

Environmental Stewardship



Environmental Stewardship



"The environment can't be a topic or an afterthought in our decisions. It needs to be part of all decisions, a reference point. With no habitable earth, what issue could possibly matter? Everything else is secondary. Facing that reality is the basis of the social shifts we need for change." Kelly Bannister



"There is a growing concern. There is an interest. During this global pause [COVID-19], we're appreciating that global change can happen a lot faster than people had thought, and with the right leadership in place, we can begin to implement those changes people want." Neil Ever Osborne

Climate change. Air quality. Water quality. Biodiversity loss. CO₂ emissions. Plastic pollution. Simple words. Intimidating concepts. Acknowledging the harm inflicted on earth and its atmosphere is disheartening and daunting. In the face of irrefutable evidence, some powerful people and industry leaders dismiss and confound the situation. Yet there is reason to celebrate. We can make a difference and motivate others to make a difference. We can be part of the solution and encourage others to be part of the solution. The bottom line is that humans are a part of nature – it's in our interest to save "us."

"There is an urgency present today. More and more people are aware of what's happening around them and the impact the human footprint has on the planet. It's a particularly important conversation to have in Canada because of our natural resources and how connected Canadians are to nature." Neil Ever Osborne

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OPPORTUNITIES

"You have to get involved to have any influence." Kathy Wachs

Organize

Whether you're acting as an individual or part of a family unit, community, region or institution – every person and collective can be part of the solution. Connect, identify common goals and determine strategies to achieve them. Design household plans that monitor the journey to being more mindful about the planet. Do the same at the office or at your club. Consider community organizations and how they can be more earth-friendly. Talk – and continue talking – with elected officials to understand and monitor policy and implementation of policy. Approach industry to encourage right action. All adults have a vote. All adults are consumers. We are their stakeholders.

The Conversation

- **Households** In what ways can we be more aware of our actions and temper – with a view to eliminating – practices that harm the environment? Set plans, track progress and tell others about your initiative. Welcome other households, friends and extended family to join the plan.
- **Office:** Observe and identify environmental improvements in office practice. Can you and like-minded colleagues promote reductions in paper waste and discourage the use of disposable plastics in the cafeteria? Can you identify other environmentally friendly projects?
- **Community:** Connect with organizations to see what earth-friendly projects the community can initiate. Encourage organizations to connect – to increase the involvement among people with various interests and generations.
- **Elected officials:** Study and question "green" policies and plans. Encourage action. Keep the conversation going.
- **Industry:** Approach industry. What are they doing to keep products, services and their organizations on the "green" track? Now that the federal government is committed to reach net-zero emissions by 2050, how will businesses support this initiative? What is their commitment?
- **Educational institutions:** Inquire about their environmental policies in the classroom, the cafeteria and the grounds. How are they promoting environmental stewardship?

"On the horizon, there are brighter skies. In my professional work I'm seeing large NGOs and large corporate organizations advance this conversation about leaving behind a legacy, having responsibility for the generations behind us. Certainly the generations growing up today want to work for corporations and organizations that think about sustainable paths forward."

Neil Ever Osborne

CASE STUDY

Katia Bannister is a 17-year-old youth climate and social activist. Bannister and other youth in the North Cowichan area of Vancouver Island "connect people to others who want to create change, combine skills and resources, and build community around shifting our mindsets." She's been a guest lecturer as a youth climate activist at Vancouver Island University and in a seminar series at the University of Victoria. Her other activities include:

- Presented the Vote16BC Campaign to schools in Victoria with plans to present to schools all over Vancouver Island.
- With the Cowichan Valley Earth Guardians, presents to schools in the Cowichan Valley, with plans for virtual as well as in-person outreach presentations.
- Hosts events and connects organizations that are youth-led or youth-centred.
- Creates multimedia content (videos, webinars, blog posts, polls, educational games, interactive content) on social platforms and online spaces to reach diverse groups, including youth, organizing groups, adults, seniors and politicians.
- Organizes community events, like Youth Get Charged Up! with the Cowichan Valley Earth Guardians Crew in November 2019 in Duncan, B.C. – bringing together local organizations with an environmental or a health focus that offer paid or volunteer opportunities for youth.

