

A Year of Reflection and Renewal

To renew. To refresh... To breathe differently for a while. To allow the spirits to speak to us. These are needed for all life on Earth, yet the current culture finds ways to speed up instead of taking the time to renew. Anishinaabe culture has beautiful words for it: Mino-bimaadiziiwin—to use the gifts the Creator has given us to live the Good Life or to live in a state of constant renewal. Animal life, trees and plants know ways to renew. We, humans, need to learn more about renewal, and the thought of living in a state of continual renewal is a challenge we want to live up to.

Terry Tempest Williams speaks of such things in her latest book, *THE HOUR OF LAND* (2016), where she says, “In the end, it may be the solitude that the future will thank us for conserving—the kind of solitude born out of stillness... where a quieting of the soul inspires creative acts.” Though Williams is speaking about parks, this is also quite true of Mallard Island. But how, we are asking ourselves, do we best *protect* the high quality experience that visitors receive, and how might we *give back* to that quality and that spirit of the place?

Mallard Island has been the site of many ways of living. For a time, it was a small wooded island inhabited only by the deer, bear, bird life, and other forms of life who either swam there in the open-water season or walked across the ice. Later on, this island was a sacred island respected and used by the occasional Indigenous traveler. We’ve learned, then, that by the time Ober took ownership of the island, there had already been several occupants, each of whom took responsibility for caring for the land. Yet we also believe it was logged, along with most of the Rainy Lake region.

In our years with Mallard Island, we have systematically shared Ober’s trails, gardens, landscapes and buildings. And we have carefully restricted the use or “borrowing” of this tiny island to a dozen people at any given time, calling that the Island’s “ecological carrying capacity.” However, we have in recent years stretched the summer to about as long as is physically possible (ice to ice) and we have lived right up to and pushed against that carrying capacity. ~ It is time for renewal.

After much discussion, the Board of Directors of the Oberholtzer Foundation has declared 2018 a *Year of Reflection and Renewal*.

What will a summer of renewal look like on Mallard Island? We don’t exactly know; we’ve never done this before. Our sharing of the island has, up until lately, allowed for “rest weeks” that we feel are needed by trails, trees and bushes, gardens, steps and ladders, floors and kitchen, drainage and compost piles!

But we can say more about the renewal that will happen next summer. First of all, we know the summer schedule will look different, and that more people will be temporarily disappointed not to get their days on the Island as they might have hoped. There will be weeks held there, however, and they will include a very few

weeks of what we call “creative programs,” meaning time to write poetry or research the archives. Then there will be a couple work weeks and some training time for caretakers and there will be a third designated rest week—where all the systems can take a breather. In addition, when there are people on Mallard, we may test the idea of lowering the magic number “12” as the carrying capacity to 11, or even 10, and evaluate the results.

In the long run, this sort of management is exactly what we should be doing to take the best care of a very finite island. Earth is an island itself, yet large enough to abuse and get away with it. If only we knew. Mallard Island is way too small to treat with anything but the utmost of respect. And when you add the historic buildings and archives, you add an even more precious “resource” of historic significance. It is up to us as the “current humans” on Mallard to *listen to the island* about any messages of overuse that we might hear.

In addition, the Foundation is learning more about how to be multi-cultural, and how to think about the place from more than one perspective. Terry Tempest Williams also recognized this happening here and there with parks and she says, “the idea of traditional knowledge being embedded with the management of the place...” is crucial to new ways of land management. We want to learn more about this and to incorporate ceremony, reflection time, dream work, and other ways of knowing about a place such as Mallard Island.

There is a creative tension that may emerge from all of this—a better way to assess the harmony of a place among all life on the island: plants, animals, humans. We want to learn more about this in order to safeguard Mallard’s harmony.

We know that any who have grown to love the Island and their time on this amazing and tiny place will bear with this sort of learning. More than that, we know that you will support this period of renewal and do your part to contribute to it. We also have some organizational “systems” to review, such as how people learn about the mission and intention of this place before they arrive. This review will all work to improve the place for the future, and we who must learn to live differently and more sustainably. Please let us know your thoughts on things we might all do during this *Year of Reflection and Renewal*.

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“I believe we are slowly learning what it means to offer our reverence and respect to the closest thing we, as American citizens, have to sacred lands.”

TTW about the National Parklands. BEW, thinking about our own Mallard Island in Rainy Lake.