



# Earthvalues Institute

## “Putting the Capital Back in Nature” Campaign



The word Nature was first used in the 12th century. It has come to represent, in its many definitions, all of the universe and the living and nonliving things within it. Before the Scientific Revolution, Nature was considered in a spiritual context, deserving of respect and admiration. Just as we have come to use Nature’s capital (animals, fresh water, minerals, forests) in a non-sustainable way, we have replaced the capital letter “N” in Nature with a lower case one. A coincidence? Perhaps.

## The Earthvalues Institute is initiating a campaign to “re-capitalize” the word Nature.

**D**uring the Scientific Revolution, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Western concept of Nature was transformed. It was during this time that Nature began to be seen as something that could be measured and quantified, something that could be understood in the same way that we understand a machine. It was during this time that the study of nature was removed from its religious (Christian) context. Nature, stripped of its spiritual connotations, became simply the phenomena of matter in motion. Nature was “disenchanted.”

As it happened, this dramatic shift in our concept of Nature coincided with an acceleration in scientific and

technological advances which, along with the birth of capitalism, fed into the Industrial Revolution of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Industrial Revolution is where we can find the roots of our remarkable ability to shamelessly discount the value of our natural capital in pursuit of capital of the monetary kind.

Meanwhile, there has been a shift in the conventions of the English language. Oxford tells us that back in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, it was fairly normal in written English for common nouns and other regular words to be capitalized (similar to the way common nouns are capitalized in present-day German).





*“We need to bring Nature back into the equation.”*

Since then, we have toned down our capitalization considerably. Today, it is more common to write the word Nature with a lower-case N.

Is there a link between the trend towards lower-casing the word Nature, and our habit of leaving Nature out of our economic equation? It’s difficult to say. We’ll let the scholars fight over that.

In the meantime, though, there is no reason that we can’t use this coincidence as a powerful symbol of a shift that has to occur in our present-day thinking about Nature, and in our methods of accounting for capital. We need to bring Nature back into the equation. We have to internalize what we have up to now been able to externalize in our cost-benefit analyses. This will take a significant effort.

To mark our commitment to this making this happen, why not make a point of capitalizing the word Nature?

The task-masters of the written English language, like Oxford University Press and University of Chicago Press, agree that apart from elementary rules like capitalizing the first word in a sentence, and capitalizing proper nouns, there is great variation in the rules for capitalization in English. It is more or less up to the publishing house to set its own convention. There is ample room, within the rules of English, to capitalize the word Nature. It is a simple and powerfully symbolic recognition of the world that supports each and every one of us.

*Join us as an individual, school, organization, or corporation that will, from this point on, put the capital back in Nature.*

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