

**Huh.**

**When it comes to natural resources, there's always more to learn.**

Theresa Hausser

Many years ago, I walked home irritated with my spiritual director (my professional training is as a minister). Her sin? She had said that she thought I'd be a lot happier if I were a little less judgmental.\*

I was irritated because I had worked very hard for my self-righteousness. I had been doing faith and justice work for decades. I worked in the inner city. I was a committed leave no trace backpacker. I read social analysis in my free time. Who was better positioned to be judgy\*\*?

It took a few more years of pain and loss and unanswerable questions for some of my security in my "correct-ness" to be rocked. As I recognized the absence of "answers," but found a world of varying perspectives, I realized that my judginess often came down to an assessment that other people should do things the way I do them. From there, it was a short hop to thinking that other people should think the way I do. Even I can recognize the inherent danger in that position. Excruciatingly slowly through often painful experience, my judgy mental files are being supplanted by a large "Huh" file.

Becoming a woodland owner has provided ample material for the "Huh" file. As little as I knew about caring for a forest property, at least I knew from my time in wilderness that my woodland property didn't need me. Then I learned that responsible stewardship and management could actually help my woodland's health. Huh. At least I knew we would never do a clear cut on our land. Then our land was torched in the Holiday Farm fire, with about 98% mortality across 39 acres, and a salvage harvest (what some might call a small clear cut) on 12 acres was the only way to reforest safely—and pay for that reforestation. Huh. At least we knew that big timber and big mills, as big businesses, were opposed to our interests as tiny, environmentally sensitive landowners. Then it turned out that timber, logging, and milling infrastructure were not only essential to our ability to harvest, but were also concerned and generous supporters and allies in restoring our hurting landscape to what will again be a vibrant woodland and not just a post-fire scotch broom monocrop. Huh.

Not that many years ago, I might have regarded my shift in perspective as selling out (at least if I saw it in someone else). That "Huh" file? It's really about humility, which is an acknowledgement that I might not know everything that I think I know, and a willingness to learn. My love for and study of wilderness led me to think I understood an industry, a discipline, and a way of life—and it turned out that not only did I not know anything; what I thought I knew was wrong. Huh. It seems like there are probably a lot more things I can learn in this new life I'm living. Challenging as it can be, I'm grateful for this opportunity to learn.

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\*In my defense, I was most judgmental about justice issues and wilderness issues, not belief issues or more typical notions of morality.

\*\*I'm using the colloquial "being judgy" rather than "judging" because making prudential judgments is an integral part of every decision we make, and not all of them are judgy.

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