

# The **Sylvan State**



**Janusz Wrobel**

## About

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When I moved to a small house on the edge of the Niagara Escarpment, it came with an apple tree, a neglected mess of branches. It took a decade of pruning to shape it, to develop a relationship with it, and to have own apples. As well as with all other trees in my new living environment. Following my childhood experience with my father, planting trees, shrubs, vegetable gardens. A habit or a choice?

The evoked relationships seldom disappoint; only the future might. I was back to daily walks and my reflections in the woods, back to a reference library, if one elects it to be. Where the past reappears in the present to gauge what changed, how and why. An active form of meditation, a chance to stir what was once learned and experienced, with the unfolding realities of the present times.



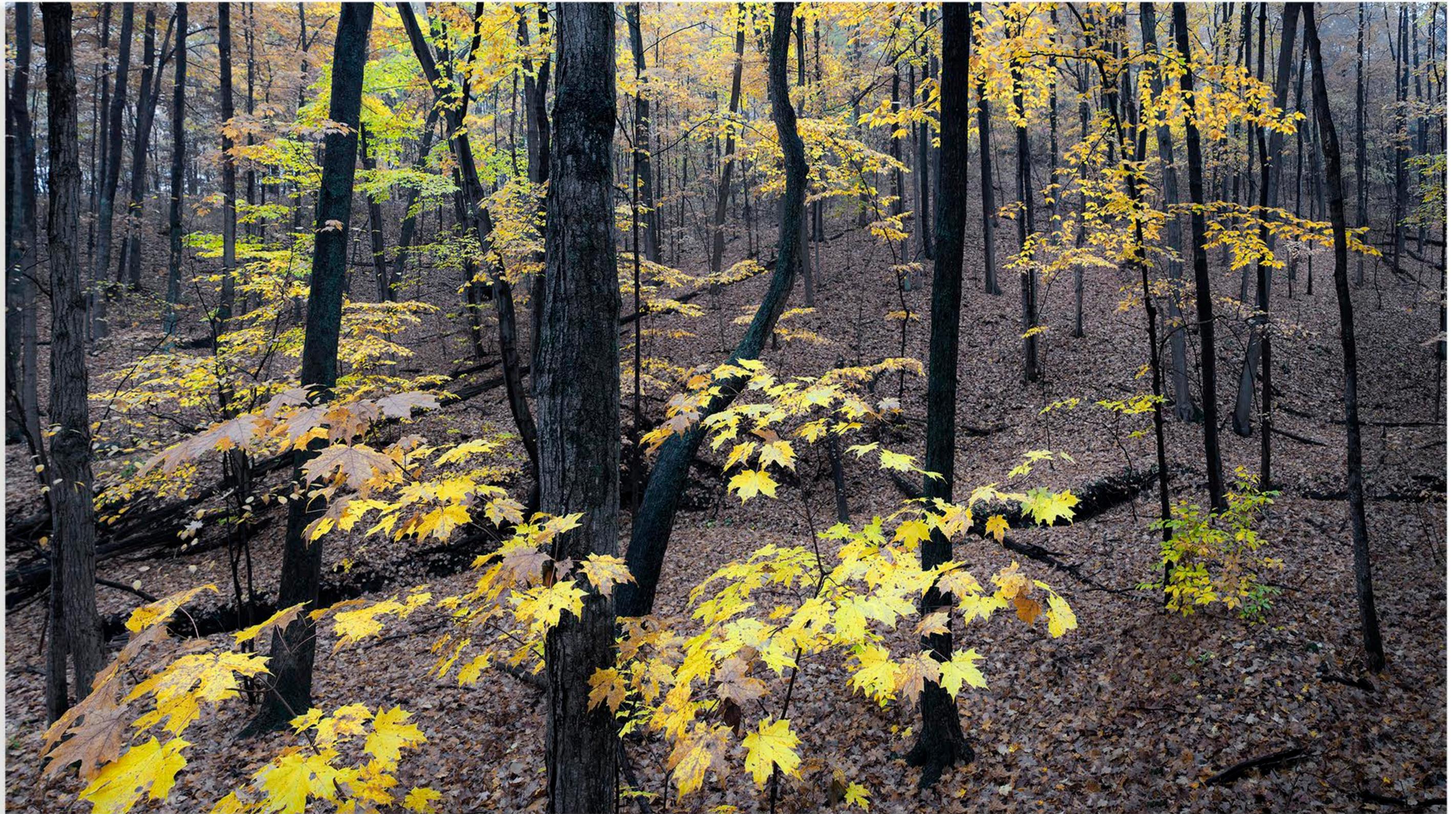
That is how I came to see the living forest as the embodiment of what matters to Life, and as the prime regulator of energy, water, and carbon cycles. A tree in it, an outcome of long evolutionary processes, is an organism to harness most physical properties of the water molecule, converting dirt into soil all living organisms need. The forest, then, is an orchestrated and amplified effort of many, maintaining food supply and thermal range of livable conditions for all inhabiting it life forms. The challenge is persuading the above to those who see the forest differently, like through a metric of the profit margin. Or upgrading the school curriculum, which separates the water cycle from the energy cycle and equalization on our planet. To restore the true meaning of Tree of Life.

