because biographical narrative can

elicit a particularly powerful expression of a person's nature in how it reveals a person's way of "thinking, feeling, and doing" (Wengraf, 2001, p. 7). In this manner, I explored individuals' self-understandings and meaning-making systems as they interpret them to have transformed their knowledge into action and ultimately leadership (Chawla, 1998a). Additionally, subsequent interview questions explored participants' path to environmental engagement, reflections on their role as environmental steward, guiding principles, thoughts on environmental responsibility, and deeper meanings they attribute to their work.

Interviews began with a single question aimed at inducing narrative (SQUIN) (Wengraf, 2001, p. 61). The question was as follows:

Would you tell me about how you came to be an environmental steward? *Please start wherever you like and say whatever comes to mind. Take the time you need, I'll listen first and won't interrupt you.*

The interviewee directed the narrative at this point without any further questioning. Depending on the participants' answers, this first question was followed by a request for more narrative on topics as they were raised during the initial question. The interview continued with a series of six more directed questions. They are as follows:

1. How would you see your role as an environmental steward your community?
2. What guiding principles, if any, do you follow when engaging in your environmental stewardship work?
3. How would you describe your current understanding of environmental responsibility?
4. Can you identify events or experiences in your past that have shifted your perspective on environmental responsibility?
5. When or if a shift in perspective occurred, how did you feel about it?

6. Can you describe, at the deepest level of meaning for you, your work as an environmental steward? That is to say, what is the essence of your work; what are you doing on the deepest level?

As with the SQUIN, more narrative on topics covered may or may not have been requested. Initially, I had some reservations about the breadth of the questions, but ultimately I chose not to alter them because I felt they allowed the necessary space for participants' personal interpretation. Seven interviews took place at participants' homes, while two interviews were conducted at either the participant's volunteer site or at a coffee shop. All interviews were audio recorded and stored on a password protected computer.

### **Data Analysis**

**MAP (Maturity Assessment Profile).** Results of the MAP provided the action logic stages of participants. Portions of the interview data dealing specifically with different aspects of leadership were grouped by participants' respective action logic. This analysis provided some insight into how participants at different action logic stages approached the aspects of leadership that emerged from the interviews.

**Interviews.** The following section outlines the procedure of thematic analysis, the process I used to make sense of the interview data.

Thematic analysis served to identify recurrent unifying concepts, otherwise known as themes, that emerged as patterns in the data (Bradley, Curry, & Devers, 2007). I followed the process of conventional content analysis, a kind of thematic analysis devoid of preconceived categories/themes and wherein the researcher immerses herself in the data to allow themes to emerge (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The procedure involved text analysis to reveal themes and

subthemes. Those most relevant to the study were identified and grouped into broader categories.

The data analysis entailed an ongoing iterative and systematic approach (Bradley et al., 2007). The initial step in my analysis was a reflective process immediately or soon after the initial interview. During this time, I made note of my thoughts and reflections pertaining to the interview process and content, as well as any emotional responses I may have had. The transcription of audio files provided a second opportunity to glean general impressions from the interview and also to revisit and re-examine some of my assumptions or responses. After audio records were transcribed, I first began by simply reading through the data and my interview notes to gain an understanding of the data in its entirety (Bradley et al., 2007). After the transcription process, data was entered into Dedoose, a qualitative data management program, where I did my initial coding to organize data into categories and reveal “links between concepts and experiences described in the data” (Bradley et al., 2007, p. 1761). Code types included conceptual codes to identify key concepts, relationship codes linking concepts, participant perspectives, or setting codes (Bradley et al., 2007, pp. 1763-1764). Other coding strategies included looking for repetitions, similarities and differences, or transitions (G. W. Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 101). This initial coding process yielded a large number of codes and sub-codes, 116 in total (see Appendix D). At that point, I felt it necessary to deal with the coding process manually and proceeded to visually map out and cluster codes into relevant themes until I believed I had a general sense of what the interviews had yielded. Figure 1 shows my initial working diagram which provided a visual roadmap from which I could further regroup and refine themes.

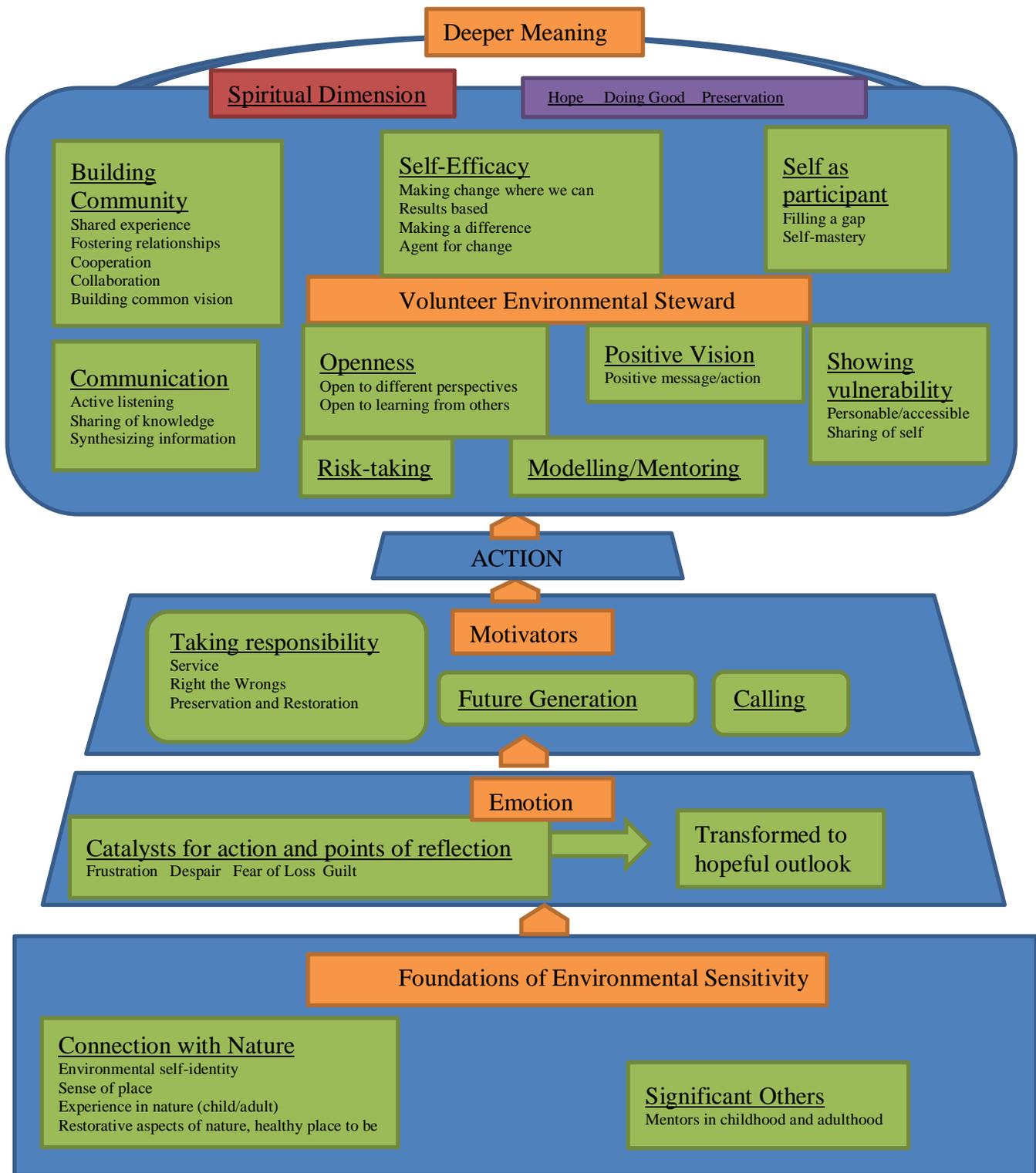


Figure 1. An initial working diagram representing clusters of codes grouped into relevant themes and sub-themes.



I then narrowed the focus and centred in on themes occurring in at least half of the participants' narratives. I again organized the paired-down themes into a simplified working diagram that I used as a guide throughout the analysis process. Figure 2 shows the simplified working diagram which served as a general outline for the structure of the thesis.

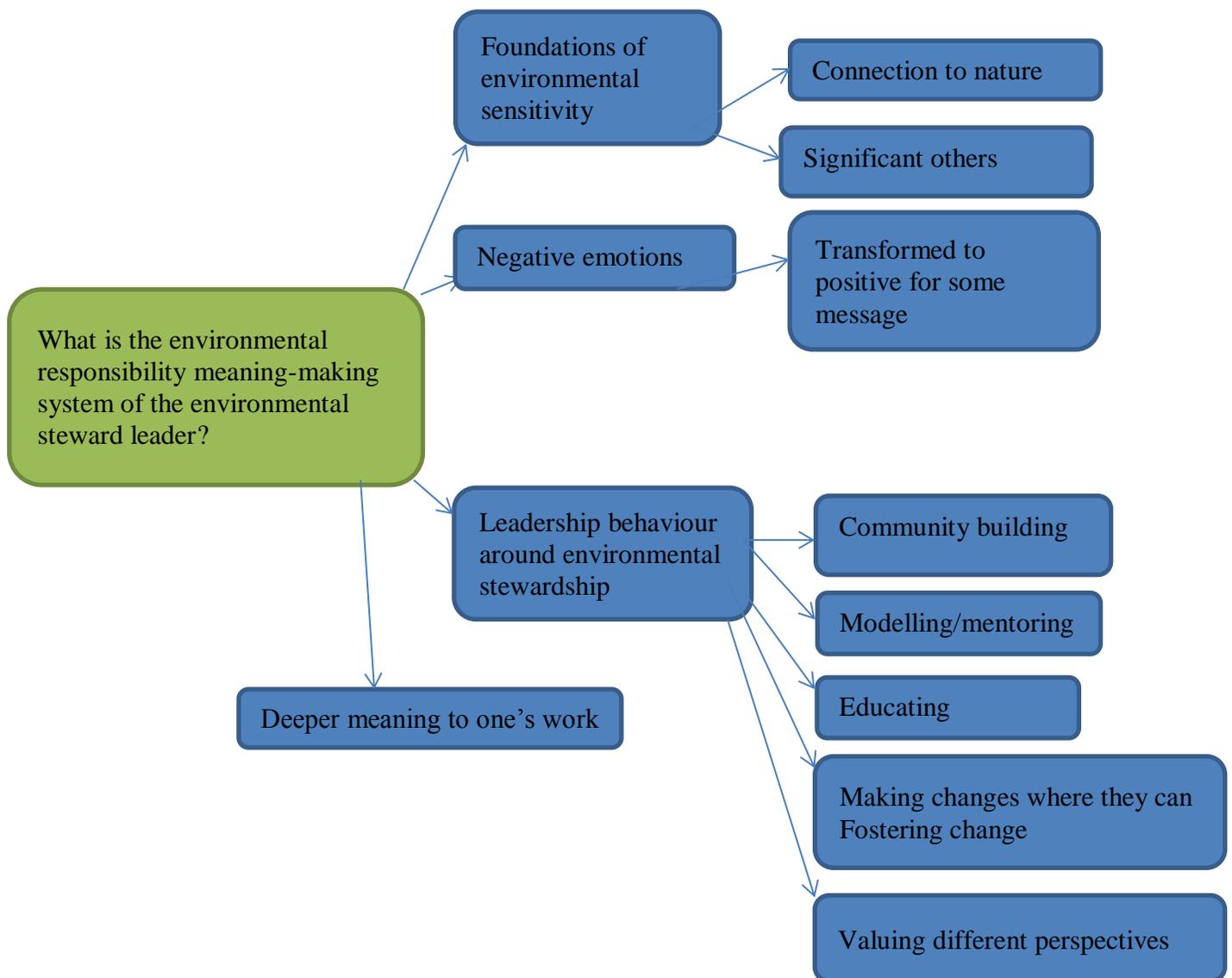


Figure 2. Simplified and refined working diagram outlining themes and sub-themes as revealed through interview data.



