Observations Primer

Skilled designers can see things in landscapes, and mainframe prescriptions can often be accurately obtained via simple site surveys. But subtlety, charm, and home-made elements of a design must be established by the people whose land is at stake.

The more details regarding these topics are articulated, and the more of a personal relationship the land-owner has with the land, the more holistically harmonious the design will play out.

Think about these things on your land. There are better times of year to make observations and worse, depending on what you are after. It is a skill to learn how to learn with the seasons.

Ecological

- Frost pockets (First places to freeze? How much sooner? Last places to lose snow cover? How much longer does it stick around there? First places where snow melts?)
- High snowfall accumulation (Drift from field? Dripline off of trees? etc…)
- Water drainage in spring (Culverts? Erosion? Volume/intensity/duration of surface flow?)
- Wet areas (differences in plant composition, how long it stays moist)
- Driest areas – (plant life, soil texture, and such, in late summer vs mid spring)
- Seasonal performance of plant flowering patterns (how does forest respond to climate?)
- Changes in plant composition (what plants are filling in, what are phasing out?)
- Sharp landscape changes (slope, topography, exposure, etc)
- Intersection of biomes (forest, meadow, wetlands, rock outcropping, etc.)
- Wildlife migration patterns (game trails, nesting habitat, etc)
- Wildlife permanent structures (snags, dens, warrens, water features, etc)
- Sun exposure and shade conditions in key areas
- Winds (intensity, direction, seasonality, temperature, content)
- Clearings (Weeds? Pasture? Natural reforestation? Functional windbreak?)
- Noxious weed seed input from machinery (earth moving, vehicle tires, shoes), animals, etc.
- Rain dynamics (volume, rate, direction, etc)
- Toxic chemical input from neighbors/county
- Hazard areas (old landfill site, sketchy storage area, gas station nearby, etc.)
- High/low temperatures at key areas

Social

- Stability of landowner's finances to make payments on land, implementation costs, etc.
- Stability of eco-community's decision-making process and unity.
- Stability of things like land steward's family relationship structure, health, work ethic, attitude.
- Cultural sites (graves, old structures, etc.)
- Places you like to go, are naturally drawn to.
- Places that must be left wild (as in certain tax situations)
- Neighbors sector (inputs such as friendly help, hostility, noise, visuals, etc