

A [sample entry](#) from the

Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature

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Edited by

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- See also: Abbey, Edward; Bioregionalism; Ecopsychology; Ecosophy T; Environmental Ethics; Naess, Arne; Radical Environmentalism; Seed, John; Shepard, Paul; Snyder, Gary; Wilber, Ken.

Deep Ecology, Institute for

If religion is "that dimension of human experience engaged with sacred norms [and] ultimate concerns, as David Chidester (1987: 4) has argued, then the Institute for Deep Ecology (IDE) can be viewed as a religious movement that reveres the Earth and promotes environmental activism in its defense. The Institute's website states that deep ecology is "a philosophy based on our sacred relationship with Earth and all beings; an international movement for a viable future; a path for self-realization; (and) a compass for daily action." Without specifically defining what is meant by "sacred," the site indicates that it seeks to "honor spirit" by acknowledging that the relationship between humankind and the natural world is a matter of ultimate concern and that to speak of the interdependence of all beings in the natural world is to engage in a description of ultimate reality.

Such understandings undergird the organization's mission to promote "well-being of the whole web of life." In 2002 the Institute's website stated that it does this through

ecological values and actions. At our core is a recognition of and reverence for the interdependence and inherent value of all life. To nourish these values in ourselves and the world, we provide opportunities for inquiry and practice through workshops, publications, and support networks. We seek to encourage and empower people to do good work in their home communities.

These intentions lead to actions, some of which have a marked ritual nature (such as the Council of All Beings), and are designed to foster awareness of the interconnectedness of all things, and to derive promote strategic environmental action.

The institute was initially co-founded in 1992 by Fran and Joanna Macy, in close association with Bill Devall, Stephanie Kaza, Elias Amidon, Elizabeth Roberts and others, and is situated in Boulder, Colorado. A 1993 brochure advertising its first Summer School provided the following description:

The Institute for Deep Ecology Education . . . sponsors regional and national trainings, consults on deep ecology curriculum and programs, and works to build coalitions among educators, activists, and others involved in this work. Its goal is to bring the deep ecology perspective to the environmental debates of our time.

By 1996 the organization had moved to Occidental, California, shortening its name to the Institute for Deep Ecology. In its Spring 1998 newsletter, the Institute's description stated:

The Institute for Deep Ecology (IDE) advances a world view based upon humanity's fundamental interdependence with all life forms – a philosophy commonly known as deep ecology. IDE seeks to heal the contemporary alienation from self, community, and the earth by encouraging a fundamental shift in the way we experience nature and respond to the environmental crisis.

The Institute provides transformative, action-oriented educational resources to a diverse constituency. In particular, IDE hosts trainings that bring community organizers, educators, psychotherapists, clergy, and others together with a large, multi-faceted faculty of prominent environmentalists.

This second description reflects a shift toward experiential work. In addition, certain therapeutic claims are made concerning the work of the Institute ("to heal the contemporary alienation from self, community, and the Earth . . ."). In these shifts, it is possible to detect the influence of ecopsychology, and also, a more explicit articulation of the spirituality common within many deep ecological groups around the world.

For the first several years, the Institute sponsored workshops and trainings in deep ecology. Many of the trainings featured various teachers of deep ecology or environmental activists who ascribed to the principles of deep ecology. In the late 1990s, the Institute went through a self-evaluation process that resulted in a shift from small, workshop-styled trainings to larger conferences

co-sponsored with other progressive groups, such as the Physicians for Social Responsibility, the Cultural Conservancy, Global Exchange, New College of California, Youth for Environmental Sanity, and the Indigenous & Non-Indigenous Youth Alliance. This marked increasing coalition-building around social justice issues. The 2000 Summer Conference held in San Francisco, for example, was entitled "Globalization or Earth Wisdom? Creating Just and Sustainable Communities." Workshops and panel presentations included discussions of the negative impact of globalization on indigenous and poor people, as well as on the Earth's natural variety. With such efforts the Institute has sought to broaden its influence and expand its efforts to include the human community as part of the ecological community by applying deep ecology principles of interconnectedness and interdependence to the political and social spheres. In this way, it has at least implicitly responded to criticisms that deep ecology tends toward indifference toward the plight of human beings.

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Further Reading

Chidester, David. *Patterns of Action: Religion and Ethics in a Comparative Perspective*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1987.

Strobel, Craig. *Performance, Religious Imagination and the Play of the Land in the Study of Deep Ecology and Its Practices*. Unpublished dissertation. Berkeley, CA: Graduate Theological Union, 2000.

See *also*: Breathwork; Council of All Beings; Deep Ecology; Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front; Radical Environmentalism; Re-Earthing.

Deere, Phillip (1926–1985)

The latter part of the twentieth century witnessed a resurgence of Native American traditions, particularly a focused Mother Earth spirituality. One of the most significant leaders in native America who fostered and guided this resurgence was the Muskogee elder Phillip Deere. He was born into poverty, was a carpenter by trade, and became internationally recognized as a spiritual leader, civil and human rights activist, oral historian and storyteller, elder statesman, spellbinding orator and traditional healer. His people, once part of the great Creek Confederacy, had been forced to move in the nineteenth century from the Southeastern U.S. to the "Indian Territory," now the state of Oklahoma, but retained their Earth-related spirituality.

Although he had little formal education, Phillip Deere was literate and of a profound intellect. He had a prodigious memory in which he retained prayers and healing

chants in Old Muskogee, creation stories and the ancient migration legend of his people's history in Muskogee and English, and federal and state governments' treaty provisions in English. He was a Methodist preacher for a time and learned biblical stories and teachings, but returned to traditional Muskogee ways.

Phillip Deere's spiritual calling kept him poor. In the Muskogee tradition, one who is gifted by the Great Mystery (the Creator Spirit) with healing powers is required to care for peoples' needs, no matter the personal cost. The healer had to set aside their usual employment whenever necessary to respond to a request for healing, without any expectation of remuneration and without consideration of the petitioner's ethnic or economic background; post-healing gifts, voluntarily offered, could be accepted from the person cured or their family. Consequently, Deere lived on allotted land in an unfinished home he was gradually building, cooking and heating with a wood stove, using outdoor plumbing. Near his dwelling was the open-walled roundhouse, with its central fire, which he had built for sacred ceremonies. As a traditional healer he learned chants and the names of herbs in Old Muskogee, a language not understood even by the traditional people who spoke Muskogee as their first language. He knew 424 healing chants in Old Muskogee: each chant containing a symptom of illness, the name of the healing herb to treat that symptom, and a prayer to the Great Mystery to make the healing ceremony efficacious. Healers were not allowed to use their powers to help themselves.

Although native to Okemah, Oklahoma, Phillip Deere traveled throughout the world to offer spiritual insights, support for native peoples' treaty rights, and concrete proposals for the promotion of human rights and egalitarian, respectful relationships among all peoples. He was a founder of the Traditional Youths and Elders Circle, and served as the primary spiritual guide for the American Indian Movement (AIM) and the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC), a non-governmental organization (NGO) recognized by the United Nations. In the latter capacity, he traveled in the spring to participate in the annual sessions of the United Nations International Human Rights Commission held in Geneva, Switzerland at the Palace of Nations. He spoke there about care for Mother Earth, and called for redress for injustices suffered by indigenous peoples of the Americas.

In his teachings, Phillip Deere integrated a sense of the sacred with concrete concern for people, all living beings and Mother Earth. He taught that the Great Mystery, when bringing about the creation, instilled certain "natural laws" within it that governed it as a whole and guided each individual creature:

In the beginning when the earth was created,
when everything came about, everything was given