Throughout this process, I constantly referred back to interview excerpts to confirm and verify the validity of the structure I had created. I feel it is important to acknowledge my biases in choice of what to include and what to exclude, as well as my coding interpretation. I realize that my own stage of adult development may hamper my ability to fully interpret the understandings or worldviews of participants who are at later stages of adult development.

As a way of acknowledging and documenting my own biases, assumptions, and worldview, I kept an on-going journal to record and reflect upon my own observations and interpretations. In doing so, I hoped to ensure findings resulting from participants' narratives were as honest as possible and not unduly influenced by my assumptions, emotional responses, preferences, and interpretations of informant' words (Shenton, 2004). I am aware that I cannot completely eliminate researcher bias, however I can overtly recognize underlying assumptions in my work (Brown, 2011; Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004). Final analysis included identifying, naming, and providing key excerpts illustrating major themes that emerged from the coding process (Brown, 2011).

Additionally, in an effort to ensure the trustworthiness of the study, credibility concerns were addressed in a number a ways such as by performing member checks throughout the process to ensure interpretation of participants' narratives accurately reflect their stories (Guba, 1981; Roberts, 2011; Shenton, 2004). As such, I provided participants with their complete transcripts with the invitation to discuss any questions or concerns they may have. Furthermore, I provided each participant with a copy of the participant profile and the specific quotes I intended to use in the final paper. To further ensure credibility, I used well-established research methods that have been used successfully in comparable studies (Shenton, 2004). The

methodology design involved triangulation as two different methods of data collection were used, the Maturity Assessment Profile and interviews (Guba, 1981).

In most cases, I have developed a certain familiarity and prolonged engagement with the participants (Guba, 1981). To ensure participants' honesty when contributing data, each person approached for the study had the opportunity to refuse to participate. My goal was to involve only those who were sincerely willing to participate and to offer information unreservedly (Shenton, 2004). I informed participants that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time (Shenton, 2004). I was fortunate to enlist help of friends and colleagues as a second set of eyes and to provide feedback and alternative perspectives on the study (Shenton, 2004).

### **Study Delimitations**

This exploratory qualitative case study focussed on a limited context, i.e., a small group of individuals engaged in volunteer environmental steward leadership on Vancouver Island, BC... The sample size was limited to nine individuals, between the ages of 50 and 84, and as such is not basis enough to make any broad generalizations about volunteer environmental stewards. Being a small in depth case study, this exploration was only intended as a contribution to more extensive research into adult development and environmental leadership. Despite the small sample size the study findings appear to be consistent with other work in the field of environmental psychology, environmental education and adult development and thus its consistency contributes to the trustworthiness of the ensuing results.

### **Study Limitations**

The interview method used during research provided a very rich data set that I don't feel I am able to fully explore within the parameters of this research, however I have tried to include

findings that may shed light on how the volunteer environmental steward's worldview shapes his/her journey into environmental leadership. I also cannot ignore my own biases in perception and interpretation as a limiting factor in this study. In order to minimize the impact of my personal bias (and I say minimise because I don't feel it is possible to eliminate personal bias entirely) I attempted to be aware of my own reactions to participants narrative during the interview process and immediately thereafter by documenting post-interview impressions and thoughts. In addition to journaling as an outlet for my own responses and reactions, I felt I needed to distance myself from the interview prior to transcription allowing time for my heightened emotional response to subside before re-engaging with the audio interview records. Even though I tried to minimise my own subjectivity, shaped by my own meaning making system, personality type, and interests, I still fully recognize its inevitable influence and impact on my interpretation (Gilmore & Durkin, 2001). Moreover, I cannot ignore my own inexperience as an interviewer as well as my inexperience with the psycho-analytical approach taken would have certainly affected the research outcomes. Furthermore, my own stage of meaning-making or action logic would govern what I was able to perceive within the data.

### **Chapter Four: Participant Profiles and Themes**

The purpose of this study was to explore how the volunteer environmental steward's leadership behaviour and environmental responsibility meaning-making system relates to the stages of leadership development or action logic. This chapter begins with a profile of each participant, followed by a review of the research findings. All participants were given a pseudonym for this study and any identifying locations or names have been omitted or altered from excerpts to maintain participants' anonymity.

#### **Research Participants**

This study's nine participants were all people actively engaged in volunteer environmental stewardship initiatives. They range between the ages of 50 and 82. Six of the participants have an educational background in the natural sciences. Of the nine participants, six have spent much if not all of their working lives in the environmental field. All the participants were residents of either the Cowichan Valley or Victoria region on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada. There were four female interviewees and five male interviewees. Six participants are retired while three are currently working.

**Participant profiles.** John, aged 50, assessed at the Achiever action logic, is a retired entrepreneur. He spent his working life as owner/operator of a small business and later running a wilderness fishing lodge. After he retired, he became active in the environmental stewardship movement and for the past five years has worked towards watershed stewardship, riparian restoration and conservation, and environmental education in his local community. His educational background is as a fisheries technician. He indicated he was able to reconnect with his formative experiences (both life experiences and educational experiences) through his volunteer environmental stewardship work.

Frances, aged 70, assessed at the Individualist action logic, is a retired (although she still does some on-call work) teacher having done much work in special education. She has been active in her local community as a volunteer environmental steward for over 20 years. Currently, she acts as the volunteer co-ordinator and an environmental steward leader for a local on-going community-based environmental restoration project. During that time, she has witnessed evolving change in environmental restoration practices as well as people's increasing environmental awareness. Her educational background is in education and art history and she is also a regular practitioner of Thich Nhat Hanh Buddhist meditation.

Lara, aged 62, assessed at Expert action logic, is a nature interpreter and serves as business manager of an environmental consultancy firm. From an early age her interest in the natural world was piqued and this passion for the environment has hugely influenced her life's career path. Lara is extremely active in the environmental stewardship movement and is at the forefront of many environmental stewardship initiatives in her community at large. She describes herself as being led to share her knowledge and passion for nature and work to protect nature through nature education, environmental stewardship and activism around it. Her educational background is in biology, education, and counselling psychology.

Alex, aged 62, assessed at the Achiever action logic, is a restoration ecologist and serves as Owner and President of an environmental consultancy firm. He is very active in volunteer environmental stewardship initiatives within his community as well as internationally. He sees his environmental stewardship role as one of sharing his extensive knowledge, understanding, and experience of ecosystems with the goal of fostering, supporting, and implementing sustainable ecosystem practices. His educational background is in plant ecology, restoration, and reclamation.

Marie, aged 70, assessed at the Achiever action logic, is a retired teacher. She has been active in her local volunteer environmental stewardship society for the last five years. Her journey into environmental stewardship began while investigating ways to address an erosion problem on her property. She later attended a community meeting organized around lake and river usage and at that point she and other concerned citizens formed the local environmental stewardship society. Her academic background is in mathematics and education.

Holly, aged 62, assessed at the Achiever action logic, currently works as a professional editor. Previously, she worked for many years in the environmental field, however she still remains active as an advocate on various environmental issues. For this study, she focussed on a very local volunteer environmental stewardship initiative to preserve a neighbourhood Gary Oak meadow threatened by development. She describes herself as having a “natural inclination” to care for the environment and has “always been keen on environmental stewardship without putting a name to it”.

Steve, aged 73, assessed at the Achiever action logic, is a retired wildlife biologist having spent much of his career as a governmental Regional Wildlife Section Head. After retiring, he formed his own consulting company and over time became actively involved in some of the environmental stewardship issues arising in his local community. He describes his role as an environmental steward in his community as one of raising awareness and advocating around local environmental issues, communicating and synthesizing information, and facilitating community building. He has been instrumental in advocating for change and proper resource management on various environmental issues in an around his community.

Nicholas, aged 83, assessed at the Expert action logic, is a retired librarian. During his career, he headed a government environmental department’s library and publication services

where he built up an internationally renowned collection on freshwater biology. Since the mid to late nineties he has been actively volunteering his time, knowledge, and expertise with local and regional environmental stewardship and research initiatives. He describes his role of environmental steward as one of educating and raising public awareness around environmental problems and advocating for restoration and sustainable resource management.

Keith, aged 65, assessed at the Individualist action logic (transitioning to Strategist), is a retired teacher. Prior to moving into the field of education, he worked for a government environmental department. He describes certain projects he worked on during that time as giving him a deeper understanding of the importance of small streams to the salmon life cycle. For this study his volunteer environmental stewardship work focusses on the restoration of an urban salmon stream and a native plant restoration project within its watershed. He describes his role in his environmental stewardship society as one of stepping in and being the person around whom others can coalesce, thus providing consistency in a way that supports and facilitates a collective's vision.

### **Interview Findings**

The findings of this exploratory research attempt to generate a picture of the volunteer environmental steward's meaning making system or worldview as it relates to their environmental stewardship work. As I systematically worked through the interview data, patterns in experiences and reflections from the participants began to emerge. From the data I identified four overarching themes: 1) foundations of environmental sensitivity, 2) adverse emotion, action, and hope, 3) deeper meanings to one's work, 4) aspects of leadership (refer to Figures 1 and 2, p. 35-36).

The first theme emerges from the “single question” or SQUIN. The second and fourth themes emerge from the first five questions following the SQUIN. The third theme draws mostly from participants’ answers to the sixth question following the SQUIN. The themes are loosely ordered to reflect my interpretation of the relative importance in participants’ narrative. These themes reflect participants’ path to engagement as volunteer environmental stewards and the ways in which they activate their environmental responsibility meaning-making system in the world. I have drawn mostly on coded data represented by 50% or more of participants. The following sections elaborate on each of the four themes and key findings within using exemplary quotations from participants. Table 1 (p.60) and Table 2 (p.74) provide a summary of how Themes and Sub-themes relate to participants’ action logics. Where necessary, I have omitted or altered identifying information so as to maintain participants’ anonymity.

**Theme 1: Foundations of environmental sensitivity.** The first of the four major themes reflects how participants describe, in various different ways, foundational influences that have shaped their sensitivity to the natural environment. To varying degrees and in varying contexts, all participants referred to connections to nature and/or significant individuals as having an underlying influence on their proclivity to value the natural environment. Two findings contribute to this theme:

- 1) *Experiences in nature.* Most participants indicated connections to nature either through experiences in nature in either childhood or adulthood. One participant reported she had always felt a “natural inclination” to value nature and didn’t attribute this view to particular experiences in nature.

2) *Influence of significant others.* Participants described significant individuals (in either childhood or adulthood) as having mentoring roles in their lives in terms of the development of their environmental pursuits.

***Experiences in nature.*** When asked about how they came to be environmental stewards, some participants took their reflection back to their early experiences in nature. These memories seemingly play a foundational role in how these individuals feel about and value natural environments. John described his childhood experiences spending long periods of time in a remote family fishing lodge as having likely shaped how he values the natural environment as an adult.

John: So, I guess I gained respect for the environment, an appreciation for the environment at a very young age, probably you know was really engaged by six. And between the ages of six and sixteen was pretty much immersed in nature, certainly every summer at the very least but I..You know, hunting and fishing was what I did. So that's probably where my early appreciation came from.

John later goes on to describe the immersion in the natural environment and absence of modern amenities and technologies as having redirected his childhood entertainment pursuits to the outdoors. The results were seemingly a lasting sense of wonder and deep appreciation for the natural world.

John: So, living in a small community, I mean as kids we were never inside, we were always outdoors, you know, exploring, riding bikes, there was quite a long period of time where we did not have television, period. Especially, when we were working up at the fishing lodge, there was no power, no roads, nothing, it was fly-in. So, I mean, nature is

your playground and so I think there were just a lot less distractions. So, every bug, every frog, every bird was... I mean, that was our entertainment.

Similarly, Frances recalls, as a child and young girl-scout, spending time camping and hiking with family and generally having much unstructured time to explore her natural environment:

Frances: ...then I was in girl scouts and did a lot of camping and hiking and that kind of thing, and then my family had the cabin up in the mountains where we would go each summer and I remember having lots of time to just play in the woods. My sister and I still talk about that, we had just day after day to just roam in the woods and play (laugh). We weren't in daycare or having to go to summer school. We were up there swimming and digging holes and building tree forts and playing around ...and so I've always liked being in the outdoors...

