

# Exploring Nature Connection Through Research: Mindfulness and Nature Connection at The Meadows Center for Water and the Environment

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# OUR MISSION

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Inspiring research, innovation, and leadership that ensures clean, abundant water for the environment and all humanity.

# OUR VISION

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A world where all people understand and embrace the value of water and environmental stewardship.



# OUR PILLARS

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We fulfill our mission by integrating activities across four pillars of action in powerful ways. Our work in each of these pillars begins at Spring Lake – one of the largest artesian springs in the world – and ripples outward across Texas and beyond.



## STEWARDSHIP

Cultivating a Stewardship Ethic



## LEADERSHIP

Transforming Knowledge into Action



## EDUCATION

Encouraging Life-Long Learning



## RESEARCH

Conducting Solutions-Focused Research



# EDUCATION

Encouraging Life-Long Learning

- Connect children and families to nature
- Engage new stakeholders in water and environmental stewardship
- Disseminate knowledge of water and natural resources
- Demonstrate responsible recreation to encourage stewardship
- Provide educational opportunities to Texas State University students
- Publish books as trusted sources on water and environmental topics
- Cultivate and prepare the next generation of conservation leaders



Conducting Solutions-Focused Research

# RESEARCH

- Conduct applied research to address real-world problems
- Advance science-based solutions to water challenges
- Increase understanding of complex water and natural systems
- Promote sustainable management of water
- Work with multi-disciplinary expertise across campus to catalyze research on water resources and nature connection
- Utilize Spring Lake as a living laboratory for research



## Spring Lake Education Program

The Meadows Center engages more than 125,000 people each year in environmental education and outdoor learning activities at Spring Lake and elsewhere.

Our programs engage people of all ages, teach them about Spring Lake and the importance of water to all living things and inspire them to become stewards of our natural resources.

# Interpretation

Interpretation is a purposeful approach to communication that facilitates meaningful, relevant, and inclusive experiences that deepen understanding, broaden perspectives, and inspire engagement with the world around us.

*-National Association for Interpretation*









# Cohen 53 Natural Senses

Sense of time

Appetite and hunger

Sense of temperature and temperature change

Sense of season

Humidity sense – acumen to find water, avoid flooding

Hearing, resonance

Sense of one's visibility

Proximity

Fear

Play

Emotional belonging, sense of community

Tacit knowing / foreknowledge

Conscious capacity for love, sublime, sorrow, spiritual

Sixth sense





# Mindfulness

An active state of mind characterized by drawing novel distinctions that result in:

- Being situated in the present
- Sensitive to context and perspective
- Rule and routine guided
- Phenomenological experience of engagement

# Mindlessness

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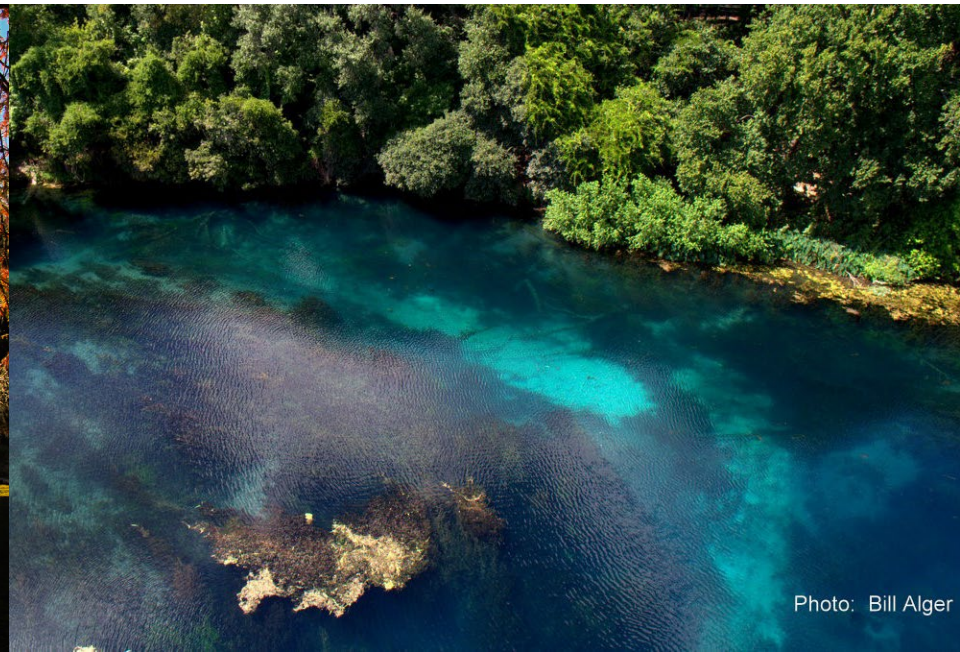
An inactive state of mind characterized by the reliance on, categories drawn from the past:

