

a small place: an artist and ecology residency

“a small place” is the name of ISLAND’s largest project; a working homestead and artists’ residency program on 10 acres (maybe 20) in Forest Home Township, Antrim County, Michigan. The concept is at once simple and impossibly difficult; we are dedicated to living these questions:

Can we change the ways we live and work so as to establish a preserving harmony between the made and given worlds?

Or, to make that question more practical and immediate: Can great power or great wealth be kind to small places? Can the necessary industries subsist upon their natural sources without destroying them? Can the life of a farm or working forest be made compatible with the local ecosystem?

—Wendell Berry, from *Towards a Coherent Community*

This is our strategy:

- we embrace arts and culture through our seasonal residency programs for visual and performing artists;
- we engage our community with workshops, exhibitions and performances;
- we teach and learn the interwoven skills of permaculture, natural design, organic gardening and home economics;
- we remain small, slow and thoughtful of our role in this place in Northern Michigan.

What this means in the most practical sense at this visioning/planning stage:

- constructing small, energy efficient buildings from local materials, using passive solar design, supplemented with wood heat from firewood sourced on our property or our neighbors’;
- making every effort to secure energy from wind and solar and remaining separate from the municipal grid; making use of propane if necessary; focusing on conservation of energy and water.
- producing some of our own food, and sourcing a great deal more from neighbors and local farms; ensuring that any food sourced from outside our community is organic and fairly traded;
- maintaining a non-toxic policy for the residency and working toward zero waste on the property as a whole;

What this means, philosophically, for the life of the residency:

- integrating the life of the homestead with the life of the residency, the ecological life of the land

and the economic life of the community;

- connecting artists to these things in order to explore two ideas: how the interpretive work of the artists complicates our understanding of our space, and how that process can connect an artist both to our space and their own.
- asking (though not demanding) that artists consider this place and their relationship to it as they work (both here and later!)