Frances seems to describe the freedom of exploration through play in nature as an early experience cementing her sensitivity and enjoyment of the outdoors, "So, I think in my garden and then just in the part nearby, I had lots of opportunity to be in the natural environment and play..."

For Lara, early experiences in nature again involved freedom of exploration and the chance for personal growth and opportunities for taking on responsibility at a young age:

Lara: So, I got engaged going twice a month with a young naturalist group and then if you really got into it you got to become a leader, which was a big deal, and then you got to do extra things like cook-outs on weekends and we'd go hiking all over the island and he ran summer camps. And from that I upgraded to, as a teenager about age fifteen, to having a summer job at the park where we did nature walks and we looked after the

nature house and we just did all this stuff that normally today you wouldn't even let children do...

Steve reflects on growing up with ease of access to nature in the community around him as well as the influence of cultural heritage and family farms and ranches as having contributed to his early connections with nature:

Steve: So, we grew up where we had access to the outdoors. My cultural heritage - we had all kinds of access to wild game and raised some of our own farm animals like chickens and all my uncles had dairy farms and hog farms and beef cattle ranches and chicken farms and all this kind of stuff. So, it was all kind of basically there, right.

Alex also began his story, however briefly, from his early experiences by saying:

Alex: I started out – spent my teen years in a rural community and was very involved in the outdoors and mountaineering and such and thought I would like to go into forestry...

This brief account seems to imply these early experiences influenced his later decision to pursue an education in an environmental field.

Of all study participants, a total of 6 out of 9 mentioned these early experiences in natural settings as forming an early connection to, appreciation of, and level of comfort with the natural world.

Nicholas's begins his story in *early adulthood*. He vividly recounts his first encounter with nature conservation and in his retelling one senses his quiet drive and passion to protect nature.

Nicholas: And at that time, this was in the mid-nineteen fifties, and, are you familiar with Wordsworth, the poem about daffodils? Wild daffodils used to grow in this area and when I was there they used to sprout forth pretty regularly along the side of the lake, but

the only problem was that every weekend people drove up there to take in the scenery and they would pluck the daffodils. And so, as I say I used to live quite close by and I used to go out for a walk sometimes at lunchtime and there would be daffodils on a Friday, they would be there. You'd go along out on a Monday or a Tuesday and there aren't any. And of course, they don't survive very long because, you know, people just grab them, they don't cut them off, and some pull the bulbs up. So, the first thing we noticed was that they were not surviving and we needed to do something about it. And the area is a national park and the powers that be recruited people who were interested to be park wardens and we basically tried to restrain people from wrecking the place by plucking flowers or doing other damaging things. And, so, that was, I guess, the first sort of thing where we came in to trying to conserve the area.

One other participant, Holly, related her connection to nature not necessarily as having a basis in her early experiences but more so as a "natural inclination" to value nature:

Holly: ... I've always been keen on environmental stewardship without putting a name to it. It's just a natural inclination of mine to take care of the natural world and to see it as something valuable in and of itself and not to be messed around with too much...

The above participants accounts of such early life experiences in and around nature, contributes to our understanding of how these individuals gained some sense of emotional attachment and appreciation for the natural world. John, Frances, Lara and Alex's early experiences of play, discovery, growth and independence in natural places seems to have created an emotional affinity for such places and partly influences their drive to protect them (Chawla, 1998a, 1998b, 1999; Palmer, Suggate, Robottom, & Hart, 1999). Nicholas's recollections denote deep sensitivity to the beauty in nature and his strongly-felt drive to protect it. Alongside this

first finding, many of the participants identified significant individuals in their lives who had in various different ways influenced their understanding of the natural world and their desire to engage with it. The following section discusses this second finding.

***Influence of significant others.*** This second finding explores the influence of significant individuals on participants' sensitivity to or interest in the natural world and/or choice to further pursue environmental interests. Lara, for example, immediately identified an influential and inspirational mentor from her childhood, a person who opened her heart to nature and "changed her life". For Lara, this was clearly remembered as a pivotal moment:

Lara: When I was ten years old my parents took me to a park... and I met a gentleman there ... and he was running a junior naturalist group. He said to me would I like to come out for walks with him and I said sure. So, they signed me up, for my ten year old birthday present, to join this nature group, and he became an incredible mentor and changed my life and I never looked back...in a nutshell...and I made a life out of it...

Steve interweaves the influence of a teacher from a childhood outdoor camp, his father, as well as his shared interests with his younger sibling:

Steve: Well there was a game-warden ... and he taught a wildlife course at the Boys' Club there and I was a member, it's a boys' and girls' club now, but then it was a boys' club. And my brother, I think he was probably eleven or twelve and ... I think I was fourteen at the time, we took a the wildlife course ... and we both got the two highest marks in the class. And my dad used to take us hunting and fishing and I just wanted always to be a biologist ... and my brother, too...

He also pinpoints his father's "consciousness and an awareness of nature around him" as helping to shape his own early environmental consciousness. Nicholas also clearly indicates a grammar school teacher as influencing him:

Nicholas: Well, my interest in biology was piqued by a school teacher, way back when I was in grammar school and I went from there to take a BSc. in marine zoology at university...

Keith speaks of an awakening to environmental responsibility and an early awareness, inspired by his mother's beliefs, of ourselves as part being part of nature:

Keith: In high school my biology teacher was part of a nesting study of robins. And this was when they were investigating whether DDT might be making robins eggs fragile and decreasing bird populations, which was significantly what "Silent Spring" was about. And so he recruited several of the boys, including me, to go out and do studies. And that was clearly an awareness that 'oh, okay ... there's a lack of environmental responsibility going on' ... so I guess that changed my view. My mother ... loved nature and had kind of a spiritual understanding of and relationship to it...and she was very big on Findhorn Garden and the secret life of plants and that stuff , all from that wonderful sixties and seventies kind of era in which – well, Findhorn Garden was really – they felt they were dealing with plant spirits, nature spirits... So, mum was professionally immersed in, but also personally very much part of ... understanding the rest of life not as an "IT" but as...life like us... And I don't believe in nature spirits, but I certainly do, in that just same sense, feel that life is something we are part of...

In this section I have focussed particularly on participants' accounts of early significant role models whom they felt contributed to their environmental appreciation and understanding.

Together these two findings reflect some foundational elements of participants' environmental sensitivity. The following theme explores deeper meanings participants' ascribe to their environmental stewardship work.

**Theme 2: Negative emotion, action, and hope.** Eight of the nine participants in the study expressed varying negative emotions associated with their environmental stewardship work. They acknowledged these negative emotions (e.g. frustration, disappointment, or despair) and yet most would make a conscious choice not to dwell on them.

*Frustration and action for change.* For some, these difficult feelings operated as a catalyst for them to move forward and take positive action in their world. John, for example, recounts how his frustration shifts into action.

John: You know at first, you can sort of get frustrated and I was there for sure. I was at a point where I was "What the hell am I doing this for?" ...But as the team grew, as the group grew, then you see – oh, it's just not me, it's a lot bigger than just one person being frustrated. It's a lot of people frustrated and if you can sort of shift that frustration into positive action, you know it's that problem solving thing, you figure out where the problem is and then sort of figure out a way to get at it...

Lara speaks of how deep frustration experienced in the face of environmental challenges, and her "leading" or perhaps her calling, combine to move her to action:

Lara: Well, I don't know, say something like...just... (sigh) incredible frustration and that I didn't have a choice. I mean, that takes me back to what I said earlier, I have a leading, I have a very strong, I don't know what it is, what quite the right word is, it's a struggle to think about this, not necessarily intuition. But once my leading calls me I have to do it even though it can take me into places I don't want to go. I mean, wouldn't

it be great not to feel all that and sit here and read a book instead? But I can't...I just can't. I stay up too late, get up too early trying to do all this stuff. Sometimes I wish I didn't, but that's – that's the way it is.

***Disappointment and hope.*** Some participants seemed to express an underlying disappointment or an emotion close to despair when considering the scope of our environmental challenges and humanity's role in the current ecological crisis. Despite difficult feelings, most maintain a sense of hope in the future towards which they continue to work. For Keith, although upon reflection he may feel disappointed with society's lack of environmental responsibility, the hope he feels for the future defines his actions and energy in the present.

Keith: I think it looks like things getting better and worse at the same time. Because I've been disappointed in, you know, my generation, with going back to the sixties, I was of a generation that sort of woke up to, a little bit, our relationship with the rest of Earth and I've found since that it wasn't just my generation, it was my mom and older sisters read "Silent Spring"... but with the flower children I thought that there was a change going on even in my generation in which we were going to start to get it right. And say, again going back to the fisheries business here just in Canada, it's during my lifetime that fish stocks have been continuing to collapse. It would seem that during a period where I thought things would be getting better, we've been doing more and more damage... You know, not too many decades from here we just may find that we're in this Earth that actually can't support as many humans as it could... I'm a very optimistic person, so I have to remind myself that, okay, there is this getting worse thing that's going on and that it could get much worse, and at the same time what interests me and what is enjoyable

and fun is to be part of the turning around of consciousness and behaviour that I think is going on underneath this.

Lara describes a general disappointment and frustration with people's lack of willingness to "step up to the plate" on environmental protection issues, but at the same time she believes an "atmosphere of hope" is essential for forward movement on the changes she wants to see happen in the world.

Lara: To find, for instance with the environmental hearings last year, I was one of the few people in [location], I don't mean that as anything special and I don't have a lot to contribute, I'm not an expert, I'm very much a generalist person, but I find it disturbing and distressing that although I Facebooked and emailed and talked to lots of people, I wasn't able to engage many other people to stand up to the plate as I'm prepared to do. I'm not saying that there is something great about me. It's just that we need a lot more of us combating climate change and protecting the Earth and I am frustrated that I don't have that charisma that I'm engaging the numbers of people that I would like to. So that's the downside of it all. I try hard not to go there too much because, and definitely not with children. I believe in an atmosphere of hope and I try really hard not to be defeated. Sometimes I'm a bit of a Pollyanna. I don't know, necessarily, all the stats and stuff going on all the time on climate change... I don't think I'm doing the world any favors if I get discouraged and give up. And I've got four children, one of them in particular I would say, probably thinks I'm more of a nut case than not because "Why do you bother mum? The problems are too big, you can't make a difference". I believe that we all can and I just keep carrying on with that attitude (laugh) that we've got to make a difference!

For Alex, it is clear from the sustained environmental degradation evident in our communities and on Earth there will be no easy fix and thus there is no other option than to hold forth a hopeful vision of the future and “to work as hard as we can” to realize it.

Alex: Hmm...well, I think it behooves all of us to try and live as lightly as we can on the land because it's clear that from various things that we can see happening in the world that if we don't we're going to perish and, you know, the idea that there are technological fixes or whatever that are going to come and save us appears to be hogwash to me. And so, unless we're doing all we can to protect the natural ecosystems and the way the natural world works we're going to not do very well... and I think it behooves all of us to try and work as hard as we can to ensure there's a place for our children and their children and stuff like that, in a world that's liveable. It's pretty straightforward actually (soft laugh).

Marie reflects on a growing awareness of the importance of hope to creating positive action towards a better future compared to where we're “not going to go” if defeated by despair in the future.

Marie: ... I'm learning, or coming to understand, that maybe there's something there about having a positive reaction to the future, right, because no matter where it's going to take you... compared to where you're not going to go if you think differently, you're just not going to go anywhere, so you may as well try to be doing something positive than be doing nothing at all, even if the result is going to turn out to be the same because we don't know. So, I don't know, understanding of environmental responsibility, I guess somehow people have got to keep hope and be positive...(long pause)

From Holly, who has worked in the environmental field for some time, one gets a sense of exhaustion from her account and deep disappointment with how her provincial government's economic policies undermine environmental protection:

Holly: But it's not very promising living in (name of province), especially since at the legislature now I hear what happens in the house and it's all about, the government is all about jobs through LNG, liquid natural gas, I guess you might not know what that is, fracking and pulling gas out of everywhere. So, it's a bit disheartening, I must say, the direction we're heading, it's truly not the direction we should be heading.