- The past over-determines the present
- Trapped inside a single perspective
- Insensitive to context
- Rule and routine governed



# Context of Mindfulness

- Eastern Origins
- The Wheel of Suffering and the Noble Eightfold Path
- McM mindfulness
- Using mindfulness as a means to ameliorate stress, without looking deeper and wider at its political, economic and social causes



# Mindfulness Research

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Dussler, R., & Derringer, S.A. (2020). Exploring the effects of interpreters' experiences of mindfulness interventions on their connection with nature and subsequent environmental interpretation. *Journal of Interpretation Research*, 25(1).

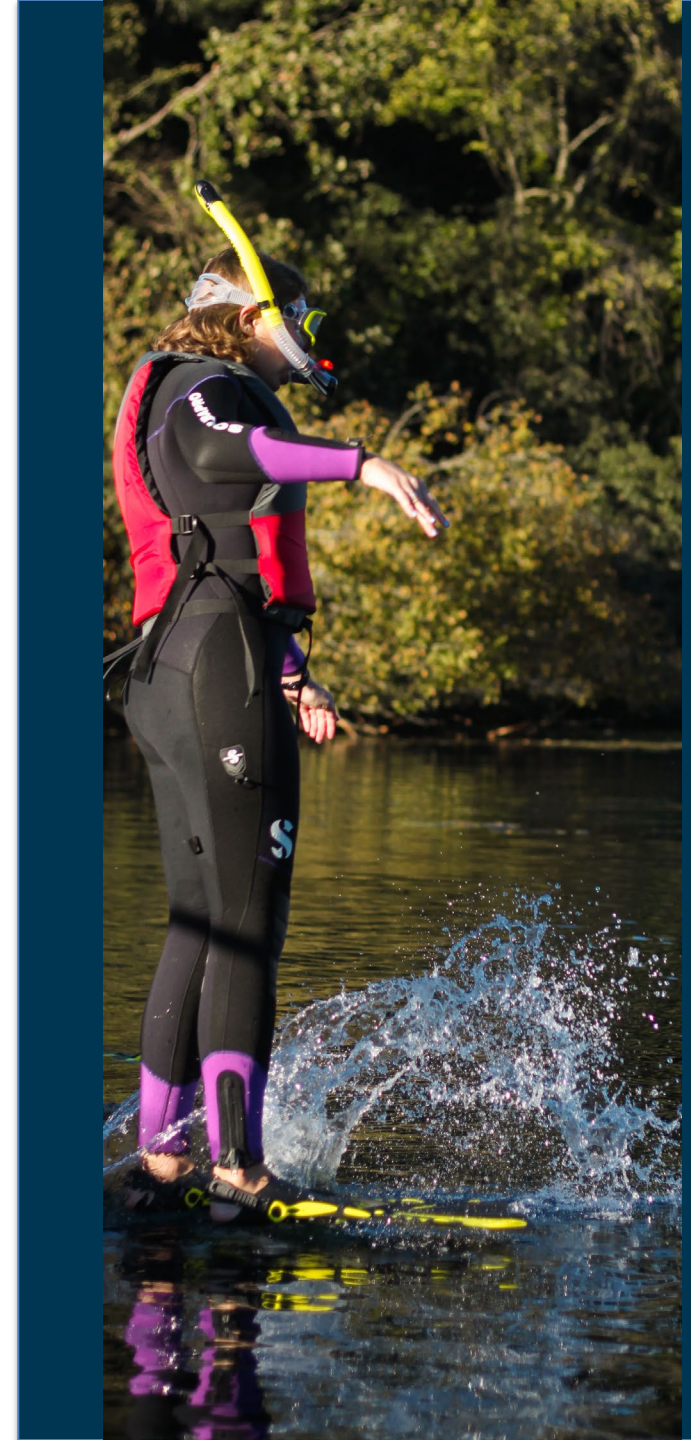
Dussler, R., Williams, J., & Massey, S. R. (2021). Reconnection with freshwater ecosystems at the Meadows Center for Water and the Environment. In R. Rozzi et al. (Eds.), *Field environmental philosophy (FEP): Education for biocultural conservation* (in review). Sage.



