



The Association
for the Study of
**Literature &
Environment**



ASLE News

Spring 2010

A Quarterly Publication of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment

In This Issue

[ASLE Bookshelf](#)

[ASLE Officer Nominations](#)

[Contribute to Members Write](#)

[Donors Update](#)

[New Diversity Blog](#)

[Officer's Retreat Summary](#)

[World Ecoculture Organization](#)

[OSLE-India Update](#)

[ALECC Update](#)

[Notes from the Managing Director](#)

[Conference Updates](#)

[Members Write: Relief](#)

[Independent Writer Interview](#)

[Summer Learning Opportunities](#)

[Member News](#)

[ASLE News Notes](#)

Quick Links

[Calls for Papers](#)

[Calls for Manuscripts](#)

[About ASLE](#)

[ISLE Journal](#)

[Biennial Conference](#)

ASLE Officer's Retreat Summary

by Amy McIntyre, with assistance from Karla Armbruster's excellent meeting minutes!

On the weekend of February 19-21 in Montreat, NC (just outside of Asheville), 18 ASLE officers and coordinators and a couple of guests met to discuss ASLE matters great and small. The snow that had been pounding the region graciously receded and we were instead treated to sunshine and temperatures in the 50s. This made our job of sitting indoors and concentrating all the more difficult, as we are a group predisposed to be outdoors in those conditions! We did rearrange our schedule to meet late into the evening just so we could get out and explore, and still managed to get through most of our copious agenda. We also shared good conversation and fabulous meals, all of which helped keep our energies up when they flagged.



2010 Officer's Retreat Participants in Montreat, NC.
Photo by Priscilla Ybarra.

The leadership is acutely aware of the internationalization of our field and devoted considerable time to thinking about ASLE's role in this, and discussing how to best encourage and participate in the many important conversations happening across the globe. We formed a sub-committee to further develop these ideas and to reach out to other international groups for their input, including gauging potential interest in a meeting with this "internationalization" as its primary topic. On another outreach-related note, our discussions about how to revitalize and make more central the work of the Diversity Caucus continued from Victoria. As part of this goal, a proposal on making the Diversity Coordinator an elected and voting position was presented and will soon be voted on.

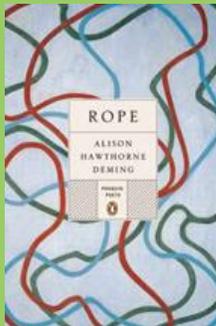
Other votes included an approval of the 2010 budget draft, an approval of a proposal to increase the Managing Director's hours from 20 to 25 per week, and approval of \$1,500 in seed money to support an off-year symposium run by our Canadian sister organization, ALECC (Association for Literature, Environment and Culture in Canada). The EC also

ASLE Bookshelf

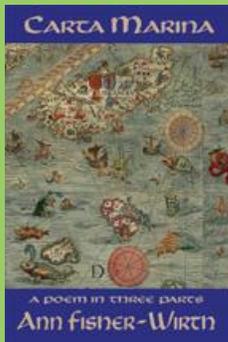
The following works were recently published by ASLE members. If we've missed your publication, please send bibliographic information to Catherine Meeks (catherine-meeks@utc.edu).

Davis, Todd. *The Least of These: Poems.* East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2010.

Deming, Alison Hawthorne. *Rope* (Poems). New York: Penguin, 2009.



Fisher-Wirth, Ann. *Carta Marina* (Poems). San Antonio, TX: Wings Press, 2009.



Fisher-Wirth, Ann. *Slide Shows* (Poetry)

approved a donation in the amount of \$500 for the Walter Isle Memorial Fund at Rice University.

Conference planning was, as always, a large part of our retreat. Christoph Irmscher, site host for the 2011 biennial in Bloomington, Indiana, joined us as we discussed everything from possible themes and keynotes to parking, food, and transportation. The conference evaluations from 2009 were pored over and improvements debated; one of the important things accomplished was to find volunteer coordinators for various aspects of the conference. This will help to delegate some of the roles that the conference organizers previously took on singlehandedly. Look for the [announcement of our theme](#) in this newsletter, followed by the CFP this summer, and frequent updates to the ASLE website and conference website once it goes live.

Our second guest was Kate Christen, representing both the American Society for Environmental History (ASEH) and Society for Conservation Biology (SCB). She was there to talk with us about possible future collaborations, and our conversation will be ongoing as we explore the possibilities in these relationships.