When asked if she sees any hope in the future she speaks of innovation and leadership happening in China, but even so her outlook remains somber as she says:

Holly: ... you can always be hopeful but the fear is that we just have left everything too late and we are not engaged enough to do what we need to do in time to ward off the worst effects of climate change, resource depletion, yeah, forests, fisheries collapse, all that stuff (laugh)...

In sum, many participants expressed, in some form or other, difficult emotion relating to the uptake of environmental responsibility in society at large. For some of these individuals, deep feeling on this subject seemed to solidify the importance of hope and its role in stimulating a mindset for pro-environmental action.

**Theme 3: A deeper meaning to one's work.** When participants were asked to describe what their environmental stewardship work meant to them personally at the deepest level they spoke, in different ways, of strengthening their own connection to nature and of fostering that connection to nature in others. They also spoke of a strong feeling of responsibility to serve and to give back to their community. Some drew on spiritual aspects and oneness with the natural

world, some on the idea of unification of humans and nature, others on service to future generations and education as the underlying meaning to their work.

*Spiritual connections.* Three of the participants noted spiritual meaning in their work that for some participants seemed to go beyond tangible outcomes and centred on cultivating a deep connection with nature. Lara's environmental stewardship work emanates from her "spiritual path". She feels a connection with the natural world and is passionate about sharing her connection and dedication to nature with others.

Lara: Nature and the environment is my spiritual path. It's the essence of my being...and I don't know about making meaning of it, it's just there, it's just me, so...(long pause)...it's a oneness, I mean I'm going there right now, it's a going deep inside myself and feeling myself at one, with my feet rooted in the ground like a tree and my breath is part of the air that I breathe, my physical body, my mental state, it's all one with the land and the Earth...there's nothing for me to make a meaning out of, in a way...it's that greater sense of being...I guess the word love, a love of all and then the way I make meaning out of that...out of what I have been blessed and fortunate to have inside my own self and to feel this very, very deeply is to share that passion with others and to do whatever I can to take care and heal the world around me in every way I've got that can be done in a compassionate, respectful manner...

Alex describes his work, both volunteer and professional, at its deepest level as spiritual practice in re-establishing, healing, and fostering connection with the natural world.

Alex: ... all of the stuff I do focusses on that connection with the spiritual. And so, whether it's teaching a course where I teach a local stream keeper group how to restore a stream bank or an oil and gas company how to deal with a well site, it's all the same

stuff... I think that basically the deepest level is that connection with the spiritual part of the world and it will differ for each person. Like, everybody has a sense of peace or whatever you want to call it... but a sense of connection and well-being and stuff that you get when you walk into an old forest or you're beside a beautiful lake...it's that sense of connection with the Earth that is, I think vital to our well-being, that I think is critical actually to who we are as a species and how we can get back into harmony with the Earth that we are currently exploiting at a horrific rate, right. So, I think it's that spiritual connection that helps us get back into harmony with the world... and so, not only do I get a lift from knowing that my work is helping to heal the Earth but also my teaching is helping to teach people how to heal the Earth...

Frances describes her stewardship work as valuable way of using her time to create harmony and serve her community and upon reflection she identifies her Buddhist meditation practice as influencing how she interprets her work:

Frances: ...well...I think it would be peace and harmony...in the world. Doing something with my time that is valuable to the wider world...and just accepting who's there with me if somebody is...I guess it's doing with your time and your energy what you think is of value...So, yeah, why am I up on the hill? It's a healthy place to be and from my perception at this point in my life, you know I've seen many perceptions over many years, it seems like a healthy thing to do for the environment and my community and...(long pause)...so probably rooted in Buddhist meditation and that way of thinking...

***Part of nature.*** The above participants tend to explicitly frame, to varying degrees, the deeper meaning or essence of their work as a form of spiritual practice. Others' interpretations

are more secular in their focus on seeing ourselves as part of nature and not apart from it. Keith, for example, sees his work as a way of re-uniting his own identity as well as human identity generally with the natural ecological systems on Earth in ideological as well as very local and tangible as ways:

Keith: Well, I would have to say that anything I am doing as an environmental steward is very small and inadequate, dabbling at the edge of what we would talk about as what one is doing at the deepest level... this is the best I seem to be doing right now in working for unification of certainly myself and humankind with the life systems of our planet, and I don't even think – yeah, okay, our planet, but just with life, okay, with, I guess, stepping into ecology, recognizing ourselves as ecological beings and taking that as part of our identity and responsibility.

Holly frames her drive as “getting the word out” that we are “part of this environment” and our survival as a species hinges on not just understanding this but living by it:

Holly: Yeah, I think it's just that we live in a time where the environment is, well, with climate change, that's the big issue of the day of course, and if we don't wake up and pay attention we're all going to suffer mightily for it. That's pretty much what the environmental movement has come to. It started out advocating for the environment, now it's advocating to save ourselves because we are part of the environment and we have had such an impact that now we are pretty much imperiling our species... So, I guess at the deepest level ...I'm actually trying to get the next generation fully engaged in seeing the world through this perspective of being part of this environment and not having the luxury of using it up as we have over the last hundred years...

*Contributing something back, in stilling respect, protection.* John's account of meaning to his work centred on instilling respect for the environment, working for his community, and investing time and energy into educating youth as they will be the future stewards:

John: I firmly believe that at the deepest level we all have to work to foster that change back to respect for the environment as a leading principle and I think that the only way that we are going to get there is by grouping like minds together and working with our youth to instill the appreciation and respect that was instilled in me from a very early age. We're not going to get there without them... So that for me is the biggest driver and the deepest meaning is to instill that respect and to instill that over-riding principle "environment first"...

For Marie, the idea of "congruence" of her beliefs and actions and aversion to "dissonance" provide an impetus to use her time now to give back to her community in a way she finds positive and meaningful.

Marie: But at some level it seems that as you're drifting through, you know, what is that, that at the minimum, you know, what's that thing 'you should do no harm'? And if possible, you should do something to make things better, like that's just how we should all, like at some level, that's just how we should all be... like my personal thing is that I'm a pretty congruent person, like it's important to me that I am who I... I hate dissonance. It tears you apart, right. So, and it's so nice when you don't have dissonance, when you can take your values and kind of marry them a little bit with your actions and your life.

Steve sums up his philosophy with "he enjoyed life, but he gave a damn". Although passionate about environmental issues and at times deeply saddened by environmental losses, he

maintains one must “learn to look for the beauty in nature otherwise it will drive you nuts”. He’s lived fully, cared deeply and feels a need to “contribute something back”:

Steve: I know who I am, right, and I mostly feel okay about myself, not a hundred percent, but good enough, right. So, yeah, that’s fundamentally the – I just feel like I’ve got to contribute something back. I mean I see, I get joy in nature, I mean, I look out and I see the wonders of nature all around me, right. I mean, we’re looking out and right out there, hummingbirds flying and there’s a cow bird there, there was a chickadee that just showed up. I mean, we’ve got – you can look out on the bay and you can see the dynamics going on out there with the seals and the piscatorial birds that we’re surveying...and the dynamic with all the chum salmon fry and the Coho fry and the chinook smolts coming down the river, or whatever they’re doing at the moment, right. And this whole thing is happening and I just want to make sure that we continue that, we don’t let it go to hell, right.

Nicholas’ comments denote urgency in getting the word out to the public on environmental issues and on government’s declining support. A sense of frustration and disappointment with “government” seem to fuel his drive to protect the environment:

Nicholas: Well, I feel deeply that we need to protect the environment that we have and try to prevent things getting worse and, you know, I’m trying to do my darnedest to make sure that things don’t get any worse. You know, I’m trying what I can locally and I have written a few article. I wrote an article in there on the, you know, the government’s library side as it were, gutting all the libraries and things of that sort. And, in January, I was on television and I was interviewed by local papers... So, I’m doing my best to, you know, let people know what’s going on. So, I’m just trying my darnedest to keep what

we've got and try and restore things.

**Summary of participants' action logic and Themes 1 – 3.** Table 1 provides a summary of participants' action logic stages and Themes 1 through 3, as well as Sub-themes revealed through the interview findings. Action Logic stages were assigned to each participant by an independent expert in mature ego development (Cook-Greuter and Torbert) from The Sentence Completion Test Integral- Maturity Assessment Profile (SCTi-MAP) results using a series of 36 sentence stems. I used each participants' interview data to construct Themes and Sub-themes. The tabled format shows themes and sub-themes as they occur with each participants' action logic stage.

Table 1

<b>PARTICIPANTS</b>	<b>ACTION LOGIC*</b>	<b>THEME 1 Foundations of environmental sensitivity</b>	<b>THEME 2 Negative emotion, action, and hope</b>	<b>THEME 3 A deeper meaning to one's work</b>
Lara	Expert	Early nature experience Significant others	Frustration, action for change Disappointment and hope	Spiritual connections
Nicholas	Expert	Significant others		Contributing back, instilling respect, protection
John	Achiever	Early nature experience	Frustration, action for change	Contributing back, instilling respect, protection
Alex	Achiever	Early nature experience	Disappointment and hope	Spiritual connections

*Summary of Participants' Action Logics and Themes 1-3*

Marie	Achiever		Disappointment and hope	Contributing back, instilling respect, protection
Holly	Achiever		Frustration, action for change Disappointment and hope	Part of nature
Steve	Achiever	Early nature experience Significant others		Contributing back, instilling respect, protection
Keith	Individualist	Early nature experience Significant others	Disappointment and hope	Part of nature
Frances	Individualist	Early nature experience,		Spiritual connections

\*Note: The descriptions below briefly describe characteristics linked to specific action logic stages (Cook-Greuter, 2004; Rooke & Torbert, 2005):

**Individualistic:** The Individualist recognizes that our identity and how we see the world are mutable constructions. They interpret their reality in relationship to and as interaction within systems viewed as an opportunity for self-development and revealing unseen facets of their behaviour. For the individualist, rules are flexible and open to interpretation and discussion is encouraged.

**Achiever:** Achievers shape a positive working atmosphere and are focussed on delivering results. They have a more intricate worldview, willingly receive feedback, and are aware of how misunderstanding and uncertainty arise from different perspectives and interpretations (Rooke & Torbert, 2005).

**Expert:** The Expert focusses control by perfecting personal knowledge. Clear and logical thinking is important to the Expert. Finding security in their expertise, Experts feel they are on solid footing from which to solicit consensus from others. They are able to give personal attention to detail, may seek perfection, and may be sensitive to feedback (Rooke & Torbert, 2005).

**Theme 4: Aspects of leadership.** The following section explores five sub-themes related to leadership that emerged through participants' narratives – fostering change, community building and collaboration, respecting and valuing different perspectives, raising awareness/sharing/educating, and modelling/mentoring. The purpose of this section is to explore how participants' action logic relates to their approach to leadership. Excerpts for each sub-theme are grouped by participants' action logic.

*Fostering change.* Most participants expressed a desire to promote and foster positive change within their communities in terms of environmental responsibility.

*Expert.* Lara is a passionate environmental advocate who is very involved in promoting environmental responsibility on many levels in her community.

Lara:...Well, to have as low a footprint as an individual can and to be involved in groups that are actively working to be responsibly stewards of the land as well as to be politically active so that you've got a government in place that will do that.

Nicholas has his hand in many environmental restoration initiatives in his community. He has a wealth and knowledge and expertise he draws upon to promote environmental awareness and responsibility. He concentrates on monitoring and supporting best environmental practices within his community:

Nicholas: .So, you know, we're monitoring things to see if there are any changes and trying to prevent things getting messed up when we hear somebody's trying to do something...so we want to keep things as they are and where they've got messed up try to restore them.

*Achiever.* John speaks about his realization that it now appears necessary for individual citizens to step in and take action to protect the environment:

John: It's clear to me that if we all don't do our part and get others involved we've got a problem and we can't count on government to do the job for us any more, it's not happening. So, I think that's also spurred on my drive to environmental responsibility.

