

Who Is Mother Earth's Mother?

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If you were to begin today to acquaint yourself with the current newsletters and periodicals published by environmentalist task forces and organizations engaged in protecting the environment, you might be alarmed at their titles. "Wilderness Watch," "Earth Watch," "Watt Watch" and "Toxics Waterwatch" are indicative titles. If you are on a mailing list for environmental concerns, the letters you receive could be written in red for the message they send: "Project action alert...." They reflect an urgency not only in relation to the earth's resources, but to the survival of the groups that have organized to protect these resources. These groups are laying the issues on the line and asking for support.

The Reagan Administration's increasing support of military and arms production spending has threatened legislative and monetary support for those programs developed in the interest of the human environment. Early this year, a "Fate of the Earth" conference was held in New York to analyze the implications of possible nuclear war and explore the tensions--over-population, competition for resources, and other factors--that make nuclear powers go to war in the first place. Such social tensions and unjust distribution of resources are global environmental problems.

Many issues confront the environmental movement in the United States. There is controversy as to whether the standards set in the Clean Air Act should be lowered. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is being investigated for mismanagement of its Superfund. Secretary of Interior James Watt is threatening millions of acres of wilderness with proposals for mining and industry, at the same time reducing funds for established environmental programs at all levels.

With the seeming lack of support by Congress it is clear that a "watch" is just the beginning of engaging in natural resources issues by environmentalists. Slogans have changed from "Pitch in America" to "Better Active Today than Radioactive Tomorrow." The Earth Day movement of the 70's is now an Earth Watch for the future. These concerns have social, political, environmental and health implications on a global scale. We all need to ask ourselves: who is Mother Earth's mother?

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

This is not an in-depth study of the earth's environmental problems. At best it is an overview of a concern that is attracting increasing numbers of individuals wanting to volunteer time and energy for a better environment. There is tremendous citizen participation potential just waiting to

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be channelled and used. In the Minnesota chapter of the Sierra Club, membership almost doubled from April 1981 to April 1982. It is clear that citizens are more willing to become "proactive" rather than just "reactive." Louis Harris addressed this increased activity at the Sierra Club's annual dinner:

*Mark it well, what is happening all over this country stems from a sudden realization that in Washington the foxes have been summoned to guard the chicken coop. And people of all ages, all segments of the population, are rising up to say that they want to take back in their own hands control of their own destinies--their own lots in life, their own land, their own water, their own air, their own environment--before others in the name of mindless greed destroy the very quality of human existence. But the battle is a race against time. Seize the nettle now . . . before it's too late.*²

I am going to briefly address the development of voluntary action in regard to meeting the challenge of finding a balance with ourselves in relation to the environment. A historical perspective is a powerful influence in that we learn from past successes and mistakes.

The establishment of groups working for environmental concerns dates back to the late 1800's. John Muir founded the Sierra Club in 1892, and it became the primary force that saved the Yosemite and Grand Canyon areas. The citizen efforts to preserve wilderness areas eventually led directly to the formation of the National Park Service and Forest Service. The early 1900's marked the beginning of conservation as a political issue, as a result of waste of natural resources by heavy industry. Local and state volunteer groups fought for controls on the threats to resources as well as establishing public parks and forests. In 1903 the Public Lands Commission and in 1908

the National Conservation Commission were established, reviewing recommendations of conservationists and working to influence congressional legislation, toward protecting the environment.³

In 1918, the "Save-the-Redwoods League" was founded in California, raising funds for the protection of redwoods in public parks. This league helped create a system of 27 state redwood parks, utilizing over 55,000 volunteers. The volunteers of American Forestry Association began fire prevention campaigns in 1928, presenting films and lectures for schools. The Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs, established in 1932, was formed to maintain wilderness areas for public use. The North American Wildlife Conference inspired the founding of the National Wildlife Foundation in response to the decline of wilderness animal and bird populations. In the 1950's, public schools began to develop volunteer programs utilizing youth for conservation projects such as roadside improvement, etc.⁴

The 1960's brought on a growing recognition that the earth's resources are limited and that the effects of chemical and biological warfare would have grave consequences. "Public health began to mingle in the public's mind with wildlife protection and wilderness preservation, overpopulation with nature protection, and the welfare of man with the welfare of his ecosystem."⁵

There seemed to be a popular campaign to revitalize the earth as was evident in the nationwide celebration of Earth Day in April of 1970. Congress adopted new environmental legislation including the National Policy Act, the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1970 and the Water Pollution Control Act of 1972.⁶ Major national educational and political organizations included Friends of the Earth, Sierra Club, Environmental Action, World Wildlife Federation, Wilderness Society, Izaak Walton League of America and the Audubon Society.

