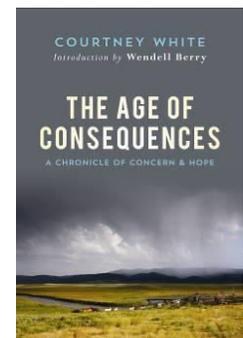
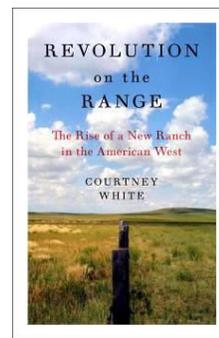
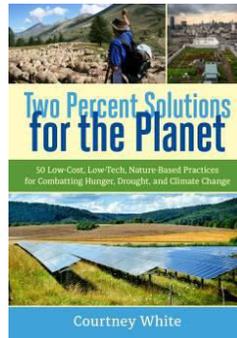
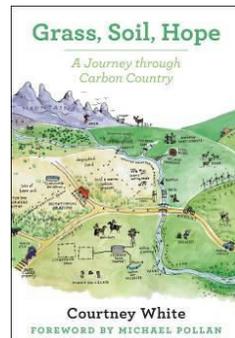


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I am a former Sierra Club activist who dropped out of the ‘conflict industry’ to cofound the Quivira Coalition, a nonprofit organization dedicated to building a *radical center* among ranchers, conservationists, and scientists around practices that improve resilience in working landscapes. For two decades, I worked on the front lines of collaborative conservation and regenerative agriculture, exploring and sharing innovative solutions to food, water, and climate challenges.

Wendell Berry included my essay *The Working Wilderness* in his book *The Way of Ignorance* (2005), an honor that encouraged me to keep writing. In addition to my nonfiction books (above), I am co-author of *Fibersheds: a New Textile Economy* (2019) and author of *The Sun*, a mystery novel set on a working cattle ranch in northern New Mexico. I live in Santa Fe.

I am an experienced public speaker and in this new talk I will discuss hopeful, on-the-ground solutions based on my experience and present a vision for the future.

What is Earth For? Five Hopeful Answers / a talk by Courtney White

During the course of my lifetime, human impact on the planet has gone from small to catastrophic. In 1960, a chief concern of the conservation movement was wilderness protection. Sixty years later, we are desperately working to stave off the sixth mass biological extinction event in Earth’s history while also trying to keep climate change from fundamentally altering planetary systems.

Author Wallace Stegner once said every book should try to answer an anguished question. Over my career, I’ve found hopeful answers a variety of anguished questions: What is land for? How should we use it properly? How can humans and nature coexist? How do we build resilience? How will we feed so many people now? What are the solutions to climate change? Today, the accelerating crises we face mean these questions have merged into one: *What is Earth For?*

I have five hopeful answers:

(1) Regenerative Agriculture

No-till, cover crops, polycultures, and animal agriculture, all in harmony with nature – practical and profitable. *If we could do one thing for the planet it would be to stop tilling the land.*

The *Drawdown Project* ranks regenerative agriculture #11 (of 100) on its list of most effective strategies to combat global warming and describes its purpose as to “continually improve and regenerate the health of the soil by restoring its carbon content, which in turn improves plant health, nutrition, and productivity.” It also builds resilience in soil against drought and floods.

(2) Soil Carbon Sequestration

Any biologically-based practice that draws down atmospheric carbon and stores it safely and long-term in the soil will create multiple, cascading benefits for all life on earth.

Photosynthesis is a miracle. It transforms atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂) into carbon (C) and oxygen. A portion of the carbon can be sequestered in the soil beneath the plant where it becomes a key component in the microbial universe underground. If managed properly, it can stay stored for a long period of time. *Planet-wide, soil has the potential to be a huge sink for excess CO₂.*

(3) Ecological Restoration

Much of the natural world and nearly all agricultural lands have been damaged by industrial practices, hard use, and human ignorance and require restoration to ecological health.

Once controversial, restoration today is widely accepted. Thanks to the work of many people we know how to bring land back to health using nature-based methods that are effective and low-cost, especially in riparian zones. *The key is to “think like a creek”* to quote Bill Zeedyk, a pioneering riparian restoration specialist that I had to the honor to work with for many years.

(4) Act Local

Watersheds, Foodsheds, and Fibersheds – inspiring and practical models of local, regenerative, and collaborative use of natural resources exist in many places.

“Think Global, Act Local” is an old phrase but its wisdom has only grown over time. The simplest way for any citizen to pitch in to help fight climate change is to participate in local food, fiber, and watershed endeavors. Each can lower the carbon footprint of the product immensely.

(5) Work in the Radical Center

Where we come together to explore what we have in common rather than argue our differences.

Rancher Bill McDonald coined the term in the 1990s to describe an emerging consensus-based approach to land management challenges in the American West. It was ‘radical’ because it challenged orthodoxies. *The ‘center’ refers to partnerships, respect, trust, and action.*

Endorsements:

Michael Pollan: “Hope in a book about the environmental challenges we face in the 21st century is an audacious thing to promise, so I’m pleased to report that Courtney White delivers on it.”

Wendell Berry: “Courtney White’s experience with the Quivira Coalition has made him master of two indispensable truths: People of different and apparently opposing interests can work together in good will for their mutual good; and, granted their good will and good work, a similar reciprocity can be made, in use, between humans and their land.”

“In a time when environmental reporting has become justifiably gloomy, this book is a refreshing breath of pragmatic optimism. White’s vision of stewardship, openness to new ideas, giving as well as taking, and flexibility will inspire anyone who loves humanity or the great outdoors.”

– **Publishers Weekly**