Alex reflects on the connection between our use of natural resources and the environmental degradation that ensues. He expresses a sense of being able to address these complex issues through the restoration and reclamation work he does for the natural resource industry:

Alex: Well, I've always worked in the mining industry and people say "Well, how can an environmentalist work in the mining industry?" But we all use the products of mining. How can we not do mining in an environmentally appropriate way? How can we drive a car and say "I don't mine the metals that were used to make the car". It just doesn't make sense. So, by working to restore these sites so that they're not deserted wastelands, I get a sense of addressing the issues that are associated with the whole thing...

For Marie, the positive and worthwhile nature of the environmental stewardship work she is involved with spurs her on to sustain her engagement and to work towards positive change in her community:

Marie: So now, with the stewardship thing, because it's turned out to be such a positive thing and our involvement has turned out to be such a positive thing... it's become, over the five years, a higher and higher priority about what I do. And I think that has to be tied into the fact that it's so positive, the intrinsic nature of it being worthwhile, especially in the current situation we are in with things changing and the climate change. There's just the ecological value of it all...

A certain clarity, directness, and goal orientation seem to drive Holly's involvement in shaping the environmental changes she would like to see:

Holly: ...and I run up against various situations where obviously somebody's not taking good care, environmentally stewarding something in an appropriate way, and that's when I get involved.

Similar to Alex, Steve talks about finding some balance in use of resources. He believes in doing what you can to improve environmental practices, restore environmental health, and avoid environmental degradation:

Steve: The principle is that you don't do harm, you do good. That's the principle, yeah, I guess that's the basic one. Restoration is important to me...seeing things put back to health again. You know, we can't put our old growth forests back to health again, but we can certainly slow down the logging a little bit and change the cycle. Rather than taking logs off every fifty, sixty years maybe we should be taking them off at ninety to a hundred years and let the forest mature more, right, so you're only taking off maybe a half of a percentage of the forest every year or one percent at the most rather than two or whatever it is. That's the kind of stuff that I look at...

*Individualist.* Francis describes, as a way of thinking and habit of practice, a desire to be active in taking part in the solution:

Francis: Well, I guess if it is to be, it's up to me I think each of us, I don't know, it feels important to be part of the solution not part of the problem, I guess I'm that generation, so I guess I try to make an effort in the parts of my life that I can.

Keith sees that accepting to be the person who provides some consistency, reliability, initiative, and support around whom others can gather, facilitates the engagement of others to work towards the changes they want to see:

Keith: ...well, I think I've been seeing in the last few years that you don't have to have a huge amount to offer, you know, that you're one of it turns out quite a few people who would like to see something happen in a particular way, who would like to take care of the watershed. And that a factor that's needed is simply somebody who's willing to say okay, I'll organize this weekly ivy pull or bi-monthly thing and I'll be the person who makes posters for it, I'll be the person who talks to the city again, who makes contacts, and I'll just do this little bit of keeping it together and then that it turns out I find that in these several cases there are other people who then have lots to offer and who just needed the person there who's simply taking care of little details...

***Community building and collaboration.*** Participants described their leadership role in the sense of community building and collaboration in varying and different ways.

*Expert.* Lara describes respect as the basis for collaboration amongst different perspectives around a shared vision:

Lara: ... and in all those things I do, respect is a really big piece and then it really comes to the forefront in this big project I'm trying to do, of how to bring people together collaboratively and respectfully so that then we can then work together with a common view. And the fact that we're working for industry or government or you're somebody like me, who doesn't fit any of those parameters, that we can all work together, that we can respect each other and move forward to that bigger vision...

Nicholas relates numerous experiences of working in collaboration with various groups to achieve common goals as part of his steward leadership work:

Nicholas: ...and there's another area of Garry oak grassland that is very undisturbed. It has no broom growing on it. So, we're trying to work with various other groups, with the First Nations, and both of these we would like to be included at some point in the provincial park...we're working with a number of other groups and the provincial government to try and persuade the logging company to sell the land at a not too extortionate price (laugh) so that it could become part of the park.

*Achiever.* John and Marie focus on the richness of the interpersonal relationships amongst those with whom they volunteer:

John: Yeah, well, the interpersonal relationships in an organization are particularly important, you know a lot of times at a board meeting you know people put up their hand to volunteer if you have established a rapport...and I think until you know someone or they know you...I don't think you'd get that response without them having a good understanding of you and you understanding who they are and what their role is and what they're...where they're trying to go, why they're involved, what drives them, so, you know, having the conversations with key people in our organization...is particularly important so that sharing or learning about each other tends to create a cohesive group which works well together.

Marie: And I guess the other thing I've learned so much about... it wouldn't have been what I expected to learn, but so much about people and people working together...lessons for life that aren't even about environmental stuff necessarily...

Alex speaks about the shared experience of connection, joy, and healing people can feel towards one another and to the Earth when participating in a restoration project:

Alex: ... So, when I have a class like the class that we had a month ago or whenever it was... it just poured rain all day and it was just a miserable day but we were doing things, we were restoring a little landslide that had slid into the creek and we were putting in a drain ... and people were learning how to do all this restoration work and at the end of the day, even though we were all dripping wet and muddy and tired from hard physical work, everybody was just totally beaming and smiling because they had felt that connection with healing the Earth and had learned a bunch of skills that would help them carry on healing the Earth.

And finally, Steve describes the value of listening, synthesizing information, and humour to disarm and foster community building:

Steve: One of the things that I've learned to do sometimes is to listen to what people have to say and there's little bits and pieces of information coming out, and then kind of summarize what they're saying and I call it stating the obvious and yet I do it in a humorous sort of way and, so, a little bit of self-deprecation, right, and I try to make jokes and lighten things up a little bit and get a little personal and when I go to the meetings I hope that I contribute a little bit.

*Individualist.* For Keith the creative, playful, and social nature of the environmental stewardship work combine to foster positive community involvement:

Keith: ...actually, you say this word creating, and I've felt that this stuff here has been a creative enterprise and a creative enterprise with other people. And I think it leads to really good relationships with the people you're working with 'cause you're all together

doing something that is kind of ecologically constructive... and I think that's this necessary creative aspect to me. And I think where that's coming from is that it's really important to me to try to feel like I'm a little bit part of human kind starting to turn the corner, again into coming into harmony with life on Earth here... there is, when I think of any of the things that I have been enjoying over the last few years and things in which I've wanted to continue to participate in and give my energy to, there's a significant aspect of play to them. And play in the form of really enjoyable committee meetings, where you're happy to see these people and you know it's an effective meeting and you get your action, you figure out what you need to talk about and you make your decisions but at the same time you're really enjoying their company and again you do have this sense of 'yeah, we're doing this together' ...and the mulching and planting and watering out back, there is getting together with other people from the community and making sort of a party of it.

Frances talks about the joy and "fun" working with others and of relationships and connections with community members that come out of the work she does:

Frances: And it's fun working with people, but I don't mind being up there on my own, that's good. It's fun to have other people that are enthusiastic about it and work with you (pause). And you can tell when we were up there people love to come up there. Some, like the elderly woman we were talking with, you know, she can only do so much but it's nice to have that contact and over the years you keep track of people and see how things change...

***Respecting and valuing different perspectives.*** Participants talked about ways of working with others and particular ways of thinking or guiding principles they tended to follow.

*Expert.* Lara speaks of love, compassion, and patience as principles that guide respectful communication and interaction:

Lara: Oh, I think love is the piece to hold onto... compassion for other people's views, trying to be patient, trying to remember what the bigger picture is, and to take care of all sentient beings including people (laugh) because we're part of that picture, to work together.

*Achiever.* John lists off several different ways in which he works to foster respect in his dealings with others such as listening and appreciating different perspectives:

John: I think you have to listen as well as talk because, you know, there's things to learn from everybody...you might not find it right away, but those various perspectives are what makes life kind of interesting. If you're just preaching instead of listening you sometimes miss the good things. So that's a guiding principle respect, listen...

Marie takes into account how vastly different perspectives contribute to the richness of one's understanding of an issue:

Marie: ...and the point of doing what we did there with your colleagues and the people you worked with, I mean the real advantage to doing that was it makes you understand the people you work with better. So, it actually was a really productive thing to do, to realize "Oh, holy smokes, other people don't think that way!" Yet on the other hand, they bring something else to the endeavour... and they all bring something, but it's different, and it all works positively...you can work together better if you realize what role you're playing and people you don't get along with or situations where you see things differently, it helps to understand that people are coming at things differently.

*Individualist.* Frances's description seems to reveal genuine curiosity and openness to the world, a way of being and seeing the world that invites others in:

Frances: Yeah, well, how we value our environment there have been some changes over my lifetime because I turned seventy this year (laugh), so there have been some changes. I find it very interesting, I love to see these different viewpoints and it's why I would love to live to be four hundred because I'd love to see how we look at things differently.

Keith reflects on working through a planning process, seeking out input from various community sources, and incorporating multiple aspects in the final product:

Keith: So, I found myself working with these just extremely able people with tons of goodwill and working our way through this process of consultation...and we ended up getting a grant from the city and sort of expanding this project to include other people's needs for the park, finding out what the seniors wanted and learning about safety concerns that other people had for the laneway and walkway and sort of putting that into the plan.

***Raising awareness, sharing, educating.*** This following section deals with approaches that participants use to raise awareness in others, to share their knowledge, skills and expertise, and to support and influence others to take positive environmental action.

*Expert.* Sharing one's expertise and skills as well as devoting time and energy to educating others (of all ages) about environmental issues are some of the approaches both Lara and Nicholas use to promote environmental stewardship in their communities:

Lara: I've been, um...I've been deeply, deeply blessed, um, to feel the way I do, and I've been blessed to have been given some of the skills- that I can share that with people and my call is to do it and hopefully make a difference in the world.

Nicholas: We educate people about the environmental problems and this centre here is one of the places, you know. We have school children coming here and we run camps in the summer for kids. But... we're open all year... and you know, the general public comes in, so, on a nice day we'll probably get maybe thirty people coming through and, you know, do some education there...

*Achiever.* John and Alex place significant emphasis on sharing information and knowledge as well:

John: Also sharing knowledge is important...I receive a lot of knowledge from other older stewards in the community and it's only fair to pass that on to encourage or stimulate other people to follow or learn about the environment they live in... The more you know, the more engaged you are...

Alex: Well, I hope to share my knowledge and understanding of ecosystems and ecosystems functions with people so that we don't, you know, destroy the place as we're trying to live here.

Marie reflects on the positive working relationships and the opportunities for learning from others:

Marie: Oh, how I came to be an environmental steward...I think, yeah, if I had to summarize, it would be those experiences in the riparian zone and just seeing and learning what happens and then once we got involved the fact that it turned out to be such a positive thing in all kinds of ways. But part of that is the working together, yeah, I suppose, part of that is the motherhood thing and definitely it's hard to argue that it isn't a good thing to be involved in. These are the positive things, the learning that's involved

and the working together part. What a good example that is, what a positive thing it is and how it makes you feel like you want to contribute, you want to contribute.

Holly describes how her love of the natural environment and desire to protect it motivates her to raise the public's awareness of local environmental issues:

Holly: What got me involved in it? So, you know, it's a love of this particular area with its rare ecosystem and wanting to protect that and wanting to make sure that people know about it, so they couldn't go and cut down the oaks in their backyard because until recently you could do that but now there is a tree bylaw that says you can't cut down a Garry Oak and certain other species unless you have a very good reason.

*Individualist.* Frances and Keith talk about actively promoting others involvement and engagement in, as well as awareness of, local environmental stewardship initiatives:

Frances: and I've also lead groups, well the girl guides for one and then I taught at elementary school and so I did a lot of enrichment activities up on the hill, starting back in the nineties. And then now...we have a what's called the "brainstorm", which is an all-school enrichment activity and we have a group called the Ecokeepers and (usually twice a year) they go up there once a week and have cleared areas...of the gorse and then put in the mulch to keep it from coming back...

Keith: I wanted the community to be kind of aware of what it was doing and feel some ownership.

