

Invitation to a “Living Landscape” Alliance

Collaborating toward a narrative of stewardship & regeneration

Glossary:

TSP - The Sustainability Project (local nonprofit organization)

RGB - Regenerate Grey Bruce (a 2-year project funded by Greenbelt Foundation)

LLA - Living Landscape Alliance (working title for a collaboration of groups aligned on sustainable land-use)

Living Landscapes - the land around us that isn't degraded or hardened, providing resilience.

Why collaborate for narrative change?

Our vibrant, Living landscapes are struggling. Rapid urban development, the conversion of pastureland and bushland into cash crop monocultures, removal of tree lines and drainage of wetlands, are diminishing the biodiversity and beauty of Grey-Bruce at an unprecedented rate. Meanwhile, conservation and regeneration is struggling for public relevance in an overall feeling of either planetary doom, or business as usual. Media attention has pushed more holistic environmental narratives aside. Yet, many organizations know that stewardship and regeneration work *is* climate work. Living landscapes are cool, and they may be our best insurance against all types of calamities.

Figure 1: In Georgian Bluffs, permanent pastures and old treelines are rapidly converted into large crop fields. This impacts insect and bird ecology, reduces water retention and groundwater recharge, and locally increases dryness and heat during months with low vegetation cover.

Narratives determine how humans engage with their landscape. A landscape narrative may either command humans to [dominate nature even more](#), or - as indigenous scholars remind us - to become ecosystem stewards who [cultivate entire bio-regions for diverse abundance](#). Already, environmental leaders from around the world [are speaking out about a narrative shift towards “carbon as a pollutant”](#) and [“electrified consumerism”](#): it distracts us from perceiving and protecting the ecological biodiversity of our planet, and the integrity of our biosphere's self regulation of water and climate. Being part of organizations that care deeply about our Living landscapes, we know that the time for narrative change is now.

Narratives don't change by themselves, but they can change abruptly. Such shifts happen in moments of public confusion that strategists call “openings”. *The purpose of any narrative network is to direct the public's attention and be prepared for openings when they occur.*

For example, the 9/11 terrorist attacks disrupted the 1990s narrative of peaceful prosperity, creating an opening. Powerful narrative networks immediately offered a new narrative, the simplistic “war against terror” where people can only choose to be “with us or against us”.

Other potential narratives - for example, a global alliance against violence - were sidelined quickly.



In the same way, climate change can bring us together around landscape stewardship and regeneration, or lock us into a simplistic “technology & control” narrative that would continue our extractive development path while investing in large-scale schemes, more industrialized farming, geo-engineering, and air-controlled cities. We envision the mainstreaming of a narrative for regeneration of Living landscapes, and a shared regenerative vision for our region’s future development, into all of our decision making - as a community and as individuals, in urban and in rural settings.

The purpose of forming a narrative network for Living landscapes, which for now we can call a *Living Landscapes Alliance*, is **to mainstream awareness for the essential role of our Grey Bruce landscape for our region’s wellbeing, build nonpartisan political support, and access strategic funding**. In practice, this means collaborating on a shared long-term vision for this region under pressure, communicating this shared vision and using some shared language (e.g. “Living Landscapes”, “vibrancy”, “climate resilience”), and communicating how one’s work contributes to this shared vision. This also means supporting each other.

Yet, we recognize that **there is no single path to a Living landscape**, and many approaches need to co-exist and complement each other - nature-based greenhouse gas sinks, biodiversity conservation, soil and watershed stewardship, regenerative farming, green urban design, protection of pollinators and species at risk, seed libraries, gardening with native plants, community gardens and food forests, schoolyard naturalization, protected parks, community events, social justice initiatives, the arts, and many more. How can we communicate such that we are recognized as one movement with one shared goal - vibrant, resilient, biodiverse Living landscapes?

Collaboration in Funding and Policy Change

As an important part of Ontario’s Greenbelt, The Greenbelt Foundation wants to invest in the health, prosperity, and stewardship of land in Grey-Bruce. However, what they see is a number of small organizations with local initiatives, **too small & segregated for funding strategic change**. Funders would likely prefer us to form a single council, or similar body, that delivers a coherent strategy for the protection of our Living landscapes. In other words, they are unable to fund small, individual initiatives, but could contribute large amounts of money into strategically-allied regeneration efforts that are carried out through our existing organizations.