Chia-ju Chang, Kate Christen & Catherine Meeks on a walk at Montreat. Photo by Priscilla Ybarra.

Prioritizing our strategic plan goals and tasks, and allocating any funds raised to those goals, was an important agenda item as well. While we agreed there are many important goals in the document, we also realize that we have limited money and manpower and must choose a reasonable starting point toward reaching them. The main priorities that emerged were to work on the sustainability of the organization and its events and practices, to increase internationalization and diversity efforts, to expand the Managing Director role, to build graduate student assistance and programs, and to continue the development of ISLE. Several sub-committees were

formed to study ways to move these initiatives forward.

Future honorary members of ASLE and the membership and roles of the Advisory Board were also discussed by officers. All in all, it was a productive weekend of dazzling depth and breadth of topic. If you would like to be part of this meeting of the minds in the future, don't forget to run for office ([see call in this newsletter](#)) this fall!

The World Ecoculture Organization Holds Inaugural Meeting

by Wes Berry, Western Kentucky University, ASLE International Liaison

The inaugural meeting of WEO: World Ecoculture Organization was held at Peking University during August 14-21 2009. Focusing on ecological literature and environmental education, with a special emphasis on Asian countries, the conference hosted a large group of teachers, students, and community activists from China and India, as well as others from Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Somalia, Cameroon, Chile, Turkey, France, Germany, and the USA. As conference chair Zhao Baisheng of the Institute of World Literature at Peking University noted in his welcoming remarks, the conference topics were "truly multi-disciplinary, ranging from literature, art, education, ethics, and law to hydrology, meteorology, medical science and ecology." For example, keynote speakers included several luminaries of ecocriticism and also scientists, like Gao Zhanyi of China Institute of Water Resources and Hydropower Research, who spoke on "Coping with Population Growth, Climate Change, Water Scarcity and Growing

chapbook).
Georgetown, KY:
Finishing Line Press,
2010. 2nd place, 2008
Finishing Line
Chapbook Competition.



**Howarth, Will and
Anne Matthews**
(writing as Dana Hand.)
Deep Creek: A Novel.
New York: Houghton
Mifflin Harcourt, 2010.
[http://www.dana-
hand.com/](http://www.dana-hand.com/)

Murphy, Patrick D.
*Ecocritical Explorations
in Literary and Cultural
Studies.* Lexington
Books/Rowman and
Littlefield, 2009.

Food Demand in China in the 21st Century." Peking University, with its mature trees and winding pathways, a large lake and old buildings, was a pleasant place to wander, a small island of calm amidst greater bustling Beijing. The panel sessions closed with an elaborate banquet, Chinese style, with abundant regional cuisine and a variety show by delegates from different nations. Highlights included dance from India and Turkey, a kung fu demonstration, and ASLE-UK's own Greg "Hot Pants" Garrard performing a campy rendition of Dylan Thomas's poetry.

The WEO conference was jointly organized by several international groups and scholars invested in ecoliteracy, such as the Institute of World Literature and the Center for Cross-Cultural Studies at Peking University; Global Citizens for Sustainable Development, based in India; and Gutenberg University of Mainz, Germany. The official ceremony to found WEO on the final day of the conference was an open forum that drew mixed opinions from attendees. Some wanted to forge ahead with the formation of this organization; others recommended a more cautious approach. For example, Scott Slovic, who has for several years worked with ecocritics in China who were not at this conference, urged the organizers of WEO to include other parties in the formation, so that WEO could be more inclusive and of course not step on the toes of people already doing this type of work in ecological humanities/education in China. Furthermore, the issue of governance was discussed. "World Ecoculture Organization" is an ambitious title. Would such a global organization have a center? If so, where?

The WEO ceremony brought to mind issues connected to the growth of ASLE and other ecoliteracy groups around the world, like EASLCE (European Association for the Study of Literature, Culture, and the Environment), ALECC (Association for Literature, Environment and Culture in Canada), and various groups with ASLE in the title, like ASLE-Korea and ASLE-ANZ. Important questions that we might ask are: *How can we best represent ourselves in an international context? And who are "we"?*



Overall, the formation of WEO signals the spreading of ecoliteracy and the continued vibrancy of the field. The Beijing conference was an excellent reminder of that, and WEO's vision, like that of other kindred groups, promises to foster "staying together, learning flowers and going light." Considering our global ecological challenges, we should welcome such efforts.