***Modelling and mentoring.*** Participants spoke of mentoring others in environmental stewardship and role modelling pro-environmental behaviour as tools to promote environmental awareness and responsibility:

*Expert.* Lara talks about the importance of role modelling in teaching children about environmentally responsible behaviour:

Lara: I believe in terms of, um, as adults the most important thing that we can be doing is role modelling and teaching children how to be stewards of the land and that's our only hope...and my hook as an interpreter is to make nature fun and interesting. If you fall in love with nature then I believe you can grow up to be someone who cares and will do something and is willing to be politically active which is what we've got to have do to change this world...That's my take.

*Achiever.* John discusses his passion for working with and mentoring youth in environmental stewardship:

John: I think the biggest thing that I can do as far as being environmentally responsible, and I'm just so crazy about doing it, is working with youth because you've got to pass it off...I mean almost every environmental steward in the valley is my age or older, the ones I've met anyway, I haven't met any young ones, because they're so busy working and trying to make a living and exist and it's getting harder and harder to do that. So I think we just have to start younger, start cultivating that responsibility in the school, get them out get there in the environment. That's why I'm so excited about what we're doing with Jennifer and the high school, because she's got that same attitude, so next month the kids are out at least once a week doing something outside, engaged in the environment. I think that's probably a big part of creating stewards or fostering stewardship is giving them those experiences that they treasure in youth, you know, they will keep that with them.

Marie and Holly both describe how showing by example seems to her to be an effective way to promote environmentally responsible behaviour:

Marie: How much can you proselytize? And I certainly would say I don't think I'm comfortable with proselytizing at all, right. So this is the good thing about what we are doing because it seems that it could and will work that you can just get out there and do things and make the examples and people can make what they will of it.

Holly: But, you know, I try to be very green in my everyday life. I cycle to work, I recycle... just by nature, I'm inclined to do all those things, being green. So, I see...that there's a modelling role there for other people...

**Summary of participants' action logic and findings in Theme 4.** Table 2 summarizes participants' action logic stages as they relate to the Sub-themes revealed through the interview findings in Theme 4. It also provides a brief summary of the professional experts' (Torbert and Cook-Greuter) description of developmental approaches to leadership for expert, achiever, and individualist action logics. I summarized participants' approaches to the five Sub-themes for Theme 4 (fostering change; community building and collaboration; respecting and valuing different perspectives; raising awareness, sharing, educating; modelling and mentoring) and organised them in relation to their assigned action logic stage and corresponding developmental approach.

In sum, the findings of this study clarified some foundational elements in the development of participants' environmental sensitivity, the emotional complexity inherent in their motivation, deeper meanings some attributed to their work, aspects of leadership that emerged from the interview data, and finally how participants' varying approaches related to their respective stages of action logic.



Table 2

*Summary of Participants’ Action Logics and Sub-themes for Theme 4*

Action logic	Developmental approach	Sub-themes for Theme 4: Aspects of leadership				
		Fostering change	Community building, collaboration	Respecting, valuing different perspectives	Raising awareness, sharing, educating	Modelling, mentoring
Expert <i>Lara, Nicholas</i>	<p>Focusses control by perfecting personal knowledge.</p> <p>Clear, logical thinking is important.</p> <p>Finds security in expertise &amp; feels on solid footing from which to solicit “consensus and buy-in” from others.</p> <p>Able to give personal attention to detail, may seek perfection, may be sensitive to feedback.</p>	<p>Lives by principles.</p> <p>Actively influences change that aligns with principles.</p> <p>Monitors and ensures best practices are followed.</p>	<p>Seeks collaborative working relationships based on mutual respect and shared vision, priorities.</p>	<p>Love, compassion, patience when working with others.</p>	<p>Sharing of skills and expertise.</p> <p>Focus of education as a means to engagement and raising public awareness of issues.</p>	<p>Use of role modelling as educational tool.</p> <p>Foster connection to nature (behaviours, understanding etc...) in youth with hope that as adults, people would be inclined to protect nature.</p>
Achiever <i>John, Marie, Steve, Alex, Holly</i>	<p>Shapes a positive working atmosphere.</p> <p>Focusses on delivering results.</p> <p>Has a more intricate worldview.</p> <p>Willingly receives feedback.</p> <p>Aware of how misunderstanding &amp; uncertainly arise from different perspectives, interpretations.</p>	<p>Focussed on getting results.</p> <p>Ability to acknowledge more complex reality.</p> <p>Focus on constructive influence of positive action.</p>	<p>Focus on building positive interpersonal connections with others.</p>	<p>Listening to and respecting others.</p> <p>Recognizing other ways of seeing the world and how being open to different perspectives can enhance understanding.</p>	<p>Sharing and passing on information, expertise and skills.</p> <p>Recognizes that sharing and raising awareness in positive manner increases others’ desire to participate and contribute.</p>	<p>Mentoring youth groups in environmental stewardship.</p> <p>Fostering environmental ethic through community projects.</p> <p>Modelling desired environmentally responsible behaviour.</p>
Individualist <i>Frances, Keith</i>	<p>Recognizes that identity, how we see the world, are mutable constructions.</p> <p>Interprets their reality in relationship to and as interaction within a system.</p> <p>Views feedback as opportunity for self-development.</p> <p>Rules are flexible, open to interpretation.</p> <p>Encourages discussion.</p>	<p>Sees self as part of larger system.</p> <p>Able to contribute and make changes with positive influence.</p>	<p>Focus on personal connection with whomever is part of the endeavour and enjoyment of the process.</p>	<p>Curiosity about and interest in exploring and searching out different perspectives.</p>	<p>Involving others.</p> <p>Facilitating shared involvement.</p>	

## **Chapter Five: Discussion, Parting Thoughts, Conclusions & Recommendations**

### **Discussion**

In this final chapter I discuss my findings in relation to my research questions and try to place them within the context of related literature. Throughout this study my intent was to understand the volunteer environmental steward's path to engagement and gain insight into worldview through which they interpret their work. Understanding the worldview and meaning-making systems that inspire the volunteer environmental steward leader is an important step in helping to foster conditions for the development of future environmental steward leaders. It is my contention that we need many more individuals working towards environmental sustainability and this research provides some insight into possible avenues to environmental engagement.

I was also curious to know at what stage of adult maturity development (in this case the term action logic was used as it refers to adult maturity development and approaches to leadership) these individuals operated in light of the research suggesting later stages of adult development would be most effective at promoting pro-active environmental leadership (Boiral et al., 2009; Brown, 2011).

This small case study yielded a sample with two participants operating within one of the late-stage/post-conventional action logic (Individualist) and seven participants operating at conventional action logics, Expert and Achiever. The latter participants, find themselves within the largest category of action logics amongst sampled professionals, with Experts accounting for 38% and Achievers for 30%, while post-conventional Individualists account for only 10% (Rooke & Torbert, 2005). Despite this finding, leadership action these individuals take plays an important role in mobilising communities towards environmental sustainability. Exploration of

these particular individuals' paths to environmental engagement and deeper meaning they attribute to their environmental work (see Table 1, p. 60) parallels a larger body of research into the meanings individuals construct to make sense of significantly transformative experiences and how they relate to worldview (Maiteny, 2002).

**Environmental sensitivity: Early experiences in nature, significant others.** I began this research with a very general question to participants simply asking them to tell me, in their own words, how they came to be volunteer environmental stewards. Initial accounts varied however many, but not all, at some point alighted on early experiences in natural settings and/or the presence of significant individuals as having contributed to their entry into environmental awareness. Participants accounts of early experiences in natural settings parallel, for example, Votaw's 1983 research findings of environmental educators who prioritize experience of the natural world (prior to early adolescence) and influence of significant adult role models as contributing to their "attitudes of love and respect for the natural environment" (as cited in Chawla, 1998b, p. 374). Additionally, early experiences in nature figure prominently amongst environmental educators' accounts of being formative to their "relationship with the environment" (Chawla, 1999, p. 17).

Some participants in this study seemed to prioritize their relationship with others (significant others) as having contributed to formative environmental sensitivity in childhood and/or later decisions to pursue varying education in environmental fields. This is consistent with findings suggesting involvement of significant others, be they parents, teachers, or other adults modelling an interest in nature are "key entry-level variables" inclining individuals to value nature and to later adopt pro-environmental action (Chawla & Cushing, 2007, p. 440). Role models, in this case, are an important factor in developing a feeling of competency

(Schunk, Hanson, & Cox, 1987). Individuals observe and learn from the process by which similar others achieve their goals or perform a task and as a result can then perceive themselves as capable of succeeding (Schunk, Hanson, & Cox, 1987). The volunteer environmental stewards participating in this small case study seem to exemplify qualities of leadership capable of encouraging others to take environmental action. In pursuit of understanding how to foster future environmental leaders and environmental citizenship amongst the public, the formative experiences described by participants in this study certainly deserve our attention (Chawla, 1999).

**Negative emotion, hope, and action.** The place of emotion within the participants' accounts cannot be ignored as it plays a role in their pro-environmental concern and behaviour. Emotions are fundamental to human psychological reactions and are therefore instrumental in determining a persons' behaviour (Bar-Tal, 2001). Frijda and Mesquita's work identifies emotion as having evolved as an adaptive function to deal with life challenges (as cited in Bar-Tal, 2001). Emotions represent an internal monitoring system of goals and values that reflects the "differences between expected and experienced rates of movement towards those goals" (Bar-Tal, 2001; Carver & Scheier, 1990, p. 33). In essence, emotion provides data to inform "judgement, evaluation, and decision-making" leading possibly to "particular behaviours" (Bar-Tal, 2001, p. 602).

I noted earlier that participants had indicated varying degrees of negative emotion in connection to challenges (environmental degradation or lack environmental responsibility) they encountered and yet they would consciously choose a hopeful outlook as a motivating force. A hopeful mindset reflects a vision of positive future expectations, ability to plan, dream, generally

engage in “goal-directed thinking” towards a positive outcome and an ability to resist “temptation to compromise the vision” (Bar-Tal, 2001, pp. 604, 605).

The hope, seemingly born out of the adverse emotion participants allude to, provides a mindset which facilitates forethought wherein they are able to set goals, visualize expected outcomes and take action towards achieving those goals. In other word, these individuals believe themselves capable of acting on their environmental beliefs and capable of “producing desired effects by their actions” (Bandura, 2006, p. 170).

Believing in one’s personal efficacy is a core foundation of human agency (Bandura, 2006). It affects how individuals think, whether it be in positive or negative ways, and how they think affects how well they are able to self-motivate and persevere to achieve their goals when faced with adversity (Bandura, 2006). The challenges and emotional adversity that participants in this study express and their subsequent focus on hope as underpinning positive future expectations and providing a framework for action, may reflect the value-belief-norm theory (VBN theory) of Stern et al. (1999), which predicts a sequence wherein one’s altruistic and bio-centric values produce an ecological worldview capable of seeing possible adverse consequences to the environment and therefore able to inspire a sense of duty to partake in varying degrees of pro-environmental behaviour (Gifford, 2014).

Most participants in this study drifted to some extent into negative emotional territory when pondering the magnitude of environmental challenges humanity faces. However, this was never a mindset they allowed to defeat their belief in the possibility of a positive future. Hope proved to be powerful as a motivator in sustaining commitment to pursuing positive future outcomes. Lara, for example, when challenged by her adult child as to why she bothers when “the problems are too big” responds with a hopeful message that making a difference is possible

and to be pursued vigorously. Keith's hope overrides his disappointment upon acknowledging himself as an optimistic person and despite knowing that things in the world may well be getting worse, he can see, at the same time, there is a change for the better in consciousness and behaviour and he chooses to play a part in a hopeful future outcome. Hope stimulates thinking that change is possible and that alternative future scenarios are indeed within reach. Literature on human agency describes being an "agent" as being able to "influence intentionally one's functioning and life circumstances" (Bandura, 2006, p. 164). Believing such future expectations are within reach and believing that one's actions can make a difference fuels a sense of empowerment to act in concrete ways towards attaining those expectations. In this respect participants display a distinctive agency in their ability to make deliberative choices and action plans and design a course of action to motivate and execute their plans (Bandura, 2006).

