

Heal Nature to Heal Yourself: The Benefits of Environmental Volunteering

Mental health and climate change are contentious problems in today's society, and both place impact on our overall quality of life. Globally, millions of individuals suffer from [mental health issues](#). On top of this, there exists the constantly looming existential threat of [climate change](#). Unfortunately, there is no quick fix to either of these problems.

Wouldn't it be great if we could simultaneously address both mental health and climate change? Thankfully, there might be a pathway! Volunteering for a community environment conservation group offers several benefits to individuals. Namely, [enhancing your physical and mental health](#), as well as taking action on climate change. A method such as this may therefore be able to prompt improvement in these two areas of issue.

Why should you consider volunteering for an Environmental Conservation Group?

Time is likely already scarce if you work full-time or have children, so finding a period in which to participate may be a challenge. Furthermore, individuals involved in such groups are often stereotyped as elderly citizens, which could discourage younger audiences. However, neither age nor time should act as a barrier to volunteering. The commitment may only consist of a few hours each fortnight or even each month and engages people of all ages. Overall, this is a small price to pay in order to vastly improve individual mental health, as well as our surrounding natural environment.

1. Think About The Children

If you have children, take steps to involve them too! Exposing young people to nature is an invaluable learning and healthy experience. [Educating children](#) about the importance of the environment is essential, as it will establish connections with nature, while also encouraging them to spend more time outdoors.

Moreover, you and your kids will be a part of the solution to diminish the future effects of climate change.

2. Caring For The Vulnerable

For those without children, consider doing it for your health and the vulnerable living organisms facing the constant destruction of their homes. We share the blame on the issues the environment and biodiversity face. Therefore, it's our responsibility to conserve the remaining biota on Earth. [Biodiversity](#) is fundamental to the balance of nature and also highly beneficial to our physical and mental health.

The Benefits of Environmental Volunteering

1. Meeting People

To improve your mental health, it is important to interact with positive individuals. Finding friendship [increases our happiness](#), and this is even more the case within an activity like a community conservation group. Volunteering for such an organisation opens the door to form relationships with altruistic people. It creates chances to feed off the positive energy that these groups have for the environment, and the people around them.



Me participating (The last person on the far right) in the Koala Habitat

Restoration event hosted by Queensland Trust For Nature at Mt Tamborine, QLD.
Photo by Kerri from the [Tamborine Bulletin](#).

“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”

– Mahatma Gandhi, n.d.

2. Mental and Physical Health Benefits

There are numerous positive effects on our physical and mental well-being when immersed within nature. The table below outlines the diverse range of benefits that are provided by nature:

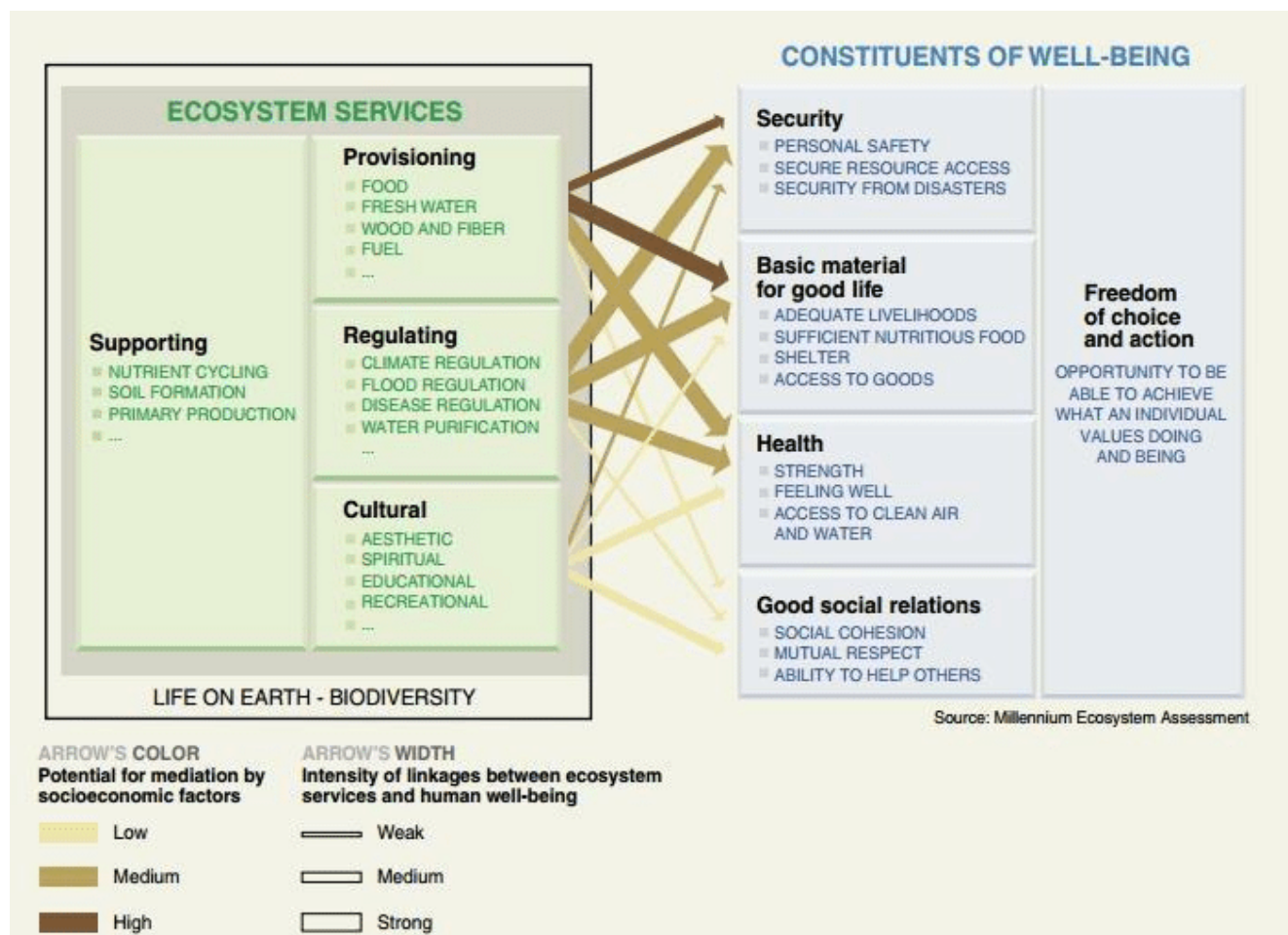
Benefits	Description	Examples
Psychological	Positive effect on mental processes and behaviour	Psychological well-being Decreased depression, dejection, anger, aggression, frustration, hostility and stress Increased self-esteem Positive/Improved mood Reduced anxiety and tension Improved quality of life Increased happiness
Physiological	Positive effect on physical function and/or physical health	Better general health Stress reduction/less stress-related illness/ improved physiological functioning Reduced cortisol levels Reduced blood pressure Reduced mortality from circulatory and respiratory disease Reduced headaches/pain Increased physical activity Better health for children by increasing physical activity Increased longevity

Table 1. Table of reported health benefits associated with nature. A condensed version of ([Keniger et al., 2013](#)) and ([Sandifer et al., 2015](#)) research.

3. Ecosystem Goods and Services

[The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment](#) led a study titled “Living Beyond Our

Means: Natural Assets and Human Well-being”, which details the goods and services we receive from nature. Their assessment provides a great illustration of the link between our well-being and nature’s services.



“Living Beyond Our Means: Natural Assets and Human Well-being” - Detailing the goods and services of ecosystems. Source: [Millennium Ecosystem Assessment](#)

We depend on basic amenities that nature provides, such as fresh water, clean air and food production. Therefore, having a higher quality of environment allows for a higher quality of ecosystem goods and services.