Report from OSLE-India

by Rayson K. Alex, Madras Christian College, Chennai, Secretary, OSLE-India

The Organisation for Studies in Literature and Environment-India (OSLE-India), a forum for promoting ecocriticism in India, had a fantastic and industrious year with an assortment of activities and events.

The Annual International Conference of OSLE-India was held on 25 & 26 September, 2009, at National College, Tiruchirapalli, Tamil Nadu. The conference with the theme, "Ecology: Text and Context," opened venues for discussing concepts like ecotourism, ethnography, environment, nature, nature-writings, ecofeminism, ecosophy, ecopsychology, ecoconsciousness, environmental aesthetics, landscapes, ecopolitics, displacement, ecotheology, tribalism, ecomedia, green education, ecotopia, ecogovernance, ecocentrism, deep ecology, ecoculture, bioregionalism, nativism, ecospirituality, ecolinguistics and ethnomusicology. Close to two hundred participants from different parts of the country and

ASLE Seeks Nominations

Candidates are being sought to run for ASLE Executive Council (EC) and Vice President (VP), for terms beginning January 2011. EC members serve a 3-year term, as does the VP: one year as VP, one year as President, and one as Immediate Past President. If you or another member you know would like to run for an ASLE office, please contact 2010 President Annie Ingram (aningram@davidson.edu) by August 1, 2010.

Members Write

ASLE News wants to include your voices! We invite members to write 100-200 words in response to a word, phrase, or question that we will print in this section of each issue of ASLE News. Selected responses will then be published in the next issue. (Readers of *The Sun* magazine will recognize this feature as similar to their always fascinating "Readers Write.")

Be sure to read Cynthia Larson's take on "[Relief](#)" published in this issue, too!

For the Summer 2010 Members Write, respond to the following phrase:

abroad presented their papers. The conference was inaugurated by Dr. B. P. Sanjay, Vice-Chancellor, Central University of Tamil Nadu, Tiruvarur.

The OSLE-India Study Circle is an active argument and discussion forum held on first Fridays of every month at Madras Christian College. The Study Circle, convened by Ms. S. Susan Deborah, has had thirty-six meetings thus far. The recently concluded thirty-sixth Study Circle was led by Dr. Anne Walter (an expert in Green buildings) on 12 March 2010.

A forum for studying the ecological aspects of media, named "Ecomedia Team," was formed this year by OSLE-India. The Team is headed by Prof. Watson Solomon (Assistant Professor, Department of Media Studies, SRM University, Chennai) and convened by Mr. Sachindev P.S. and Mr. Moses Srinivas K.S. The Team is committed to creating original digital documents (photographs, video and audio) for class room purposes and to be used for public ecological awareness. The first video-documentary production of Ecomedia Team is *Pandiammal Illam*. The 30-minute ethnographic video-documentary scripted and narrated by S. Susan Deborah is a story of two transgenders, Mahalakshmi and Pandiammal, in T. Kallupatti, Madurai District, Tamil Nadu, and their multiple homes. The Team is at present involved in the building of a Tribal Research Centre in Attappady, Kerala, with a grant from the World Oral Literature Project of Cambridge University, London. The Research Centre will be a platform to collect oral literature of two tribal communities, the Mudugar and Kurumbar, and make video-documentaries. The Ecomedia Team is also in the process of creating a Digital Archive for OSLE-India, which contains video-interviews, video-documentaries, photographs, audio tracks and digital ecocritical books. The Ecomedia Team organized three workshops in Madras Christian College, Good Earth School, and Bharati Women's College respectively. The workshops on the theme, 'Ecology in tribal lore,' focused on ecocritical readings of South Indian tribal stories for postgraduate students in Madras Christian College and Bharathi Women's College while in Good Earth School the focus was on the artistic expressions inspired by these stories. Followed by the workshop in Bharati Women's College, a National one-day seminar themed, "Ecocriticism: Emerging Trends" was initiated by the Ecomedia Team on 25 February, 2010.

The second volume of *Indian Journal of Ecocriticism*(IJE) has been released. The editor of the journal, Dr. R. Swarnalatha, IIT Madras, and her team should be congratulated for their persistence and perseverance in bringing out the journal on time. Essays for the third volume of IJE have been invited and the team members have already begun their review-editing process.

Apart from the aforementioned events, OSLE-India has been publishing online newsletters and guiding postgraduate and research students in the country. OSLE-India is the biggest organization in the country for promoting ecocritical discourses with over 350 members.