There are those who believe that the environmental movement of the 1970's has died. On the contrary, I believe it has just changed. The issues in the 1980's have become more complex and volunteers involved are finding they need to become more educated and skilled in order to ask the right questions and plan effectively for impact.

The Three Mile Island incident in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania in March of 1979 was a turning point in environmental volunteer activity. Nuclear power has perhaps been the most influential issue, forcing groups of all interests to combine efforts for a safe environment free from nuclear waste. Local groups of citizens, professional and disarmament groups, Native Americans, farm and labor organizations, women's groups, the Gray Panthers and American Taxpayers Union formed coalitions to strengthen their lobbying power on behalf of environment issues. The stage is set for active citizen participation.

TODAY'S ENVIRONMENTAL VOLUNTEERS: WHO ARE THEY?

Environmental volunteers come from varied backgrounds and include people of all ages. They come from youth groups such as Scout troops and 4-H to older people in the Gray Panthers. Environmental volunteers are highly motivated and emotionally dedicated to their work. For most volunteers, exposure to an environmental problem stimulated their initial involvement. The general public has a greater awareness of our finite supply of resources. When people visit a favorite recreational area and realize its very existence is threatened, there is a natural tendency to wonder what can be done to preserve it for future generations. A more critical example of personal motivation involves those who are dealing with the consequences of radiation leaks in their immediate living environment.

Certainly the media coverage has

been a catalyst in rallying volunteers by feeding on controversial issues. Information is at our fingertips and in front of our eyes. This media exposure can play on people's emotions and sense of powerlessness in certain situations. It is also an invaluable tool for networking: a national and international, visual and written directory of what's going on environmentally, thereby linking people concerned with similar issues.

For many volunteers, an important motivation is the desire to get involved in a larger picture of life; to go beyond routine jobs and responsibilities. They want to supplement their lives with something that is meaningful and where an impact can be made. The increasing difficulty in flexibility for career growth in an economically depressed time coupled with the recurring process of budget cuts for programs affecting the quality of life is taking its toll. Studs Terkel sums it up by saying "jobs are not big enough for people's spirits."

The added impetus for volunteer involvement creates new problems for environmental groups. In addition to dealing with an increased population of volunteers, the importance and sometimes immediacy of effective action necessitates skilled managers. Lack of strong leadership is cited as one of the main causes of unsuccessful development and maintenance of an organization. A list of the key problems characteristic in environmental groups include lack of intergroup coordination, IRS tax laws, funding, physical needs (clerical help, equipment, office space), unresponsiveness of government and business, lack of legal and technical assistance, training volunteers, utilizing and recruiting volunteers and leadership development.¹⁰

In an interview with an Executive Committee member of the Minnesota chapter of the Sierra Club, Dave Adams, we talked of the high burnout rate that can happen among the club's activists. The workload is not balanced in relation to its member-

ship. A national survey of the Sierra Club revealed that 80% of its members were content with contributing by paying the membership fee, 10-20% of its members attend outings and are active in events, and 3-5% of those are leaders. This clearly indicates a need for leaders to strengthen recruitment tactics and delegate responsibilities in order to minimize burn-out.

Mr. Adams also explained that leaders do not have time to do long-range planning because they are tied down to ground level work. They seem to be continually "putting out fires," addressing issues that need immediate attention (e.g., when legislation is being passed). In short, they don't have time to be good managers.

Other factors that influence volunteer involvement include job intimidation (pressure from employers to stay out of environmental issues) and decline in availability of women for daytime volunteer activity as they have greater opportunities for employment.¹¹ Then there are those organizations who hesitate to invest in volunteers because they are not seen as cost effective. Additional paid staff is necessary to accommodate supervision and training of volunteers. Some groups feel they can do the work more economically and quicker with their paid staff, without the extra burden of training volunteers.¹² These are all important factors to consider in the development of programs utilizing volunteers.

Before going on, I would like to mention another genre of volunteers who are not as visible as the activist influencing legislation or maintaining park systems. It is the individual who voluntarily evaluates his/her lifestyle, looking at ways to change patterns of consumption and developing a sense of responsibility as an individual in relation to the environment. These volunteers are just as vital to the environmental movement for the future. They will make an impact by

example, creating another ripple effect.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AFFECTING THE QUALITY OF OUR LIVES: THE PEOPLE RESPOND

I remember sitting in a grade school science class learning the four elements necessary to sustain life: air, water, fire and soil. These are the very elements in danger today. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that 48.5% of our water is extensively polluted while only 0.2% of all water is free of pollution. Sixty percent of our air pollution comes from cars (85% in some areas) and we discard 4,340 million tons of solid waste a year.¹³ These concerns prompted Congress to adopt new environmental legislation during the late 1960's and early '70's. The National Environmental Policy Act, the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1970 and the Water Pollution Control Act of 1972 came into being as well as laws regulating noise, pesticides, toxic substances, ocean dumping and solid waste disposal.¹⁴

