

Conservation Mission Statement

Due date: 3 October 2023

Recommended length: one paragraph

Vision and sense of purpose are essential qualities in people who sustain effectiveness in conservation and other complex environmental challenges. Demands on your time, attention, finances, and other resources can seem overwhelming. Responding to every perceived demand can distract from your work and predispose you to burnout. Thomas Merton, renowned as a theologian, Trappist monk, and social activist, warned about this risk as follows.

The rush and pressure of modern life are a form, perhaps the most common form, of contemporary violence. To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything, is to succumb to violence. The frenzy of our activity neutralizes our work for peace. It destroys our own inner capacity for peace. It destroys the fruitfulness of our own work, because it kills the root of inner wisdom which makes work fruitful.¹

In a similar context, adrienne maree brown, activist and former executive director of the Ruckus Society, advised people to:

get really good at being intentional with where you put your energy, letting go as quickly as you can of things that aren't part of your visionary life's work. Then you can give your all, from a well-resourced place, when the storm comes, or for those last crucial miles.²

Defining your sense of purpose can help you maintain intentionality. For this assignment, record why you care about your home place, region, the planet, or the beings in your spaces, and why you care about conservation or other environmental issues. Then describe how your skills or passions position you uniquely or importantly to act in ways that support your values. Write these statements initially without judgement or critique; you can revise them later. These declarations of value and intent can provide valuable guidance when myriad demands threaten to distract or overwhelm you. Simply writing your mission statement can help propel you toward fulfilling it.

Your mission statement can serve you long after this course. After writing your statement, you can hold it up to your daily habits, decisions, or demands made of you. When you ask if a habit, choice, or demand serves your mission, you can maintain your purpose and avoid distraction by pursuing only those that help create the world you desire.

¹Merton, T. 1968. *Confessions of a Guilty Bystander*. Crown Pub. Group, New York.

²brown, a.m. 2017. *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*. AK Press, Chico, CA. quoted in: Ray, S.J. 2020. *A Field Guide to Climate Anxiety*. Univ. California Press, Oakland, CA.