Alongside local leaders, [The Sustainability Project](#) is continually discussing forming an alliance/network with several organizations to meet our collectively shared goals and put us in the running for these larger grants. Organizations would remain totally independent, but come together for strategic goals. The benefits of working together go beyond just funding: aligning overall communication will help all of our groups in gaining access to political decisions, set media narrative, and ultimately make this region a better place to live and work.

Co-designing an alliance together

We want to invite organizations to join us in this development process who are involved in every aspect of Living landscape regeneration, from conservation, ecological farming, urban pollinator and food gardens, seed libraries, watershed initiatives, schoolyard naturalization, protected parks, community events, to the arts. We are excited by the possibility of working with such a diverse group of leaders from such local initiatives, each speaking to a different but equally important part of our shared mission.

We want to assist in bringing this alliance together in a way that supports the voices of all leaders and organizations. Even the official name of the alliance or network will remain undecided until interested organizations offer their input. Once the alliance is formed and a council is appointed, TSP will become just one member and hold no special power over any other organization.

We don’t want to impose how a Living Landscape Narrative Alliance will look, we want to co-develop it with you.

To offer a starting point for our discussions, we aim at something pragmatic:

- ☐ A SHARED DECLARATION THAT WE RECOGNIZE, for example:
 - ***the Niagara Escarpment as a globally important natural heritage*** that needs protection urgently.
 - We recognize that both our agricultural and residential ***landscape outside of the protected escarpment area also performs important functions*** for habitat, nesting and feeding, water retention, and as migration corridors for many species.
 - We ***recognize the role of a vibrant Living landscape*** in building climate resilience, protecting biodiversity, and maximizing the carbon that is stored within our landscape.
 - We ***see multiple opportunities for large-scale strategic change*** in landscape management of our region, which requires aligned efforts. These ideas seem out of reach without a strategic alliance.
 - ***We recognize and celebrate our unity in diversity.*** We all chose different yet mutually supportive paths within this same “narrative of hope”. There’s so much wisdom around
- ☐ A STRUCTURE FOR WORKING STRATEGICALLY WITH FUNDERS to support a rapidly-transforming region.

Eventually, a Living Landscape Alliance could perform many roles, because only our imagination sets limits:

- ***We share a “narrative of hope”*** around climate change that is about fostering vibrant, Living landscapes and recognize a human role as stewards for this landscape. This “narrative of hope” shines as a bright light within our control- and techno-based narrative of further landscape simplification and geo-engineering. In a care-based narrative, technology is *a tool in support of* a Living landscape, rather than *a substitute* for it
- ***We use shared language and stress how our actions align with other organizations***, within a shared narrative. For example, we find success fencing out livestock from streams, and stress how this contributes to a vibrant Living landscape (*the anchor*), by promoting birds, pollinators, and water retention (*the pathways*) but let's explicitly remind ourselves about the vibrancy of the Living world as *our shared anchor*.
- ***We communicate this shared “narrative of hope”*** at events, and align our organization's mission within this narrative. For example, we say: “Our organization envisions a landscape that provides habitat for a vibrant Living biosphere and provides climate resilience. Within this larger vision, our organization is (for example) working with urban gardeners to establish pollinator gardens / working with local residents to purchase more land for conservation / working with municipalities to promote rainwater harvesting / enabling young folks access land for ecological farming.
- ***We form a council to apply for strategic funding and prioritize jointly***, according to shared criteria and an agreed-upon process. This does not necessarily require a new organization, but does require a host.
- ***We can jointly identify strategic direction, strategic projects and mutual support for strategic action.*** This will require regular conversations. Bill 5 can bring forward spontaneous collaboration; a Living Landscape Narrative Network can act intentionally and preemptively.

That said, RGB was only funded from 2021-23, and so our assistance in forming this alliance now either falls to pro-bono work at TSP or ideally seeks partnership resources from aligned organizations.

Next Steps

If you are interested in having a discussion about the possibility of this alliance or network, we are:

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| ● Thorsten Arnold - National Farmers Union - Grey County Chapter | Email: thorsten.r.arnold@gmail.com |
| ● Leigh Grigg - The Sustainability Project - Rural issues | Email: griggsport@gmail.com |
| ● Madeline Marmor - Youth Climate Action Council | Email: scaleupprojects@gmail.com |