Nature-based Grounding

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 short grounding practice uses the natural environment around you to help reset attention and restore focus.

When to Use

- During long field days when noticing fatigue or mental overload
- Between tasks or site transitions
- After exposure to a stressful or emotionally impactful situation
- When attention feels scattered or unfocused
- Anytime a brief pause is possible and safe

WORKPLACE STRESS

Environmental and conservation work often takes place in landscapes that people are working to protect. During long days in the field, stress, fatigue, or mental overload can build up quietly.

Environmental and conservation workers commonly experience:

- Mental fatigue from sustained attention in outdoor conditions
- Physical exhaustion from long field days
- Environmental exposure and unpredictability
- Emotional strain from ecological loss or degradation
- Mental overload from multitasking and safety awareness

These stressors can lead to:

- Reduced concentration and difficulty with decision-making
- Feeling numb or burnout
- Decreased sense of purpose over time

Taking time to reset can help improve attention, reduce stress, and reconnect to the meaning of your work.

THE PRACTICE

Step 1

Find a Quiet Moment

If possible, pause for a minute in a place where you feel physically safe and undisturbed. This could be a trail edge, a monitoring site, a shoreline, or simply wherever you are working. Allow yourself to slow down for a brief moment before continuing your task.

Step 2

Tune Into the Landscape

Rather than thinking about work tasks, bring your attention to what is around you.

Notice a few details in the environment:

- The movement of leaves or grasses
- The sound of wind, water, or wildlife
- Patterns of light and shadow
- The texture of bark, soil, or rock

Allow your attention rest on these details for a short time.

continue on page 2...

THE PRACTICE

Step 3

Engage Your Senses

Choose one natural element nearby and observe it closely for about 30 seconds.

Ask yourself:

- What do I see?
- What do I hear?
- What do I feel physically in this moment?

Allow your breathing to slow naturally while you focus on these sensations.

Step 4

Remember the Connection

Many people who work in conservation chose this work because they value the natural world.

Take a moment to reflect on this question: What is one thing about this place or landscape that reminds me why this work matters?

You might notice:

- The presence of wildlife
- A healthy forest or shoreline
- The quiet or beauty of the setting
- Signs of restoration or protection

Step 5

Return With Renewed Attention

When you feel ready, bring your attention back to your work.

Consider: What is the next task I need to focus on?

WHY THIS HELPS

Taking even a short grounding moment can help restore clarity, reduce stress, and reconnect you with the purpose of your work in the field.

WHY THIS WORKS

Focusing on specific sensory details like what you see, hear, and feel helps pull attention away from mental overload and brings it back to the present moment. Research shows that even brief exposure to natural environments can lower stress hormones and restore the brain's ability to focus. Engaging your senses activates a calming response in the nervous system, and pausing to notice what makes the landscape worth protecting reconnects you to the purpose behind your work. Studies show that linking tasks to personal values strengthens motivation and helps build resilience over time.

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:
Ohly, H., White, M. P., Wheeler, B. W., Bethel, A., Ukoumunne, O. C., Nikolaou, V., & Garside, R. (2016). Attention Restoration Theory: A systematic review of the attention restoration potential of exposure to natural environments. *Journal of toxicology and environmental health*.

What Is Forest Bathing and How Does it Benefit Mental and Physical Health? American Psychiatric Association, December 22, 2023.