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Awareness

It's imperative that people feel they can do something to help the environment. Focus on what can be done and is being done. Encourage people, organizations, companies, educational institutions and levels of government to promote and demonstrate the positive news about environmental solutions they are involved in. Ask what they are doing to be earth-friendly and help spread the news. Show how you are monitoring situations. Celebrate progress. Help people and organizations learn from each other.

CASE STUDY

Echo Heights is 21 hectares of ecologically rare coastal Douglas fir ecosystem on Vancouver Island. Years ago, the municipality designated the land for residential development – dismissing local Indigenous traditional rights and the public's right to use the land recreationally.

The town of Chemainus formed a residents' association, organized petitions and partnered with First Nations, the University of Victoria's Environmental Law Clinic and the POLIS Project on Ecological Governance, and a number of ethnobiology experts to convince the municipality to designate Echo Heights as parkland. The battle took over eight years, during which time residents maintained and groomed the forest at their own expense – and enjoyment.

Today Echo Heights has a new name – Wul'aam, which translates to "echo park" in Hul'qumi'num – gifted by the Penelakut First Nation. Wul'aam is testimony to what individuals, groups, communities and municipalities can do. Its ecosystem is protected, and the park itself protects the community by offsetting carbon emissions and contributing to water quality. It is a popular haunt for walkers, hikers and biology students of all kinds.

"We have to shift the valence, the tone of the environmental narrative and of the climate change narrative. For so long it's been doom and gloom. It's been about what's gone wrong. People are starting to see success stories. We need to highlight solutions – solutions on the ground and on the horizon."

Neil Ever Osborne

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The Conversation

- Share good news. Use blogs, websites, video and live presentations to rally support and commitment.
- Collect, publish and promote positive environmental news.
- Solicit case studies from families, communities, not-for-profit groups, educational institutions, industry and government. Celebrate all efforts toward positive environmental management.
- Organize events to demonstrate progress and indicate next steps.
- Illustrate accomplishment while invigorating further “green” momentum.
- Consider the effective use of communication to arouse support.

“To change mindsets, reach people with information that is presented in ways that open minds instead of overwhelming or shutting them down. Opening minds can lead to opening of hearts and emotions to access the inner motivator, catalyst or compass within us that we take our direction from – the part of us that relates to and cares about and is moved by something powerfully enough to change or act.” Kelly Bannister



CASE STUDY

As a growing number of Canadians share their belief and increasing concern over climate change, The Weather Network/MétéoMédia has a social responsibility to seek out and report on the causes and impacts of climate change and, most importantly, share stories of hopeful solutions to abate this serious climate breakdown.

Through the Climate Change & Sustainability initiative, audiences are immersed in a new climate change narrative.

To inquire about the initiative, email nosborne@pelmorex.com

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Legislation

Environmental stewardship involves keeping current with government policy and activity at all levels. It's critical to initiate conversations with people of influence – regardless of party line – and not let the conversations drop. Study the policies, legislation and claims of all levels of government. They must be held accountable on major environmental issues:

- Recycling and repurposing initiatives
- Plastic waste
- Water supply and safe water
- Earth-friendly transportation
- Net-zero emissions by 2050

CASE STUDY

For decades, the East Don Parkland Partners – a mix of community volunteers and businesses – have helped keep Toronto's Don River and associated parklands vital to a wide variety of flora and fauna.

Every year, volunteers raise funds to buy trees to plant along the Don. The trees provide forest canopy that's essential for the ecosystem, and their root systems help reduce erosion along the Don's banks. They become home and shelter for all manner of life and increase overall oxygen.