Report from the Association for Literature, Environment, and Culture in Canada (ALECC)

by Richard Pickard, University of Victoria, President, ALECC

In writing this, I feel a bit like Juan Antonio Samaranch, who at the end of all but one Olympics described the most recent games as "the best ever." Once again, 2010 will see all sorts of excitement in Canada related to the intersection of literature and environment, making it once again perhaps the best year yet for ALECC.

Under the more than capable editorship of Lisa Szabo, Mike Pereira (who stepped down at the end of 2009), and Paul Huebener, our online voice, [The Goose](#), last year clearly finished outgrowing its original designation as a newsletter. There's no better way to keep up with Canadian literature and environment news than by reading *The Goose*, including news about the prolific publication record of ALECC members both in print and online.

After the successful visit of our southern neighbours to Canada for the 2009 ASLE conference, ALECC was emboldened to host its own inaugural conference: "The Ecological Community," will be held August 19-21, 2010, at Cape Breton University in Sydney, Nova

"Living Downstream"

Please send responses either in the body of an e-mail or as an attachment to *ASLE News* editor Catherine Meeks, catherine-meeks@utc.edu.

Strategic Plan Donors Update

The following people were inadvertently left off the Strategic Plan Fundraising donor list in the previous newsletter, or have given since it was published. We also apologize to donor Elizabeth Schultz, whose name was misspelled in our Winter 2010 donor list.

Bristlecone Pine (\$250-499)
Greta Gaard

Dogwood (\$100-249)
Frank Bergon
Chia-ju Chang

Aspen (\$20-99)
Tonia Payne

New ASLE Diversity Blog

The ASLE community now has a new cyber meeting place to share news about research, events, pedagogy, and more regarding diversity and environment issues. Designed and maintained by current Diversity Officer Priscilla Ybarra, the site will host

Scotia. There's no competing with the enormous size of ASLE's biennial events, but the ALECC schedule will be tightly focused as well as full of sessions that speak to other sessions. The soon-to-be-released conference schedule will include all sorts of gems!

Canada will also see relevant non-ALECC conferences this year in Montreal at the end of May (the annual conference of the Environmental Studies Association of Canada); in Calgary in October ("Under Western Skies: Climate, Culture, and Change in Western North America"); and again in Montreal in November (the 14th annual meeting of the International Association of Environmental Philosophy). Anecdotally, I'm hearing from colleagues across the country that this year has seen a marked jump in the number of graduate student applicants who want to work in the literature and environment field. Not only are we seeing exciting work in the discipline, in other words, but we're also seeing more and more people who want to participate in this work.



Bottomland Trail, Prairie Oaks Metro Park, OH.
Photo by H. Lewis Ulman.

conference (even meriting a [dedicated post in Andrew Revkin's "Dot Earth" blog](#)). The university piloted a mass spay/neuter program this spring, but canceled the program once it realized no one wants to adopt feral rabbits as pets. At press time, the university is believed to be badly under-estimating the population at 1300, of which (or possibly whom) 40 were recently neutered.

Not that there's an obvious link between these rabbits and the number of those interested in literature and environment, but....

Notes from the Managing Director

by Amy McIntyre

2009 was a great year for ASLE in so many ways, and was a year of firsts: we conducted our first-ever biennial conference outside the U.S., launched our first fundraising campaign, and finalized our first strategic plan. We also saw growth in both our members and our finances (see below), as well as in the frequency of our publications. But we as environmentally-minded people know that it is not all about growth, but sustainability, so in 2010 I look to nurture these gains and build upon them, and to strengthen the expanded ASLE community. All this activity means that I will be working a few more hours a week this year to keep up with more people and projects.

In a year in which many people and nonprofits struggled to stay afloat, ASLE was able to strengthen its financial stability. This was mainly possible through the loyalty, generosity and

Two of the Canadian universities reporting another year of increased student interest are the University of Calgary, home to ALECC's immediate past president Pamela Banting, and York University, home to ALECC's current vice-president (and 2011 president) Cate Mortimer-Sandilands. I feel deeply honoured to serve between these two, and I want especially to take this opportunity to thank Pamela for her years of hard work to bring ALECC into existence, to forge bonds with ASLE for Canadian writers and scholars, and to develop a genuine literature and environment community in Canada. Our first conference promises to be an energetic, rich expression of this community's strengths and interests, and I can hardly wait.

