

COMMON GROUND:
Getting to Know Your Home

2006

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From mountain top to prairie, mesa to valley bottom, the interface between the Rocky Mountains and Great Plains offers immense variety of land and life. Our sense of Indian Peaks watershed flowing into the Boulder Creek basin develops as we discover that there is always something new to be explored and enjoyed right here in our own "backyard"

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Common Ground invites you to discover the richness and complexity of your local area through questions and activities inspiring research, exploration and experience in the field, on the land, by individuals or groups of any age. We encourage you to seek out, acknowledge, and support people who are local sources of wisdom about your river basin or bioregion. People, books, maps, talks, classes, study groups, and, of course, walks on your home ground, are all good sources of information to aid your learning. By adapting Common Ground questions and explorations and compiling information sources, you can create a resource guide unique to your area. Keeping questions as free from cultural bias as possible will facilitate their travel around the planet. (For instance, "bioregion" may be defined in many ways). Many questions have no single "correct" answer - and you'll discover new questions as you explore. Possibilities are endless - how can you use these questions to learn more about where you live?

1. Trace the path of water from local storms to your kitchen. When you use your kitchen, flush a toilet or use your outhouse, how does water get back to a river or lake?

Further exploration:

How is water used in your river basin? Does your drinking water come from your river basin? If not, where does it come from? What can you do to protect the quality of your drinking water?

2. Walk for a distance between the headwaters of your local river basin and your home. Tell of changes (such as climate, topography, human settlement, etc.) which have occurred in your area through time.

Further exploration:

Obtain or create a map showing your river basin or bioregion. Document your discoveries with photos, drawings or by mapping. Learn about the places most important to you.

3. Find someone who knows the area where you live well, and listen to their stories of your common ground, watershed, river basin, or bioregion.

Further exploration:

Help to preserve this knowledge by recording or sharing those stories with their permission.

4. What heavenly events most influence life where you live (examples: lightning, hail, tornadoes, fog, blizzards, drought, chubascos, chinooks, spring thaw)? How and where do these weather patterns originate? What was total rainfall for your river basin or bioregion last year?

Further exploration:

Set out a rain gauge, and see for yourself how much rain falls where you live. Observe the weather for a period of time – do you see patterns during different seasons?

5. On what soil series does your home stand? What is beneath that soil?

Further exploration:

Hold some soil from your home ground in your hand – describe it. If you can't touch soil around your home, what is the nearest place you find and touch open ground?

6. Describe the primary geological events that have influenced the land you live on (examples: faults, uplifts, downwarps, volcanics, sea floods, etc.).

Further exploration:

Climb a hill or mountain, or find a place with far horizons near your home. What do you find there? What can you see or hear?

When was the last time a fire burned within five miles of your home? What changes occurred because of that fire?

Further exploration:

Find places that show a physical record of these changes.

What was happening on the land where you live 100 years ago? 1,000 years ago? 10,000 years ago? 100,000 years ago? 100 million years ago? A billion years ago?

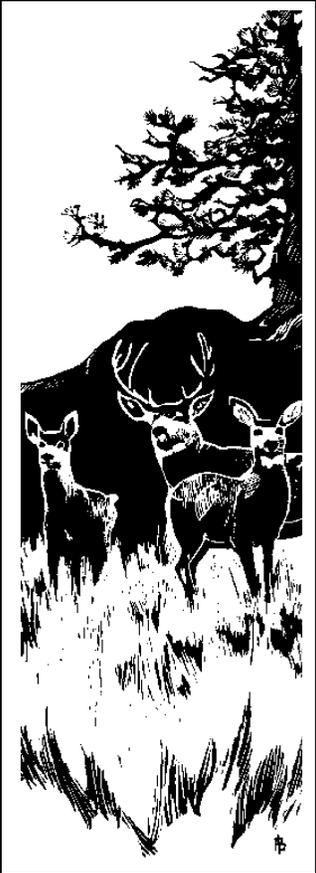
Further exploration:

Find places that show a physical record of this history.

Identify the major ecosystems in your river basin or bioregion, and the features that distinguish them – you may want to draw these on maps of your area.

Further exploration:

Become very familiar with the area around your home – follow the cycles of its inhabitants, and interconnections within your ecosystem.



10. Learn to know plants and animals that thrive in your river basin or bioregion (at least 5 each): resident birds; migratory birds; grasses; wildflowers; shrubs; trees; mammals; reptiles; insects; amphibians. Which are native? How did some of the others arrive here?

Further exploration: *Learn to identify these wild residents in the field. What other places on the planet have similar climate, land, plants and animals? How are interrelationships between these in other places similar or different from your area? How have these interrelationships changed through time?*

11. What plant and animal species have disappeared from your river basin or bioregion? What caused their disappearance? Which species are threatened?