**Deeper meaning to one's work.** As I worked my way through the data, I was trying to find lines along which I could categorise the participants' experiences and interpretations. When considering participants' responses to the question of deeper meaning to one's work, my findings did not uncover particular themes specific to any single action logic. However, a large proportion of Achievers (but not all) tended to frame deeper meanings solely within more tangible concepts of education, contributing back to society, and conservation for future generations.

Amongst the entire participant sample three categories of deeper meaning to their work seemed to emerge. They are as follows: 1) spiritual connections, 2) part of the environment, 3) education and contributing something back.

**Spiritual connection, part of nature.** In describing the deeper meaning of their work, three participants (one Expert, one Achiever, and one Individualist) seemed to draw on their

spiritual practice in their accounts. It is important to note the fact that these three explicitly incorporated their personal spiritual practice into their descriptions. Other participants, who may or may not have declared themselves as spiritual practitioners, did not necessarily draw on explicit spiritual dimensions. Two additional participants, an Achiever and an Individualist, describe an awareness of being part of the environment and Earth's ecological system. To some degree these five individuals' accounts corroborate with Wilson's 1984 "biophilia hypothesis" which stresses the "existence of a fundamental, genetically based, human need and propensity to affiliate with life and lifelike processes" (as cited in Kahn, 1997, p. 1; Kellert, 1995, p. 42). In Kellert's words the 'biophilia hypothesis' advances that:

...human identity and personal fulfillment somehow depend on our relationship to nature. The human need for nature is linked not just to the material exploitation of the environment but also to the influence of the natural world on our emotional, cognitive, aesthetic, and even spiritual development. Even the tendency to avoid, reject and, at times, destroy elements of the natural world can be viewed as an extension of an innate need to relate deeply and intimately with the vast spectrum of life about us. (Kellert, 1995, p. 42)

In many ways these five participants explicitly include the environment or nature as part of their self-identity. Their consideration of nature goes beyond the intellectual understanding of the environment. They seem to experience relationship with nature as a relationship that produces a sense of being part of Earth's ecological systems. Identity and inner beliefs inclusive of the experience of nature and its processes lend a deeper and longer lasting meaning as individuals see themselves as part of and "mutually dependent" on the natural system (Maiteny, 2002, p. 304).

Participants' experience of nature and the emotional involvement some describe are central elements to their pro-environmental identity. For example, Alex describes the connection to nature he experiences while working on collective restoration projects; Keith relates his hands-on restoration work as contributing to his sense of being part of the ecological creative process: Lara describes nature as her "spiritual path" and draws meaning from a deep awareness of her inner spiritual and outer physical environment. The belief structures these participants attribute to their experience of the environment are of great "personal significance" as they enhance the meaning of their lives and sense of well-being associated with pro-environmental action thus making it likely to persist (Maiteny, 2002, p. 305).

**Education and contributing something back.** This section takes a closer look at the deeper meaning that four participants' give to their stewardship work. Three of them measured as Achiever and one as Expert. None of these participants related any spiritual leanings or practice within their narrative. Their goal oriented focus was generally on education, "contributing back", and conservation for future generations. In this respect, they tended to frame deeper meaning as a combination of altruistic concern (specifically future generations) and biospheric concern (plants, animals, properly functioning ecological systems). As an explanation for pro-environmental behaviour Schwartz's moral-norm activation theory posits that: "altruistic (including pro-environmental) behaviour occurs in response to personal moral norms that are activated in individuals who believe that particular conditions pose threats to others...and that actions they could initiate could avert those consequences..." (as cited in Stern, 2000, p. 412).

For some of the four participants in this category, the deeper meanings they communicate seem to hinge upon a drive to rectify situations they find are at odds with their environmental belief systems. When what they believe ought to be the social norm or when natural

environments are under threat, they are motivated to do what they can to stem environmental degradation and to bring about change for the better. Self-understandings such as these relate to Stern's value-belief-norm theory (VBN theory) which proposes that:

the consequences that matter in activating personal norms are adverse consequences to whatever the individual values...Thus people who value other species highly will be concerned about environmental conditions that threaten those valued objects, just as altruists who care about other people will be concerned about environmental conditions that threaten other people's health and well-being. (Stern, 2000, p. 413)

For Marie, meaning came from the internal need to marry her values to her actions, live in "congruence" with the two, and to avoid "dissonance". Her desire to avoid what she found to be the psychologically unpleasant state of "cognitive dissonance" seems to provide a drive to engage in environmentally responsible behaviour. Marie's ruminations on deeper meaning to her stewardship work are to some extent reflective of social-psychological theory, inclusive of cognitive dissonance theory, that proposes people generally want to act with consistency and possibly that environmentally responsible behaviour is more likely when engaging in it is morally important to the individual (Thøgersen, 2004).

I found in reviewing these particular accounts that participants' meanings were much more centred on the concrete and tangible aspects of their work. Be it a desire to foster a respect for the environment amongst youth, to stem the tide of environmental degradation and restore what can be restored, or live a life consistent with one's environmental values, these participants centred on the physical, the palpable, and the measurable ways to influence environmental responsibility of their own doing and of others.

**Aspects of leadership.** Much of the previous discussion centred on the participants paths to engagement in environmental stewardship, how they think and feel about their work and the deeper meanings they attribute to it. The following section discusses some sub-themes that arose when participants recounted how they engaged with others and aspects of that engagement they felt were paramount to contributing to the collective effort, which underscores their volunteer environmental stewardship work.

In most respects participants viewed themselves as contributors to and facilitators of a collective effort. It was interesting to note that most wouldn't refer to themselves as "leaders" *per se*, rather there seemed to be a leaning towards serving the collective effort and supporting others in their stewardship work. The "leadership" actions and qualities described by participants in this case reflect aspects of service to community, to people, and to place. According to Greenleaf's theory of servant leadership, leadership is about serving by ensuring first and foremost the needs of others are being met (Greenleaf, 2002). Study participants related through their accounts some approaches to leadership that reflected the servant-leadership concept.

The aspects of leadership that emerged as sub-themes from the interviews and which participants felt described their role as environmental steward leader were fostering change, community building and collaboration, respecting and valuing different perspectives, raising awareness, and modelling and mentoring. The following discusses, participants' approaches to leadership sub-themes and how they relate to the characteristics linked to their action logic. Differences in participants' approaches, when grouped by action logic, were sometimes subtle and sometimes quite distinct.

***Fostering change.*** Fostering change tended to be a theme that ran through participants' narrative. However, the ways participants at different action logic stages approached this aspect varied. Those at the Expert stage, when talking about influencing change, seemed to draw on their expertise, knowledge, and skill in given areas and made use of that skill set as a solid basis for influencing or advocating for change or environmental protection. Achievers tended to talk about a desire to achieve certain outcomes. That is not to say that they didn't use their skill set to influence change, but rather the focus of discussion tended to be about getting particular results. Participants' scoring as individualist spoke less of trying to control change and more of seeing themselves as part of a larger collaboration that resulted in change.

***Community building and collaboration.*** Participants recounted varying ways in which they had a hand in building community. Those at the Expert stage spoke about fostering collaborative working relationships with other groups in the community. Lara (Expert) spoke of respect as an important basis of understanding for collaboration amongst stakeholders. Achievers seemed to put an emphasis on cultivating positive interpersonal relationships. This aspect seemed to hold a certain amount of importance in establishing and securing engagement and commitment from others. Additionally, Alex (Achiever) talks about sharing his skill and knowledge about ecosystems and about fostering a connection to the land in others. There is a sense of his desire to empower others with the practical skills and emotional context to continue healing the land. Individualists concentrate on the interpersonal connections of working with others towards a common purpose. They also viewed themselves as part of the process of community building and collaboration. Achievers communicate a sense of openness towards and enjoyment and curiosity about the endeavours they were involved in, and the people they were working with. Keith (Individualist) viewed his role within his group as serving, being the

“consistent person” around whom others can congregate, providing what needed to be provided and doing what needed to be done in order for the group to move forward. He felt he has played a role in facilitating a “creative enterprise” in community building that is ecologically and socially healthy and lends a hand in connecting people with nature.

*Respecting and valuing different perspectives.* Lara (Expert) describes respect as an operative component of her work with people; she respects and values the different perspectives of those she ends up working with. She mentions love, compassion and patience as underlying elements in her dealing with others. The idea of respecting the views of others in a caring and encouraging way so that all may work together to achieve a common goal shapes her collaborative efforts.

Some participants at the Achiever stage mentioned listening as being an important contribution to group cohesion. Listening was a way of showing appreciation of and respect for others. For John (Achiever), listening to others proved to be an important process in understanding the people he works with and tailoring his behaviour to meet their needs within the stewardship organisation. For Steve (Achiever), the process of listening to others, distilling and synthesizing information, and then sharing his understandings with the collective was an important feature of communication. Active listening is a critical component of clear communication (Russell & Stone, 2002). Listening provides the opportunity to learn about beliefs and values of the people one is engaged with and shows an openness to receiving input from others thus engendering a sense of trust (Russell & Stone, 2002). In addition to listening, participants discussed being conscious of valuing different perspectives and appreciating the variety of worldviews.

For Frances (Individualist), a curiosity of, openness to, and acceptance of different perspectives appears to be a source of deep enjoyment for her and it's a quality she brings to her environmental stewardship work with others. From the narratives of both Frances and Keith (Individualists), I sensed a sincere appreciation of being present in the moment. There was an awareness of being an observer as well as a participant in the process of doing their work and of talking/thinking about their work. They have an interest and curiosity about the whole of the process, not just the intellectual, but emotional and physical elements as well; they recognize the shifting of reality that is dependent on the stance of the observer (observing others and observing themselves).

I found it intriguing how participants at the Individualist stage held views lightly and were easily open to taking different perspectives both from the head and from the heart (April & Peters, 2013). This seems to me to be a useful attribute and way of being when engaging with a variety of conflicting worldviews. Not that these aspects weren't taken into consideration by participants at other action logic stages, but they appeared to frame the narrative of the Individualist participants.

Engagement with people is a large part of all participants' environmental stewardship work. Showing concern for others, being open to others and respecting and valuing different ways of seeing the world are important qualities of leadership that were identified amongst participants.

***Raising awareness, sharing, educating.*** In terms of raising awareness, sharing and educating, Experts talked about their role as one of sharing knowledge and skills and of educating others about environmental issues (conservation, protection restoration, ecosystems, plants, etc...). They indicated feeling comfortable in this role and successful with this approach

to delivering their message. Achievers tended to present a slightly more indirect approach to raising awareness, sharing information and educating others about environmental issues. Steve (Achiever) described his manner of communication as being somewhat personable and non-threatening. Marie (Achiever) related the ease and enthusiasm she felt when able to share with others the positive aspects of the environmental work she was doing without feeling as though she was imposing her views on others. Individualists mostly spoke about their efforts to facilitate and promote the involvement of others in environmental activities as a way of sharing and raising awareness.

***Modelling and mentoring.*** Both Experts and Achievers spoke of role modelling behaviour as a way of promoting environmentally responsible behaviours. Mentoring, in this instance, refers to paying attention to and actively developing an environmental consciousness in others. John (Achiever) talked about his excitement when working with youth to provide the experiences and guidance necessary to nurture commitment to, and understanding of, environmental responsibility.

### **Parting Thoughts**

I began this exploration with a desire to understand the meaning-making systems of a select group of individuals engaged in volunteer environmental steward leadership. I was particularly interested in their path to engagement and where it may have begun and what deeper meanings they use to interpret their stewardship work. Being that these participants are actively creating and promoting environmental stewardship initiatives, I was curious to know at what stage of adult development this particular group operated. Given the theory that leaders with later-stage action logics are particularly well-equipped to lead in the challenging field of environmental sustainability, I expected these individuals, whom I saw as leading the charge in

sustainability within the volunteer environmental stewardship community, would tend towards post-conventional action logics. However the SCTi-MAP questionnaire revealed that 7 out of 9 participants measured at conventional stages of action logic (Expert and Achiever in this case) while only 2 were at a post-conventional stage (Individualist in this case). This distribution of action logic stages was not incongruent with what one would expect based on Rooke and Torbert's (2005) percentage breakdown (see page 74 of this document). The fact that 7 out of 9 study participants operated at conventional action logic stages may suggest that environmental stewardship has become more part of the norm in mainstream society.