And finally, several ASLE members who came to Victoria have emailed me in recent months to ask about the university's rabbit population, which was the subject of so much conversation during and after the

ongoing discussions and announcements. The next elected Diversity Officers will continue to maintain the site. Please see the site at <http://aslediversity.weebly.com/> to join the conversation on diversity issues.

participation of you, our members. Because so many of you contributed in a variety of ways, ASLE now has assets that stand at approximately \$166,000. For more detailed information go to <http://www.asle.org/site/about/finances/2009/>.

Our membership is as large and diverse as it has ever been. The combination of the ability to join or renew online and very high participation in the biennial conference increased the ranks of ASLE members to about 1300 in 2009. I hope that most or all of you stick around for 2010, which promises to be an exciting and interesting year for our organization as well. It is especially heartening to find that nearly 250 of our current members are international, and hail from 36 countries including Cameroon, the Czech Republic, Malaysia, and Thailand. We also have members from every U.S. state but one: North Dakota. If you have a literature and nature loving friend who lives there, let them know about ASLE!

I am currently exploring the world of social media, and how such things as Facebook and Twitter might help keep members in touch during the very long stretch between conferences. If any members have expertise and interests in this area, I would appreciate your input. Look for an email related to ASLE and new forms of communication very soon. Finally, if you have ideas about how to help improve my service to the ASLE community in any way, I would love to hear from you.

Conference Updates

ASLE-sponsored Panels at Recent MLA Convention

The annual convention of the Modern Language Association, held on December 27-30, 2009, in Philadelphia, saw two successful ASLE-affiliated panels, both chaired by Scott Knickerbocker of the College of Idaho, the ASLE liaison for the MLA.

On Monday, December 28, the session titled **African American Literature and the Environment** featured four excellent papers: "Catastrophe's Caesura: Sterling Brown's Lyric Time," by Sonya Posmentier of Princeton University; "They Held the River's 'Tongue like Words': Reenvisioning African American Eco-poetics," by Katherine R. Lynes of Union College, NY; "Environmental Justice and the Transcendence of Race Thinking in Percival Everett's *Watershed*," by Alexa Weik of Université de Fribourg, Switzerland; and "'Now a Swamp in Name Only': Assimilation and Environment in W. E. B. DuBois's *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*," by Kristen Egan, Loyola University, Chicago. On Wednesday, December 30, the session titled **Humor and the Environment** featured the work of Molly Wallace of Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, who presented her paper "Involuntary Satire and Global Risk in Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle*," and of Katherine R. Chandler, of Saint Mary's College, MD, who presented her paper "Honeyed Venom: Humor's Role in Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible*." By all accounts, both panels produced lively discussion afterward, and many of those in attendance expressed interest in ASLE and ecocriticism.

Looking ahead, for the next MLA Convention to be held January 6-9, 2011, in Los Angeles, Scott is in the process of putting together two ASLE-affiliated panels: **Queer Ecology** and **Pulp Fiction and the Environment**. Deadline for submissions of abstracts has already passed, but please check for future CFPs on the ASLE website at <http://www.asle.org/site/papers/current-conferences/>.



Along the Allegheny Front, Dolly Sods Wilderness Area, West Virginia. Photo by H. Lewis Ulman.

"The Future of Ecocriticism: New Horizons" in Turkey

by Greta Gaard, University of Wisconsin-River Falls, ASLE Executive Council Member

What better place for ecocritics to meet, deliberate, debate, and dance than on the shores of the Mediterranean? From November 4-6, 2009, at the Hotel Limak Limra, Kemer, Antalya, Turkey, an international gathering of ecocritics from 26 different countries discussed the future of ecocriticism. Themes of globalization, ecopoetics, postcolonial ecocriticism, outdoor environmental education, ecocritical praxis, nature writing, ecological inhabitation, queer ecocriticism, environmental justice, children's literature, first nations' environmental literatures, ecolinguistics, climate change literature, animal studies, and Turkish culture featured prominently in these discussions.

As days lengthened into nights, strong community relationships were formed. Ecocritics who share breakfasts, dinners, and late-night wine cannot help but become better acquainted. Our conversations were enriched by a tour of nearby Phaselis, the ruins of a Roman seaside community, where we explored place, culture, and history. Our hosts surprised us with a funicular ride up to the summit of Mount Olympos, a steep climb from seaside village to snow-capped peaks and breathtaking vistas of the Mediterranean. At the summit, our guides provided us with hot mulled wine and we toasted the beauty of the Turkish environment, the pleasure of ecocritical community, and the generosity of our hosts.