# Mindful Interventions

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- Noticing Walks / Expanding Awareness
- Nature Sketching
- Moving Closer – Kayaking
- Moving Closer Still - Snorkeling
- Solo Experience
- Story of the Day
- Focus Group
- Journaling
- Mindful Meditation



*The purpose of this study is to understand the experience of environmental interpreters participating in mindfulness-based interventions as it relates to nature connectedness and ecological behavior.*

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## Prominent Themes

- More aware of surroundings
- Improved connection to nature
- Authentic interpretation
- Care for nature
- Improved connection to participants



# Mindful Connections to Nature

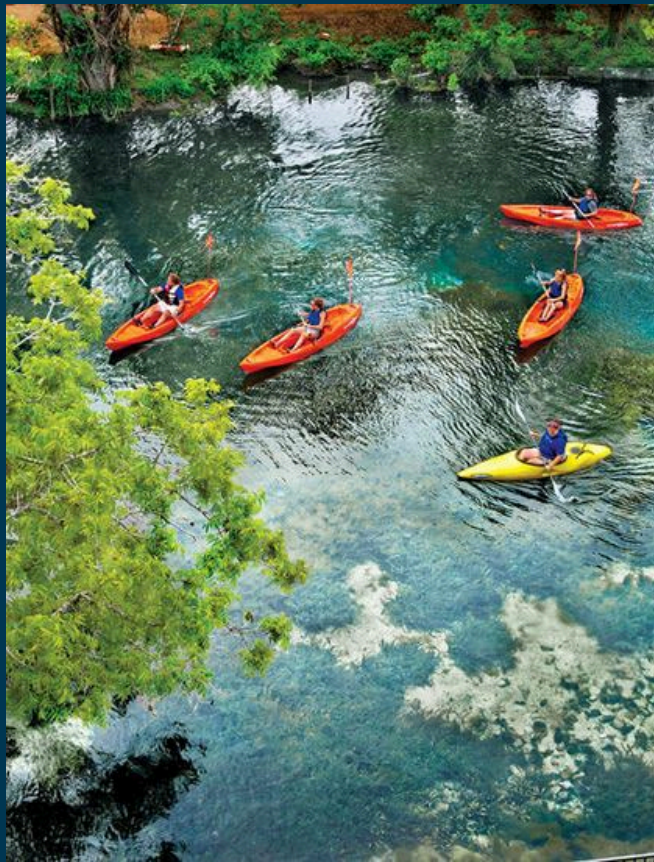
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Since, this mindfulness, you know, project started, I've gone fishing. And, I have this little fishing spot on the river that I go to quite often. Umm, but a lot of times when I'm on my way there I just try to, you know, kind of tune out everything, find the quickest path, with no poison ivy, no scratches, basically getting there. Umm, this time let myself to kind of wander, meander, picked up rocks, and on the way there I noticed that the canopy of the trees, the birds that were up there, totally different. I never paid attention to them. All the different calls and everything in there, and it really transformed the location when I, when I did finally get there. It wasn't just the fishing spot and then the road over here and then empty space in between them. That particular spot was part of the whole environment around it. Part of you know, where I passed through and the reason why it's there, that little eddy in the river is because of these rock formations that I went through, where there's, you know, vegetation beds. The last time it flooded it went through this way, but now the water has been diverted that way. So, it gave a lot more, like, meaning and reason that I really understood it a little bit better. . . I was able to notice it a lot more in the context with everything else around me.





But merely exposing children to nature is often not enough. Their abilities to calm down, to focus, to clear their consciousness, to compassionately notice and care are also in need of cultivation, as are the abilities for respect and intrinsic valuation of nature. Without such abilities whatever experiences there are run the risk of dissolving into the continuous flux of ‘one thing after another’ that characterise so much of modern life.  
(Pulkki et. al., 2017, p. 216)



## Experiences, Representations, and Meaning In a Mindfulness-Based Environmental Education Program

How do children participating in a mindfulness-based environmental education program observe and interact with nature?

How do children participating in a mindfulness-based environmental education program describe their nature experiences?

What representations and meanings do children ascribe to their nature experiences and observations in a mindfulness-based environmental education program?

# THANK YOU

Visit [www.explorespringlake.org](http://www.explorespringlake.org) for more info.



THE MEADOWS CENTER  
FOR WATER AND THE ENVIRONMENT

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