It is much harder to have a relationship with soil, a living entity, and complex ecosystem of diverse organisms like bacteria, fungi, earthworms, and other micro- and macrofauna, which interact and perform vital functions such as decomposing organic matter, recycling nutrients, improving soil structure, and enabling plant growth. The foundation of all food supplies.

A few keystrokes allow to see anything, like flocks of migratory birds. In the woods, the real things unfold. Life is happening with intricate, symbiotic, unconditional relationships. Evoked imagination allows me to see the underground infrastructure of the living world. Forests, biotic pumps of water circulation and a source of hydrological dynamics of flying rivers. All appears on the screen of Life.



*Young Maple (15)*







*Escarpment Winterland #1 (6)*



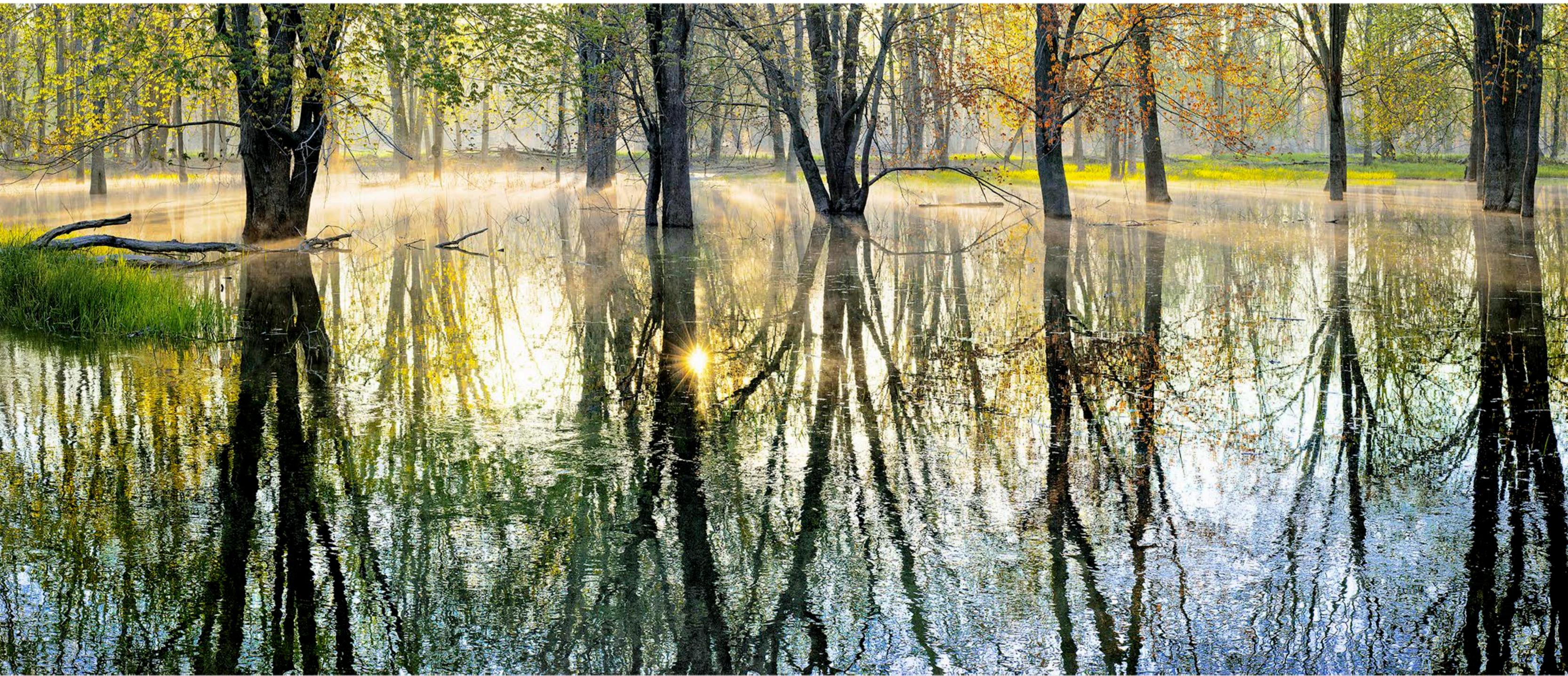
Navigating modernity could be blindfolded without historical or statistical data sets as references. We live in a world of many scales and values. A standing oak has no assigned tangible value. As a timber, it has. Lady Elizabeth Simcoe marvelled at the magnificent oak tree groves while visiting the first settlers on the shores of Lake Ontario. They endured as old building structures. There are three trillion trees on our planet, half of the number at the advent of the First Agricultural Revolution.