Priorities established by environmental groups include land use control and planning, natural and wild area preservation, water quality, wildlife preservation, air quality, solid waste/recycling, and water management. The single issue receiving most attention nationally is wild area preservation.¹⁵ More specifically, the 1982 Conservation Priorities established by the Sierra Club included the Clean Air Act Reauthorization, National Forest Wilderness, water resource planning and management, urban transportation, nuclear legislation, public lands leasing permits, National Forest planning, Bureau of Wilderness Land Management, community energy and environmental budgets and appropriations.¹⁶

The current activities in the Reagan administration have a tremendous impact on the environmental quality of our lives. Policies adopted by Congress can take away

years of volunteer accomplishments. Secretary of the Interior James Watt has announced he is dropping as many as three million acres of Bureau of Land Management land from wilderness status. He is preparing to close large blocks of public lands to be used by the mining industry. Forest Service lands (140 million acres) are in review for sale and disposal. He is looking into possibilities for strip mining in the National Park System (as many as 26 units). He continues to push oil and gas development in Alaska as well as loosening control by the Fish and Wildlife Service. He has proposed reducing Land and Water Conservation Fund monies.¹⁷

The dynamics in confronting these environmental concerns are two-fold. On the one hand we are facing the physical existence of the problem: the air, the toxic wastes, the polluted water. On the other hand, there are administration and legislation: the brains and brawn of those who control the strings. Since there are fewer people being paid to address these problems, citizen participation has a big job ahead of it. Successful goal setting and long-range planning will be essential.

The goals of volunteer groups are generally described in two categories: environmental/conservation activism and education. The actual work of the group depends upon the source of funding. Groups with funds obtained by their members tend to be involved in lobbying, put pressure on leaders, participate in hearings, etc. Those with funds from the government are less likely to get involved in lobbying. These groups tend to have educational functions, take on recycling projects and develop beautification projects.¹⁸ Ideally the government would support all levels of volunteer activity to facilitate a sense of responsibility on the part of citizen involvement in the legislative process.

The power behind the volunteer movement is evident in its accomplishments. Volunteers have been suc-

cessfully utilized in areas such as conservation, zoo support services, energy issues, anti-pollution efforts, recycling, population control, horticulture and garden clubs, weather observation and city planning.¹⁹

An example of volunteers in park and recreation systems is the Sempevirens Fund, an organization committed to preserving land in California's Santa Cruz mountains. This group has been instrumental in organizing numerous volunteer projects to improve and maintain parkland in that region.

Every April, groups such as the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Camp Fire Girls, YMCA groups, youth organizations, garden clubs, ecology groups, high school and college students, the Sierra Club and countless individuals meet for "Trail Days." In 1969, 2,500 volunteers cleared 25 miles of trail connecting Big Basin and Castle Rock State Parks. By 1974, 65 miles of trail had been built and numerous campsites developed. Sempevirens maintains close contact with the California Department of Parks and Recreation whose rangers plan and provide work assignments.²⁰ Trail Days is an excellent example of a group planning for ongoing environmental action, as well as facilitating intergroup communication.

Because of the nature and complexity of the problems environmental groups face, they have realized the importance and effectiveness of coalitions. Quite simply, two groups speak louder than one. For example, the OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Act) Environmental Network was formed in 1981. It is a coalition of labor unions and environmental groups working to keep the Clean Air Act and OSHA effective while Congress is trying to lower standards of these acts.²¹ It should be noted that it was the United Steelworkers who sponsored the first major national conference on air pollution as a result of an air pollution disaster in Donora, Pennsylvania in 1948. Half the town fell ill

when weather conditions trapped poisonous gases from Donora's factories in the atmosphere. This was also the beginning of industry's affiliation with the American Lung Association.²²

It is clear that no segment of society, whether it be government, business, industry or environmental groups alone can solve these resource problems.

MINNESOTA: ISSUES, ACTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VOLUNTEER INVOLVEMENT.

The Minnesota Chapter of the Sierra Club has identified a substantial number of issues for 1983: supporting the Superfund (money for hazardous waste clean-up), Clean Air Act, clean water, state land management, mining in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area (BWCA), recycling (pushing for the Bottle Bill) and renewable energy.²³ Presently, the BWCA is in danger of losing some of its Mining Protection Area to copper and nickel mining. Acid rain is a growing concern and there is controversy over motorboat and snowmobile use.