Further exploration:

Describe some of your community's efforts to protect its environmental health. Work on a project to protect the ecosystem around your home. Help to restore or preserve one of your area's native plants or animals.



12. Name the place that grew each item of food you consumed at your last meal.

Further exploration:

Try eating at least one locally grown food each week of the growing season - grow it yourself at home or in a community garden, or find a local source such as a farmer's market. What is the growing season for food in your area?

13. Describe primary subsistence techniques of the first people to live where you live now. How did these people eat, clothe, and shelter themselves? How did they celebrate seasonal changes? What was important to them? Do they still live there?

Further exploration:

What other people have come to live in your river basin or bioregion? How has their arrival affected those who were there earlier?

14. What processes provide your light and power? Where do the fuels you use for heat and cooking come from? How do they reach you?

Further exploration:

Visit some sources of your light, power, or fuel - perhaps a river, a machine-driven power plant, or a forest. Does some of your light or power come directly from the sun?

15. Trace your garbage from trash container to the soil. Name some of the waste products produced by homes, or local industry in your area. Where do these go?

Further exploration:

Visit a recycling facility or the nearest waste dump. Work to decrease producing waste and increase recycling of waste; work with others to increase local recycling opportunities.

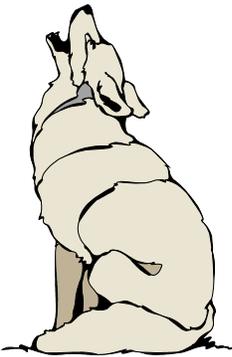
16. What do you fear most in your river basin or bioregion? What is dearest to you about where you live?

Further exploration:

You may wish to discuss this with others, and find out about how they feel about where they live.



17. In what month does the "Hunter's" moon fall? In what month is the "Moon of the Frost Lodge"?
- Further exploration:**
Find out other local names for lunar cycles. Go out and look at the moon during these cycles. Why were they given these names?
18. When do the deer rut and when are the young born? When do mountain blue birds leave for the winter; when do they return?
- Further exploration:**
Learn where these animals live, and observe them if you can do so without disturbing their lives.
19. Experience a wild or less human dominated place in different weather, at several times of day or night. Do the weather and time change your experience? How do patterns of life vary with these changes?
- Further exploration:**
If there is no wildland or less developed land near, or if it is not safe to go there, try to find someone who can tell you about wildlands. Sometimes aspects of the "wild" can be found even in a roadside or empty lot. Work on protecting, restoring, or creating true wildland habitats near your home.
20. Identify a place near your home where ecosystems meet (Example: Where a prairie meets a forest). How does each system affect the other?
- Further exploration:**
Spend time in each place. Can you tell where the change from one ecosystem to another occurs?
21. Take on stewardship for an area that you want to know well - help to care for it and learn about it, and share that stewardship with others.
- Further exploration:**
Contact whomever is responsible for welfare of the area you wish to learn about. Take part in caring for the land and its inhabitants within your home ground, neighborhood, river basin, or the larger bioregional community. Explore what you can do to preserve and restore your common ground.
22. Find out how your community celebrates your river basin or bioregion - and if it does not, help to create such celebrations in your own life, and in the community.
- Further exploration:**
Learn how the inhabitants of other river basin and bioregions celebrate the place they live in!



Now, continue to another most wonderful exploration.....

23. Visit and get to know a wildland place in your river basin or bioregion over a period of time, while respecting the need to keep such places as untraveled as possible – a delicate balance! Some “wildland” places may be very small, close to human activity, and in short supply. Be respectful when experiencing daily life in this place – it is the only home for those who live there. Savor changes through the seasons – discover and note sounds, smells, sights, and textures which make this place unique. Tell a bit about this place in ways that you enjoy – images, a poem, a story written, a tale told...

Further exploration:

Spend a full day out-of-doors in this wildland place – predawn till dark. Prepare for your experience so that you are safe, but try not to invent things to do – just quietly discover what this place brings to the day.

and

Share with someone else a bit of what you’ve learned and discovered by taking them with you as you continue to explore your common ground.

Let the place be your teacher.

This edition was last modified by Susan Ross in October 2003. These questions have been created, gathered and adapted by many folks including: Leonard Charles, Jim Dodge, Lynn Milliman, Victoria Stockley, Carl Sauer, Peter Berg, Peter Warshall, Gary Snyder, Bill Devall, Susan Ross, and many others. This program is available for download at our Website: www.ci.boulder.co.us/openspace

When you reprint this program, please acknowledge those who helped create it, and please let us know where these questions travel, and how they are used and adapted!

For more information, contact:

Susan Ross, Coordinator of Volunteer Services

City of Boulder, Department of Open Space and Mountain Parks

Box 791, Boulder, Colorado 80306 USA;

Tel: 720-564-2013

Email: Rosss@ci.boulder.co.us