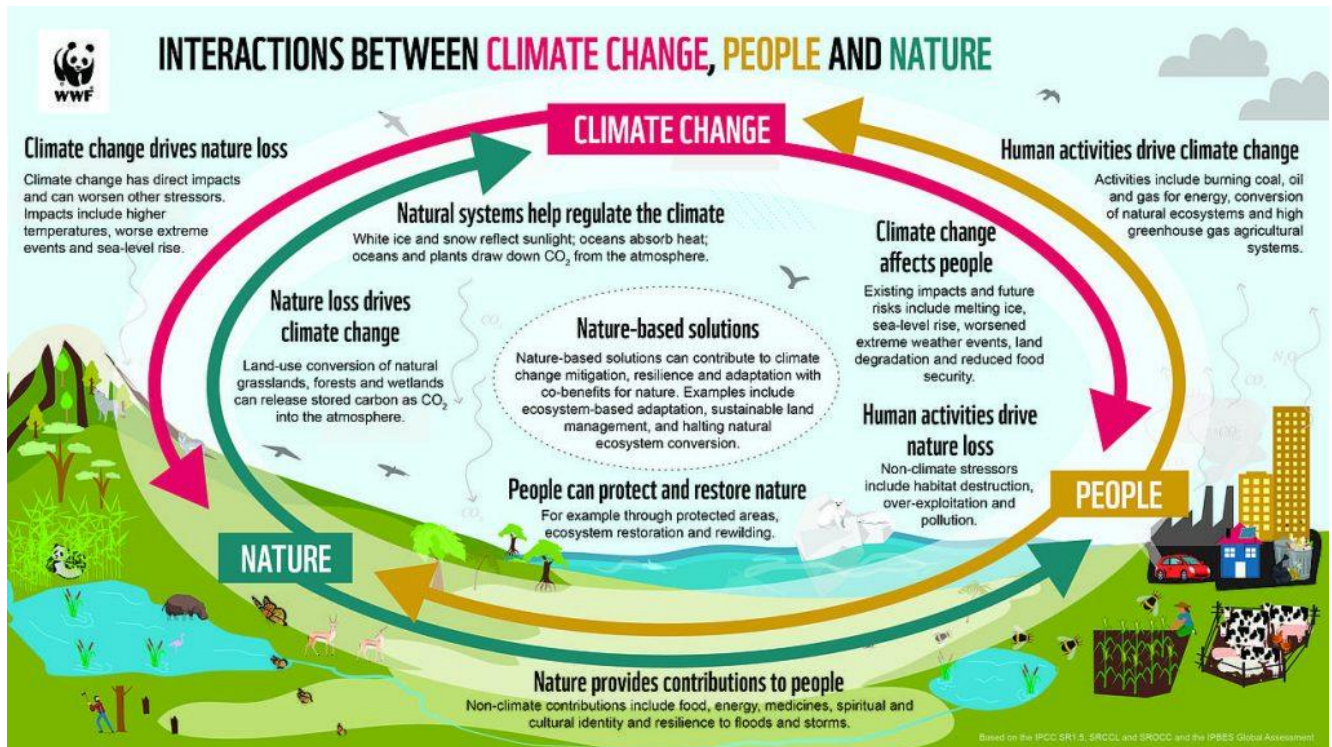


Figure 2. Relationship between Human's, Nature and Climate Change.
Source: WWF

Time to *THRIVE*

Feeling a bit stuck in the mud? Perhaps it's time to get stuck in the soil instead. Volunteering for a community environmental conservation group allows you to experience unique sensations. You will interact with magnificent people, learn hidden facts about nature, but most importantly, forge a strong connection with the environment. Through healing nature, you heal yourself.

Community conservation projects go a long way in reducing the negative impacts of climate change. Plant some native trees in your area. Leave a legacy like [Wangari Maathai](#), who helped plant over 47 million trees in Kenya. The possibilities are endless when we devote ourselves, and it is our collective efforts that will bring about change.

Exposure to nature will make you [feel better emotionally](#). It will relieve your mental stress and make you feel revitalised (Carrus et al., 2015). So if you are feeling down, try your hand at volunteering, and be involved with something great. Now could be your time to ***THRIVE***.

"That the situation appears hopeless should not prevent us from doing our best."

- Aldo Leopold, n.d.

Where Can You *THRIVE*?

If you are interested in volunteering for an environmental conservation group, check if your local council has any bush or park care groups. If not, find out if you have non-profit conservation organisations in your area. Otherwise, if you feel ambitious, maybe think about launching your own group.

For example, the [Brisbane City Council](#) has run the volunteer bush care program named the Habitat Brisbane, Australia. There are currently over 160 groups spread throughout the metropolitan area. These volunteers are committed to keeping Brisbane clean, green, sustainable and thriving. Groups work in partnership with the council, receiving advice and support from Council's Habitat Brisbane officers. These groups help protect, monitor and increase native flora and fauna populations, especially rare and threatened species in nature reserves.

For those interested in volunteering for the *THRIVE* Project, check the [link](#). It's a great platform to collaborate and communicate with individuals deeply concerned about contemporary environmental issues. If you want to make a difference on Earth and be more sustainable, this is the organisation for you.

Written in collaboration with THRIVE Tribe member Sinval Aragao