A conference that began with 9:00 a.m. plenaries and ran till 8:30 or 9:00 at night seemed surprisingly manageable, thanks to the foresight of the organizers. Coffee breaks at mid-morning and mid-afternoon provided opportunities for conversation, and each night offered new delights of Turkey. We were introduced to the mystic Ney (reed-flute) music and the presence of whirling dervishes; adventurous ecocritics undertook an evening tour of Antalya; and the final night of the conference featured a sumptuous banquet complete with "The Future of Ecocriticism" cake and a belly dancer who invited leading ecocritics to "shake their stuff."

The conference was the bounteous outcome of collaboration between Hacettepe and Ankara Universities in Turkey, and four key planners: Serpil Oppermann, Ufuk Özdağ, Nevin Özkan, and Elis Yildirim. From the banners that heralded our arrival, to the notepads, pens, CDs of Turkish music, conference folders and picture book of Turkey, the generosity of our hosts was unsurpassed. By creating a conference that appealed to the intellect as much as the senses, our hosts encouraged collaborations and community that indeed will form the future of ecocriticism for many years to come.

Members Write

Remembering the Season of My Mother's Passing

by Cynthia Larson, Ph.D.

Noun: re-lief. *Release from a post of duty; deliverance through the removal of pain, oppression, distress.*

This morning, late in autumn, I watched leaves fall. Before the sun lifted above the tree line to the east of my house, nothing moved in the surrounding woods save for an occasional wind walking uphill from the lake, stirring with idle fingers the topmost branches. But when the sun rose above the forest and began to warm the oak's crowns in my yard, then a scattering of leaves loosened in unison and fell. It's as if the trees sought the sun's blessings, needed an embrace of light in order to surrender more leaves to gravity. This morning's first leaf fall was coppery-gold, lazy, and felt like relief, a night fever broken, a burden set down, so that the letting go was without effort, the drift down easy and grateful.

For too long, I watched my mother's health slip steadily, the result of an October stroke that struck like a first hard frost, changing her forever. Years later, my mother found relief at last, delivered from the body's duties, released like a leaf in autumn.



Buckeye (*Aesculus glabra*), Highlands Nature Sanctuary, Highland Cty, OH. Photo by H. Lewis Ulman.

Interview with an Independent Writer

Writer **David Taylor's** most recent book, *Soul of a People: The WPA Writers' Project Uncovers Depression America* (Wiley, 2009) covers a little-known cultural experiment in America that reconnected Americans and local writers to their places. In Wisconsin, the WPA guide included Aldo Leopold's early essay on conservation and a land ethic - years before Sand County Almanac. In Illinois, the WPA connected Nelson Algren and Richard Wright to Chicago's land and history. In California, it sent Kenneth Rexroth backpacking into the Sierras and writing up his routes alongside a lament for the state's forests. And in Utah and Idaho, it fostered work by Juanita Brooks on what would become *The Mountain Meadows Massacre*, and Vardis Fisher's first historical novel.

The accompanying documentary film, *Soul of a People: Writing America's Story*, premiered on the Smithsonian Channel and was nominated for a 2010 Writer's Guild Award. The film is scheduled to be released on DVD on June 29. For more information about Taylor, and for events continuing this spring in conjunction with the 75th anniversary of the WPA, visit: www.davidataylor.org and www.soulofapeople.blogspot.com.

Taylor responded to the following questions for ASLE News.

1) What do you find to be the most important "connections between people and their worlds," as you categorize your writing, and how did these become important to you and your work?

Hard to summarize succinctly, but they intertwine physical sustenance -- food, shelter, tools -- with our personal and cultural identity. I'm particularly drawn to the ones that seem small and contained, yet the closer you examine them, the more they sprout in all directions. That was the essence of my first book, *Ginseng, the Divine Root*: something from the forest that's small enough to fit in your palm was wrapped up with human aspirations for wealth, health, and good fortune. And not just in one culture, but indigenous cultures East and West. It spanned

the trade routes from North America to China. In spiritual terms, that defines a sacrament: the outward and visual manifestation of an inward and spiritual truth.

