4 WAYS OF RECOGNIZING THE CIRCLE OF LIFE

Peter Donovan
For regeneration of soils and watersheds, we need to know how to work WITH the circle of life—the most powerful geologic force. For example—how well does this field or yard accept a 5-inch fall of rain? How we recognize this power influences what we DO, which influences what we KNOW.

See inside back cover for ways to participate

soilcarboncoalition.org
recognizing the
CIRCLE of LIFE

1. INTUITIVE

A flow and change of MATTER. Plants grow from soil. Dust to dust. Composting and manuring. Air plays little part.

2. SCIENTIFIC

By 1800, chemists had discovered carbon, oxygen, photosynthesis, respiration, and the CARBON CYCLE. Nature was a WHOLE—a verb—driven by ENERGY from the sun.

1920s: Vladimir Vernadsky recognizes that LIFE is the MOST POWERFUL FORCE on earth. But there is little practical need or context for this understanding.
REACTIVE

The circle of life has NOT BEEN the context for most human decisions.

Instead, we react:

PROBLEMS quick fixes

more, BIGGER problems

OCOTOPUS FIGHT! WE'RE TRASHING OUR SUPPORTS.

MAYBE SO, BUT THAT'S WHERE THE MONEY AND JOBS ARE.
The climate industry

Climate change is a perfect fit for our reactive tendencies. People take sides and positions, which compete and multiply.

BLAME
POWER STRUGGLES
CONFLICT

CO₂ a POLLUTANT
400 ppm
SINKS
SOURCES
CIRCLE OF LIFE DIVIDED INTO COMPETING PARTS

WE'VE GOT THE FACTS. PEER-REVIEWED.
IT'S ALL MAKE-BELIEVE.
WE'RE DOOMED.
I'M GOING TO MARS.

GIGATONS! NOW! NEVER.
HOAX! MY WAY! HIGHWAY!

GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE

We're NOT learning what works.
We spend BILLION$ on predictions, models, and the endless struggle to control or change each other's positions.
But shift is happening.

The climate issue has helped broaden and deepen understanding of the circle of life, the carbon cycle. More people understand that climate change is a SYMPTOM, and that the circle of life is deeply entangled at all scales with water, biodiversity, and soil health. More people are grasping the opportunity to work WITH the most powerful force.

ON MY FARM I CAN LET THIS CRITTER MOVE AS A WHOLE.
3. PROACTIVE

Many now recognize that human decisions and actions influence both sides of the carbon cycle.

Let's let institutions take care of this. Certification! Pay farmers to sequester carbon! More research!

Cap 'n Trade! Policy incentives!

What about feedback? What about responsibility or response-ability?
We are responsible...

Does this "we" include me? How do I participate?

With the industrial and scientific revolutions, knowledge became more specialized and professional. Knowledge is produced, managed, and distributed by institutions. The disconnect between knowing and doing grows wide.

Maybe you could change how you know things.

Change how you do things.

Learning and change are imposed (and resisted) by others. We lose trust in ourselves and in others. We lose accountability, imagination, creativity, participation, and the ability to lead.
There are alternatives. Knowing and doing can be reconnected.

We can ACKNOWLEDGE the problems, the fears and AFFIRM the opportunities for care of the circle of life.

Professional research, scientific citizenship, and overlooked evidence can come together on open platforms and maps. We can grow a shared intelligence on what works in our situations and locales, with more people, more land participating in both knowing and doing.
4. RESPONSIBLE

The circle of life is a feedback loop, composed of countless other feedback loops, INCLUDING our processes of learning and recognition.

The circle of life, the carbon cycle, is not an external problem to be fixed or solved. It is a MYSTERY that we live within.
PERMISSION TO PARTICIPATE

The Soil Carbon Coalition can help you and your community grow a shared, evidence-based intelligence on soil health and watershed function:

- inquiry-based learning for schools and communities: soilcarboncoalition.org/learn

- open-source, open-access data entry and mapping: atlasbiowork.com

- Land Listeners Workshop: soilcarboncoalition.org/land-listeners-project

- Soil Carbon Challenge: soilcarboncoalition.org/challenge

Questions? Suggestions? info@soilcarboncoalition.org
4 ways we recognize it
The circle of life is the most powerful geologic force. How we recognize it influences our beliefs and actions, which influence the circle of life.

It's a feedback loop.

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