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## Thinking like a Watershed: Spirituality, Ethics & Watershed Organizing

### Abstract

This presentation examines the spirituality and ethics of “watershed organizing” movements in the United States, wherein activists, often acting in league with limnologists and other scientists, seek to protect and/or restore aquatic ecosystems and their drainages. In the U.S. such organizing has been decisively shaped by “religious” or “spiritual” countercultures. A history of watershed organizing in the U.S., reveals close connections between deep ecology, bioregionalism, radical environmentalism, environmental science, Leopoldian ethics. Indeed, it is impossible to understand environmentalism in general and watershed organizing in particular without understanding its religious, spiritual, and moral tributaries. This will be clear by spotlighting some of the earliest examples of watershed organizing in the U.S., its affinities with the pioneers of conservation biology, and the ways in which it is a reflection of what I call “dark green religion.” Such religion has to do with the feelings of belonging to and connection to nature felt by most environmentalists, along with a perception that nature is sacred in some way. Illustrations may include excerpts from a video entitled “Thinking Like A Watershed” that was produced by some of the earliest watershed activists in the United States, and who have for a generation sought to restore the Matole River watershed (and its salmon habitat) in Northwestern California, as well as the contrasting case of the Waterkeeper Alliance.