

# Permaculture in Practice

## Permaculture Credit Union an earth-friendly alternative

Eleven years ago, some local permaculture practitioners started the Permaculture Credit Union. The first credit union to be chartered by the state of New Mexico in 30 years, the PCU has few of the problems that traditional financial institutions have.

“To date, our member-supported financial institution has loaned out \$14 million and has a default rate of 0.11 percent,” CEO Bill Sommers said in a recent interview. “Compared to national averages of 3.5 percent for consumer loans and almost 8 percent for residential real estate, this is one of many facts that are a testament to our membership.”

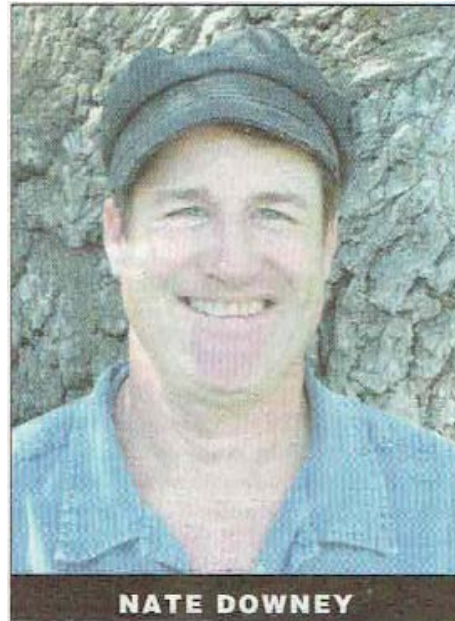
One of the few criteria for becoming a member of the PCU is that you must “agree with the ethics of permaculture.” According to Bill Mollison’s *Introduction to Permaculture* and his larger book *Permaculture: A Designers’ Manual*, agreeing with these ethics means

1. caring for the Earth,
2. caring for people,
3. reinvesting surplus resources back into efforts that promote such caring,
4. setting limits to one’s own consumption, and
5. taking responsibility for one’s own existence and that of our children.

Permaculturalists often say that you can’t care for the Earth without caring for people, and you can’t care for people without caring for the Earth. This brings us down from five ethics to four. But isn’t reinvestment of surplus a form caring? If so, the third ethic is technically redundant. Similarly, setting limits to one’s own consumption seems necessary and unavoidable if you are going to care for people in a world of limited resources. Finally, that parents should take responsibility their children is common sense. For these reasons, the ethics of permaculture can be boiled down to “caring for the Earth and its inhabitants.” If you have cares like these, you could be a member of the PCU.

In addition to the question of what is *required*,

there’s the question of what you can do to take your passion for permaculture a step further. Where are your resources needed most? There are at least as many answers to this question as there are permaculture projects across the globe, but the short answer is that the PCU is at a point in its evolution when it is actively accepting tax-deductible gifts.



“We’ve been significantly hampered,” Sommers said, “by costs imposed on us by the 2008-2009 meltdown of the financial markets. Due to the mistakes and poor investments of other credit unions, we’ve taken a \$60,000 direct hit to our bottom line. The assessments to recapitalize the insurance fund will disappear over time and interest rates will bounce back, but direct donations to the credit union, regardless of their size, will help us speed up the recovery process.”

The PCU holds a special place in my heart since I was its board chair back in the days of its infancy. Now the credit union seems to be experiencing a kind of pubescence. It’s strong and growing, but it still needs support from its family, friends, and community. Not everyone can donate money to a credit union, so keep in mind that there are numerous other ways to help out. Please visit [www.pcuonline.com](http://www.pcuonline.com) for more information.

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