Misson Fatigue Check

NEW YORK STATE | Office of Mental Health

New York State Trauma-Informed Network & Resource Center

ABOUT THIS TOOL

Audience
Field staff, park rangers, environmental scientists, conservation officers, inspectors

Description
This is a reflective tool designed to help you identify early signs of emotional exhaustion and reconnect to your purpose.

When to Use

- When feeling discouraged about the pace of environmental progress
- After repeated exposure to environmental damage or systemic barriers
- When questioning the impact or value of your work
- During periods of emotional fatigue or cynicism
- As part of regular reflection to maintain long-term motivation

WORKPLACE STRESS

Many people who work in conservation and environmental protection choose this field because they care deeply about the natural world. Over time, constantly confronting environmental damage, slow policy change, or limited resources can lead to mission fatigue, a feeling that the work matters, but the challenges feel overwhelming.

Environmental and conservation workers often face:

- Slow or incremental progress on large-scale environmental issues
- Repeated exposure to environmental degradation or loss
- Policy, funding, or enforcement limitations
- Public or institutional resistance to conservation efforts
- High emotional investment in long-term outcomes

These stressors can lead to:

- Cynicism or that nothing will make a difference
- Emotional exhaustion
- Disconnection from original motivation or values

This short check can help you notice when that fatigue is building and reconnecting with the purpose behind the work.

THE PRACTICE

Step 1

Notice the Warning Signs

Think about the past few weeks and check any statements that feel true.

Ask yourself: How am I feeling right now?

Examples might include:

☐ I feel discouraged about the pace of environmental progress
☐ I sometimes wonder whether my work is making a real difference
☐ I feel frustrated when environmental problems seem to repeat
☐ I feel emotionally worn down by the scale of environmental issues
☐ I feel disconnected from the sense of purpose that originally drew me to this work
☐ I feel more cynical about conservation efforts than I used to

If several of these statements feel true, you may be experiencing mission fatigue. This is common in fields where the work is meaningful, but progress can be slow.

continue on page 2...

THE PRACTICE

Step 2

Identify the Moment

Think about a recent situation that made the work feel discouraging.

Examples might include:

- Seeing environmental damage
- Enforcement challenges
- Resistance to conservation efforts
- Policy or funding limitations

What happened?

Step 3

Reconnect With Your Why

Many people enter environmental work because they care about something specific.

Finish this sentence: "The reason this work matters to me is..."

WHY THIS WORKS: Remembering the original motivation behind the work can help reconnect with your "why".

Step 4

Recognize the Impact That Still Exists

Environmental work often creates incremental change, even when large problems remain.

Ask yourself: What is one positive impact your work has contributed to recently?

Examples:

- Protecting habitat
- Educating the public
- Monitoring wildlife populations
- Enforcing environmental protections

WRITE ONE EXAMPLE:

_____

Step 5

Rebalance Your Energy

When mission fatigue builds, it can help to reconnect with parts of the work that restore motivation. Consider one action that might help recharge your connection to the mission.

Examples:

- Spending time in a place you helped protect
- Talking with colleagues who share your values
- Revisiting a project that had positive outcomes
- Stepping away briefly to regain perspective

WRITE ONE ACTION YOU COULD TAKE:

_____

Closing Reflection

Finish this sentence: *Even when progress feels slow, the work still matters because...*

WHY THIS HELPS

Protecting ecosystems and natural resources is long-term work. Recognizing moments of mission fatigue can help sustain the energy needed to keep showing up for that mission.

WHY THIS WORKS

Naming what you're feeling helps reduce its hold on you. Catching warning signs early prevents fatigue from turning into burnout. Reconnecting with a specific hard moment helps your brain process it and move forward. And returning to your "why" reactivates the purpose that brought you to this work. Research shows that reconnecting with personal values can restore motivation and build resilience against future stress.

Resources:
Find additional wellness information on the NYS Trauma Informed Network and Resource Center at traumainformedny.org
Looking to go deeper? Explore BREATH-BODY-MIND™ (BBM) for weekly breathwork practice, expert tips, and a welcoming community. Check out the website here for additional details.

Sources:
Bird, L.H. (et.al.), Thinking about the future: Examining the exacerbating and attenuating factors of despair-induced climate burnout. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, Volume 98, September 2024, 102382.
Boon PI. (2023) Is poor mental health an unrecognized occupational health and safety hazard for conservation biologists and ecologists? Reported incidences, likely causes and possible solutions. *Pacific Conservation Biology* 29, 273–291.