On old photographs I studied, the Niagara Escarpment looked stripped of trees with the unfolding of the Industrial Revolution age, and Dundas Valley became farmland. The dedication and initiative of private individuals, let to the restoration of native habitat I could enjoy for years. Despite the latter erected ticket gates and falling numbers of visitors. Cultural roadmaps often end up being monetized along the dominating system of values.

The info tech, despite its promises, became the hedonic driver for way too many mindsets. More became less. Along came the personal desire to put a stamp on the local ecology, regardless of the consequences.

Who will chart new or revise our roadmap? I often wonder.



















With age, I became enslaved to my habits. Whenever I could while travelling, I set my camp under the white pine trees. Inspired by their grace, endurance, adaptability, scent and gentle whispers in the evening breeze. It became my place to be.

With a genome many times larger than my own, a record of past adaptations to changing conditions, these trees have a far more assured place in the changing world than I will ever have.

I came across, and stayed on, at many one-tree islands that looked like a little pine grove. With hugging ground brunches, long and intertwined needles creating enduring ground carpets, a foothold for the accumulation of matter, where small plants and shrubs were starting new living communities.

There is no monetary value in the natural inspiration.



*Thunderstorm Over Baie Fine (6)*



White Pine #05 (6)



White Pine #07 (3)



Fallen (6)



Acquiring an insight into a working habitat is a monumental task because of the inherent complexity of any living ecosystem, so I focused, therefore, my curiosity on the Great Canadian Shield environments in my next project. However, I dedicated time to studying the collection of West Coast Native art at MOA in Vancouver. The testimony of deep-rooted relationships in native cultures within the ecologies of their lives.

Later, I spent some time in the rainforests on Vancouver Island. The symbiotic plant relationships were much more visible than in Ontario forests. The memorable exuberance of Life in full view. Different scents, whispers, hues, but the same role of trees in their living environments.

The anchors to living habitats, harnessing excesses of the sun's energy and atmospheric carbon, equalizing energy distribution, preserving stores of water and humus. All the scaffolding of living soil that warrants the continuation of Life processes. And supplementing stores of carbon underground, as they were doing it for about 370 million of years.

*"A tree is known by its fruit; a man by his deeds."*







After witnessing the logging practice, I had a long lunch in Victoria, BC, with a retired forester who had worked at a logging company. He tried to convince me that what I saw on the island was, in fact, sound environmental practices.

I returned home from Victoria thinking about Upton Sinclair's, author of an old book, "The Jungle". How his words remain valid.

About a man being paid to not understand.