Volunteers also lead nature walks to educate the community about the parklands and all its delights and resources.

"We're making a difference in the Don, one tree at a time."
Phil Goodwin



The Conversation

- Can you describe your policy on this issue and identify actions your government have taken to address the challenges? How have your actions improved the situation? How will you continue to improve the situation? When we talk again in six months, will you be able to show progress?
- Why are there places in Canada without potable water? Why are there so many water advisories? Are solutions being implemented? Why are First Nations communities particularly challenged by water issues?
- Can you describe how you are working with industry to find environmental solutions? Can you give examples of steps you and industry leaders have recently taken to address specific issues? When we talk again in six months, will you be able to show progress?
- What is being done to address existing plastic pollution in landfills and our natural environment? How are you helping the public understand the threat of plastic in the environment – and our bodies? Are you illustrating how we may become part of the solution? Describe your talks with industry about plastics and their various uses. Can you give examples of solutions you are seeking with industry?
- Describe how you are working with governments and industry to reduce pollution attributable to various modes of transportation. What standards are set for various modes? Are they being met? What are the metrics? Do they indicate any progress?

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Education

People need continuous education about environmental stewardship. Education programs at all levels should include content relevant to earth – and atmosphere-friendly activity. We should learn from experts with no vested interests other than environmental well-being. Outside of educational institutions, community organizations could invite experts to speak at events and advise community members on how they may be part of the solution toward environmental stewardship.

The Conversation

- Ask educational institutions and pertinent government officials about their commitment to teaching students at all levels about environmental issues. How is this content supported? What can community members do to help?
- Consult with experts in the community and organize events for dialogues on the environment and how to safeguard it.
- Are we teaching Canadians how to think about science and its lexicon in relation to the environment? Are we educating people on how to manage facts? Are we telling the narrative effectively?

“The science is crucial. But emotion trumps facts. If your values are incongruous with the values that will tackle climate change, facts don’t matter. We have to find a way to crawl into people’s hearts and minds. The storytelling must transport, must use visuals. Sometimes we have to tell the climate change story without mentioning climate change. Stories are how we make sense of the world.”

Neil Ever Osborne

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INFLUENCE: THE POWER OF ONE OR A FEW

Advance the cause

- Be a better role model. Help change the culture around consumption and waste.
- Design individual household plans to become progressively earth-friendly. Invite friends, neighbours and extended family to join you.
- Seek out like-minded people and organizations, and collaborate. Activate positive programs to combat specific issues.
- Help people and organizations connect.
- Observe and identify projects where you – and others – can make a difference.
- Encourage elected officials, opposition parties and industries to be part of the solution. Ensure they know you and your group monitor progress.
- Remind elected officials that you seek candidates who are friends of the earth. Remind industry that you seek products and services that are friends of the earth.
- Help the young learn to be earth-friendly early on. Support educational activity that grooms environmental responsibility.

TIPS

- Optimize the power of communication. Enhearten people to activate commitment.
- Use visuals to anchor your messaging.
- Remember that using scientific lexicon may make climate change abstract and remote. Bring the story close to home. Illustrate what can be done.
- Reach out to the heart as well as the head.



INFLUENCE: THE POWER OF MANY

Illustrate your strength. Solicit the help of family, friends, neighbours and community.

- Approach elected officials or people of influence together.
- Organize meetings in which people of influence see your strength in numbers. Make them understand your influence.
- Collaborate with not-for-profit organizations and associations sympathetic to environmental programs.
- Organize volunteer programs.
- Organize community events for people with common interests to connect and network.
- Organize programs to monitor progress in your community, region and Canada.
- Help innovate and set environmental stewardship standards for your community.
- Start petitions and persist.

TIPS

- Research how to submit valid petitions to government.
- Get people from every sector and age cohort involved. Show people of influence that all generations care.
- Create community task forces to share the work and the rewards.
- Use all available communication platforms to reach diverse target groups.

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