What I found most intriguing about this exploration was the opportunity to observe and peripherally take part in participants' process of reflection on their experience. The process of reflection is part of the maturational journey "in which critical information noticed, questioned, validated, and utilised to ultimately change assumptions" (April & Peters, 2013, p. 88). Reflecting on our assumptions can lead to transformative learning whereby meaning making systems or worldviews that are no longer viable are exchanged for more inclusive ones (April & Peters, 2013; Elo et al., 2014). In Mezirow's (2014) words:

Transformative learning involves a particular function of reflection: reassessing the presuppositions on which our beliefs are based and acting on those insights derived from the transformed meaning perspective that results from such reassessments. (p. 18)

While it has been noted that supporting growth in individuals to and at the post-conventional level of mature adult development can be complex due to the fact that shifts in consciousness are triggered internally, transformation within the conventional level is possible (April & Peters, 2013). Individuals involved in environmental steward leadership may benefit from incorporating the process of critical reflection into their practice. Reflection can play an

important role in helping to shift, reconfigure and expand individuals' perspectives and meaning-making systems towards a broadening and more inclusive understanding of oneself, and of others, which may be critical to navigating the complexity, contradictions, and ambiguity inherent in environmental leadership.

This exploratory study also revealed paths to environmental engagement and environmental responsibility consistent with other research and literature in the field, while highlighting adverse emotional aspects of environmental work that participants encountered (again consistent with research in the field of environmental education) juxtaposed against a hopeful mindset empowering them to continue working towards their goals. This emotional interchange between hope and despair empowers and seems to fuel a sense of self-efficacy and a commitment to improve the natural world and human's relationship with it (Kovan & Dirkx, 2003). The varied deeper meanings participants associated with their work seemed to be a sustaining force, lending passion and conviction to their work (Kovan & Dirkx, 2003). Participants' narratives generally spanned a wide breadth of experience over their lifetime reflecting a gradual, progressive and transformative learning process; their present self-understanding is an ever expanding process of self-revelation and awareness developed over time.

### **Conclusions & Recommendations**

With this study I sought to understand the motivations and meaning making systems of environmental stewards. These individuals' paths to environmental engagement, self-understandings, and approaches to leadership contribute to our understanding of how to support development of future environmental stewards.

Although the findings in this study have not generated any new theory, they certainly tie into other research on the subject of the role of connection to nature, determinants of environmental sensitivity, and elements of leadership behaviour that characterize environmental stewards. They also point to the importance of early life experience of nature and of the role significant others (as mentors) in shaping peoples' environmental vocations and avocations.

One recommendation is to educators within the K-12 school system to regularly incorporate age-appropriate environmental stewardship and nature experiences into their programming. By providing young people with ample experiences in nature, guided by an environmental stewardship ethic, we may very well, in the long term, increase the number of environmental stewards of all ages. I would also suggest that environmental stewardship groups pro-actively work towards forming partnerships with local schools and their educators.

An additional recommendation is to incorporate, into environmental leadership training, practices that support adult developmental maturation. Those working in environmental steward leadership are ultimately trying to increase others' awareness of and engagement in environmental issues. In doing so they are appealing to an ever broader and varied population. Maturation growth, through reflective practices that promote questioning, re-evaluating, and ultimately shifting of assumptions to ever more expansive and inclusive ones, can enable individuals to work more readily with diversity, complexity, and difference and thus perhaps more readily inspire others to become the environmental stewards the Earth desperately needs.

I am eternally grateful for the willingness of participants to share their time, place their trust in me, and open their hearts to me while participating in this research. I also hope they may have benefited in some way from the process and from knowing their narratives and reflections contribute to our understanding of the volunteer environmental steward leader.

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**Appendix A**

## SQUIN Question

- Would you tell me about how you came to be an environmental steward? *Please start wherever you like and say whatever comes to mind. Take the time you need, I'll listen first and won't interrupt you.*

## Subsequent Questions

1. How would you see your role as an environmental steward your community?
2. What guiding principles, if any, do you follow when engaging in your environmental stewardship work?
3. How would you describe your current understanding of environmental responsibility?
4. Can you identify events or experiences in your past that have shifted your perspective on environmental responsibility?
5. When, or if, a shift in perspective occurred, how did you feel about it?
6. Can you describe, at the deepest stage of meaning for you, your work as an environmental steward? That is to say, what is the essence of your work; what are you doing on the deepest stage?

**Appendix B**

The following is a draft letter of invitation:

Dear [Name],

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study on volunteer environmental steward leadership. As you may know, I am currently a graduate student at Royal Roads University, based in Victoria, British Columbia. I'm extending this invitation to you because of your dedication to volunteer environmental stewardship in your community. This invitation describes the purpose, process, and potential benefits to you for your participation in this study.

**Purpose.** The purpose of the study is to explore the personal stories and experiences of volunteer environmental steward leaders in order to gain insight into how to develop future environmental leaders.

**Process.** The study will comprise two phases. The first phase involves taking a psychological assessment that requires you to complete 36 sentence stems in writing and takes approximately 45 minutes. The second phase of the study involves a face to face interview lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes with open-ended questions about your role as an environmental steward leader. The interviews will be recorded and then transcribed. Both phases of the study would take place over a 2 to 3 month period and would be arranged at your convenience. The data collected from the assessment and the interview would be kept in complete confidentiality and your identity will be protected with the use of a pseudonym throughout the research.

**Benefits.** You may enjoy and even welcome the chance to reflect upon your role as an environmental steward leader. At the end of the study the findings will be made available to

you. The information in the findings may serve to deepen your own understanding and further develop your approach to environmental steward leadership.

If you wish to consider participating in this study, I would like to schedule a convenient time with you to in which I can answer any questions, provide more details, or discuss any concerns you may have. I look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

Sincerely,

Briony Argue

Graduate Student, Royal Roads University

### **Appendix C**

Below is a draft informed consent form:

A Developmental Perspective on Volunteer Environmental Steward Leadership.

My name is Briony Argue and this research project is part of the requirement for a Master's in Environment and Management at Royal Roads University. My credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by contacting Dr. Chris Ling, Director, School of Environment and Sustainability.

Before you agree to participate in this research study, it is important for you to understand the risks and the benefits. Your decision to take part in this study is completely voluntary and this informed consent form provides information that will help you decide whether you wish to participate.

#### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study is to explore the personal stories and experiences of volunteer environmental steward leaders in order to gain insight into how to develop future environmental leaders.

#### **Your participation and how information will be collected**

The research study will consist of two phases. The first phase involves taking a psychological assessment, called the SCTi-MAP, which measures your stage of leadership maturity. This assessment requires you to complete 36 sentence stems in writing and it takes approximately 45 minutes.

The second phase of the study involves a face to face interview lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes with open-ended questions about your personal experiences and how they have influenced your role as an environmental steward leader. Participants may also be asked to take

some time (approximately 60 minutes) to review their transcribed interviews. Total participation in the research study should amount to approximately 3.5 hours. Both phases of the study would take place over a 2 to 3 month period and would be arranged at your convenience. The data collected from the assessment and the interview would be kept in complete confidentiality and your identity will be protected with the use of a pseudonym throughout the research.

### **Benefits and risks to participation**

You may enjoy and even welcome the chance to reflect upon your role as an environmental steward leader. At the end, the findings of the study will be made available to you. The information in the findings may serve to deepen your own understanding approach to environmental steward leadership. The risks to you during the study are minimal. It is feasible you may experience some emotional discomfort during or after the interview process. Should this be the case, you are encouraged to seek out counseling services.

### **Confidentiality, security of data, and retention period**

I will protect your privacy throughout this study. All information I collect will be maintained in confidence with hard copies (e.g., consent forms) stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. Electronic data (such as transcripts or audio files) will be stored on a password protected computer on my home computer. Information will be recorded in hand-written format and, where appropriate, summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final thesis. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to you unless specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential. Transcripts of the audio files will be viewed by the principal researcher, Briony Argue, and possibly by the thesis supervisor, Dr. Richard Kool of Royal Roads University. Any records that would identify

you as a participant in this study, such as informed consent forms, will be destroyed by Briony Argue approximately five years after the completion of the study.

### **Sharing results**

In addition to submitting my final thesis to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Master's in Environment and Management, the information collected may possibly be used for articles, publications, conference presentations, or as reference material for environmental leadership development programs. Study participants will be offered an electronic copy of the thesis upon its completion. To those participants with whom I meet regularly, I would extend my offer in person. To those whom I see infrequently or with whom I do not have a close relationship, I would extend the offer via e-mail.

### **Procedure for withdrawing from the study**

You are free to decline to participate or to withdraw at any time, either during or after your participation, without negative consequences. Should you choose to withdraw from the study, I will first ask if I may keep the information already collected. Should you agree, all data will be kept until five years after the completion of the study upon which time it will be destroyed. Should you disagree, all data will be eliminated from the study and destroyed promptly.

### **Additional information**

This informed consent form has been provided to you electronically via e-mail. Please print a copy of this form and sign it, thus indicating that you have read, understood, and agree to participate in this research. Keep a copy for your records. Send the signed form to me (via email or other method) as I will also need to sign it. Then, please reply to the principal researcher, Briony Argue, via e-mail that you have read, understood, and agree to participate in the research.

By replying directly to the e-mail request for participation you indicate that you have read and understand the information above and give your free and informed consent to participate in this project.

If you have any further questions about this study before or during your participation, please feel free to contact Briony Argue, principal researcher, at XXX-XXX-XXXX or by e-mail at (email address).

Thank you.

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NAME OF PARTICIPANT (please print)

---

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

---

DATE

RESEARCHER  
Briony Argue  
Graduate Student

THESIS SUPERVISOR  
Dr. Richard Kool  
Royal Roads University

**Appendix D**

The following is my initial working list of codes and sub-codes which were applied to the interview data.

Healing the land

Agent for change

- Making change where we can
- Raising awareness

Building community

- Shared experience

Calling

Caretaker of the land

Challenges

- Engage new people
- Raise awareness

Connecting with nature

- Nature experience
  - Childhood nature experiences
    - Remote location
    - Play
    - Basis of nature appreciation
    - Opportunity to take responsibility
  - Healing place to be
- Experience of place
- Good for mental health
- Influence of early experiences
- Natural inclination to care for the environment
- Being restorative part of nature
- Part of ecology
- Rejuvenation
- Sense of place
- Spiritual nurturing

Despair

Disappointment

Discomfort

Education

- Raising awareness
- Valuing natural heritage

Environmental baseline

- Connecting past and present

Exhaustion

Filling a gap

Focus on positive

Fostering relationships

Frustration

Fun

Guilt

Advocacy

Hope

Leadership

- Personable/accessible
- Collaboration
- Communication
- Cooperation
  - Building common view
- Honesty
- Making a difference
- Modelling
- Open to difference
- Open to learning from others
- Active listening
- Personal network
- Positive message/action
- Recognize strengths/interests
- Respect different perspectives
- Results-based
- Risk-taking
- Showing vulnerability
- Synthesizing
- Taking responsibility
- Valuing individuals

Learning

- Greater awareness
- Self-mastery

Letting go

Loss

Motivations for environmental stewardship

- Helping
- Environmental degradation
- Restoration
- Preservation
- Giving back
- Pick up responsibility
- Righting the wrongs
- Future generation
- Personal responsibility

Perceive self as participant

- Self-perception

Respect

- Land and living things
- People

Role modelling

Satisfaction of affecting change

Sharing

- Sharing
- Sharing of yourself

Shifting perspectives

Significant others

- Mentors
  - Being mentored as a child
    - Being mentored by a parent
  - Mentoring youth
  - Being mentored as an adult

Spiritual connection

- Love
- Part of the environment
- Peace and harmony

Time, actions, values aligned

Vision

Flexibility