I found those connections again with my latest project, *Soul of a People*, about the 1930s through the eyes of people on the Writers' Project all across America. This was during the Depression, when people were by necessity uprooted more than ever before (as in the 1937 film *Make Way for Tomorrow*, now out on DVD). Some of these people ended up on the Writers' Project relief rolls as their last hope. They were assigned the task of writing about their hometowns and states for the WPA guides, and they rediscovered those places. In Nebraska, a hobo novelist came back after several years knocking around North America on the rails and ended up with the job of editing the WPA guide to Nebraska. And that's how he came finally to see the place. You find the same kind of engagement by Kenneth Rexroth in California, and John Cheever in New York, and of course Zora Neale Hurston in Florida, and Meridel LeSueur in Minnesota. In some cases, I'm sure, it saved their lives.



Floodplain Grasses, Prairie Oaks Metro Park, OH.
Photo by H. Lewis Ulman.

I came to these stories as a user of those WPA guides, which treat place vibrantly, as a locus of people's customs and stories and life. Then I got drawn to learn about the people who created those guides.

The title comes from Mark Twain, who said the only way you could really grasp all of America's contradictions would be to have a thousand people from all corners of the country, all ethnic backgrounds, and all walks of life write from their experiences and perspectives, from their place.

Then, he said, you'd get the soul of the people.

As for how these connections became important to me, that goes back to childhood. By high school I got a lot of nourishment from walking the shore of the Potomac River almost daily. Later

when I studied for a year in Scotland I was struck by how hikes in the Highlands shaped people's views of the world. Travel showed me how those connections varied and how much stayed the same.

2) What landscapes--whether literal, figurative, of place, of the mind--do you consider most important to your work?

My first thought is of driving through the mist of mountains in southwestern Virginia, listening to a tape of songs by the Carter Family. Mountains and mountain culture have a strong hold on me.

3) What books and/or authors have most influenced your work?

Among short-story writers, Chekhov, Alice Munro (for example in *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage*) and Grace Paley (*Later the Same Day*). In narrative nonfiction, John McPhee, for his combination of surprise, dry humor, well-chosen detail, startling comparisons, and characterization, and Wole Soyinka's evocative memoirs, *Aké* and *Isárá*. In travel writing, William Least Heat Moon's *Blue Highways*, Tom Miller's *The Panama Hat Trail*, Patrick Symmes' *Chasing Che*, and Peter Hessler's *River Town*. Another wonderful book that I wish I'd read earlier is Tiziano Tiziani's *A Fortune-Teller Told Me*.

4) What is the best thing anyone ever taught you?

My mother, Nancy Taylor, is an artist with a singular aesthetic; she responds to landscapes

and distressed pieces of the landscape as if they were unheard people. She taught me a lot about how to see, as well as how to accept people as they are (mostly).

5) What are you working on now?

I've been finishing the text for an illustrated book about the people who sailed tall ships in a series of events that converged on New York harbor on July 4th in various years between 1964 and 2000. These events were called Operation Sail and their aim was to foster appreciation for the knowledge of the sea that sailing requires. With not much land in sight, this project has been very different for me. I've interviewed scores of the sailing men and women who came from many countries - Poland, Ecuador, Indonesia, Norway and Britain, among others - and I got to go aboard a couple of the ships. The people I spoke with have a tremendous respect for the power of the sea and they know their own reserves from living through squalls and man-overboard drills at night. It's a different experience of the world.

Summer Learning Opportunities

Call for Creative Writers: The Mount St. Helens Field Residencies

Creative writers whose work in any genre reflects a keen awareness of the natural world and an appreciation for both scientific and literary ways of knowing are invited to apply for a week-long writing residency at Mount St. Helens. The Mount St. Helens Field Residencies will take place July 18-24, 2010, with a base camp near Randle, WA, and will be held in conjunction with the 2010 Mount St. Helens Science Pulse, a gathering of ecologists and research scientists who are engaged in field work on Mount St. Helens. Residency writers will be able to join ecologists on field trips to various locations on Mount St. Helens, interact informally with scientists, and to focus on writing projects that embody creative responses to the volcano and its varied landscapes and the role of volcanic landscapes in the imagination and culture of the Northwest. The Mount St. Helens Field Residencies are sponsored by the Spring Creek Project for Ideas, Nature and the Written Word at Oregon State University; the US Forest Service; and the Andrews Forest Long-Term Ecological Research group. More information can be found on ASLE's website, <http://www.asle.org/site/papers/workshops/>, and at <http://springcreek.oregonstate.edu/>.



