

# *Introduction to the Center for Humans and Nature Manifesto*

By BROOKE HECHT AND CEARA DONNELLEY

As a fly-fishing philosopher (as he often called himself), Strachan Donnelley saw an urgent need for an organization dedicated to exploring the ethical dimensions of the relationship between humans and the natural world. Strachan founded the Center in 2003, after decades of work in the bioethics field revealed that serious bioethics work was largely reserved for human and social issues. The roots of his vision for the Center were in his experiences as a thinking wild one, as he called all of us humans. Whether in a trout stream or at his writing table, Strachan grappled with big ideas about who we are and what our place is in the world—and what it could be.

Strachan envisioned an organization that could serve two critical goals: to serve as an honest broker of knowledge, pulling together the best academic scholarship and conceptual research; and to develop ideas and fresh interdisciplinary perspectives at the cross-section of conservation and ethics. Strachan believed that creative interdisciplinary dialogue would provide a basis for a more expansive vision of ethical responsibility that includes—and integrates—humans and nature.

There is a growing recognition that values are at the center of our most intractable challenges, but the conservation community often struggles to understand and express its values adequately and effectively. For example, conservation goals are frequently framed in terms of economic benefits or individual self-interest. Insights

from social psychology reveal that this approach usually backfires. Using self-interest as a motivator rarely works if personal cost is simultaneously required, while appealing to the common good can be more effective because it avoids such contradictions. However, the conservation community is not accustomed to framing goals and making arguments using ethical language. Importantly, this is not only a question of crafting a message and using the appropriate language. As Strachan noted, the core ethical constructs relevant to sustainable living are yet to be fully examined, developed, and deployed. True to Strachan's vision, the Center has been home to original research, critical ethical thinking based on sound science, and practiced collaboration focused on the socio-ecological challenges we face.

It's hard to believe that Strachan died almost four years ago. For all of us who knew Strachan, his death came far too suddenly and too soon. As the board and staff of the Center have sought to carry on his work, we have also strived to express the collective values that draw us to the work we do and connect us to the work of Center colleagues. The statement you find here is the result of a collaborative staff and board effort during 2011 to express the values, beliefs, and intentions of the Center for Humans and Nature. It is—in short—our manifesto.

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