Education in a Changing Climate: An Environmental Education Workshop

Climate change is not just for scientists to deal with. It's a challenge for us all, and we need everybody's skills and perspectives to confront it--now. But the scope and complexity of the issue can seem intimidating and frustrating, like trying to grasp hot air. How can we understand global and long-term problems when we live and work in the here and now? Do we need to be experts before we even mention climate change in public or add it to our teaching? Join us at Unity College for a 4-day workshop that will give you powerful, practical ways to move past anxiety and educate yourself, your students, and the public. This workshop, co-sponsored by The Orion Society, publisher of *Orion* Magazine, runs from August 1-4, 2010 on the campus of Unity College in Maine. Core faculty will include SueEllen

Campbell and John Calderazzo of Colorado State University, and Cindy Thomashow, Executive Director of The Center for Environmental Education. For more information or to register, visit the workshop website:

<http://www.unity.edu/Visitors/SummerPrograms/Orion/Welcome.aspx>.

Member News

Casey Clabough of Lynchburg College announces that administration of a literary journal called the James Dickey Newsletter recently moved from the University of South Carolina to Lynchburg College in Virginia and, in the process, has changed its name to James Dickey Review. Future issues of the journal will contain creative nonfiction, poetry, reviews, and scholarship that are possessed of an ecological and place-based feel. Please review the updated web pages and consider submitting your own work here: www.jamesdickey.org. As annual subscriptions are only \$12, consider subscribing and/or directing your nearest library to do so. The subscription form is here:

http://www.jamesdickey.org/index_files/Subscription_Form.pdf

Andrew C. Gottlieb won the 11th American Fiction Prize from New Rivers Press for his short story, "Stickmen." Previously judged by Raymond Carver and Wallace Stegner, this year's judge was novelist and poet Clint McCown. "Stickmen," will lead *American Fiction, Volume Eleven: The Best Unpublished Short Stories by Emerging Writers* (published in Fall 2010), which will also include the other 19 finalist stories.

Shelly Shaver has launched a new website that puts a human face on the environmental crisis. This site tells the story of our grandparents' generation struggling against the worst environmental and economic disaster in American history. Fact-based and updated daily, it tells the story of a young farm family battling the Dust Bowl. Shaver responds daily to comments by teachers and students. Readers can enjoy the whole story or can select individual "mini-episodes" to read. This webpage is fully functional now at <http://www.dustbowlpoetry.wordpress.com>. It will be linked as a guest artist page to the website honoring the late Horton Foote, the brilliant screenplay writer of *To Kill A Mockingbird*.

ASLE News Notes

ASLE 2011 Conference Theme and Update

As announced in the Winter issue of ASLE News, the 9th ASLE Biennial Conference will be held on the campus of the University of Indiana in Bloomington, IN, June 21-26, 2011. ASLE Vice-President Ursula Heise and conference site host Christoph Irmischer are pleased to announce the conference theme, ***Species, Space and the Imagination of the Global***. This theme particularly seeks to include work that links animal studies with ecocriticism, or that integrates analyses of globalization in its various dimensions with ecocritical concerns. The official Call for Proposals, to be released July 15, 2010, will include much more detailed information about the conference theme and goals. In preparation for the CFP, the conference organizers would like to encourage prospective attendees to consider that fully constituted panels will be given preference over single paper proposals, so it might be useful to contact potential co-panelists as early as possible. Visit <http://www.asle.org/site/conferences/biennial/> for more information as it becomes available.

Member News

Whether you got a new job, won an award, or did something interesting, enlightening, or exciting, we want to know what you're up to! If you have some news to share with other ASLE members, and it doesn't "fit" into the Bookshelf, PhD, or Emeritus categories, please contact Catherine Meeks (catherine-meeks@utc.edu) with the Subject heading "Member News."

ASLE Emeritus

ASLE News honors those ASLE members retired or retiring from teaching. If you would like to acknowledge someone in this new feature--or if you yourself will be retiring during the coming academic year--please contact please contact Catherine Meeks (catherine-meeks@utc.edu). We will include a brief account of scholarly interests, the institutions of employment and years taught in the next newsletter.

ASLE PhDs

Have you or one of your students recently defended a dissertation? If so, ASLE News wants to know. Each issue, we include announcements commemorating those members who have recently completed their doctoral work. If you would like to be included in this feature, please contact Catherine Meeks (catherine-meeks@utc.edu) with the dissertation title, degree-granting institution, and committee members.

Contact Information

ASLE

Amy McIntyre, Managing Director

E-mail: info@asle.org

Website: <http://www.asle.org>

Phone: 603-357-7411