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency has listed 32 of the state's 87 counties as having land and/or lake areas which are sensitive to acidic deposition, caused in large part by emissions from fossil fuel burning power plants. The Sierra Club Clean Air Task Force will be working with the Pollution Control Agency to develop an acid deposition standard and control plan (the first in the country). The goal is to have all Minnesota air polluters in compliance with deposition standards by 1990.²⁴

Citizens for a Better Environment (CBE), a professional organization (opened its office in Minneapolis in May, 1982) working on human health and urban environmental issues, has declared hazardous wastes and water pollution by toxic substances to be Minnesota's most critical issues. Minnesota has no off-site repository where all industries and municipal plants may dump their hazardous

wastes. The EPA has designated the metropolitan stretch of the Mississippi as one of the ²⁵ 34 toxic "hot spots" in the country.

Paul Smith of the U.S. Forest Service said in an interview that the work needed to maintain park systems and wilderness areas in Minnesota would be virtually impossible without the help of volunteers. Currently, volunteers of all ages are active in trail maintenance, working in the visitor centers, writing publications and programs, etc. Ideally, Mr. Smith sees the recruitment of people using the recreation area as good candidates for meeting the needs of the parks and wilderness areas. For example, this fall groups planning to use the BWCA for cross-country skiing spent weekends assisting Forest Service staff in clearing and maintaining the ski trails.

There have not been a significant number of volunteers used with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Between 1974-79 only 40-80 volunteers were trained to work in interpretive centers. That averages less than one volunteer per state park. School groups and scouting troupes have helped on a one day or weekend basis.²⁶ While these are good activities to help citizens gain a better understanding and greater appreciation for their environment, it needs to happen on a much wider scale to make a dent in the system.

There are groups putting their energy into educating the public so that citizens can participate in ways that facilitate gaining control of environmental policies. To encourage citizen participation in water pollution issues, CBE published a booklet entitled "How to Protect Minnesota's Environment Through Surface Water Discharge Permits." Requests for copies came from citizens, environmental groups, news media, government agencies, public libraries and special collection libraries. CBE also conducted Toxics Waterwatch workshops in which citizens were taught how to participate effectively in the

permit process and to speak up at public hearings regarding industrial and municipal polluters making applications to discharge toxic substances into lakes and streams.

Minnesota has a real lobbying power in the North Star Sierra Club chapter. Its exceptionally strong voice in legislature stems from its volunteer legislation committee of 50 lawyers. The Club also provides its members with training workshops in the lobbying process. The North Star chapter is also nationally known for its newsletter, updating its members with current issues, action alerts, volunteer activities and club outings. This communication is essential for effective action by its members.

THE ROLE OF VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

Given the fact that citizen participation will be vitally important in managing our threatened resources in the years to come, leaders in government, business, industry and special interest groups will need to have effective management skills. There is an especially strong need for the professional volunteer manager. This manager's role is described by Marlene Wilson, author of The Effective Management of Volunteer Programs, as someone to:

...encourage and enable others we work with, both staff and volunteers, to become doers and movers as well. The future of our communities and country lies with those who are no longer content to be placid observers, but who are determined to become origins instead of pawns of the future. It is a challenging task we set for ourselves.

Volunteer managers will need to provide training for increased numbers of volunteers, plan strategies for action beyond crisis situations and propagate communication among diverse groups both nationally and internationally to pool resources.

With the increase in members and need for more effective communica-

tions, the Sierra Club hopes to implement a "phone tree" in the future. Membership would be available on a locally computerized mailing list categorized by legislative districts. Each district would have its own phone tree. Members could be easily rallied to provide support on issues demanding immediate attention. This tool could cut down on time needed to organize the writing of letters, phone banking, mailing information letters, etc.

It is one thing to communicate issues and activities between the various groups in the environmental community, yet the communication that goes on internally within a group is equally important. It is a law of nature: life cannot be sustained in the absence of a healthy core. It will be important for managers to help the volunteer find his/her "cog in the wheel" to enable satisfaction for the individual and the organization. Expectations must be clarified. Involvement needs to be evaluated and re-evaluated. Goals need to be developed and redeveloped.

It is particularly important for managers to encourage ongoing communication because of the very nature and content of environmental issues. There is substantial evidence to validate reasons for getting upset. It could be all too easy to let despair, powerlessness, frustration or anger immobilize a group or cause a genuinely concerned and talented individual to drop out for lack of human resources to work through these emotions. These feelings are to be expected. Leaders would benefit by meeting them head on, then going on. Leaders also need to be sensitive to those who are struggling with the time and energy consumed participating in these issues. They need to help volunteers understand and accept their limitations both as individuals and as a group. These problems have no one solution, nor can they be solved from one source. It may also come to a point where it is quite appropriate to support an in-

dividual's decision to refrain from involvement.

On the other side of the coin, there need to be built-in opportunities for recognition of accomplishments. People need to celebrate what their work is about and the impact they do have. In the same token, opportunities for enjoyable social interaction are essential for keeping the spirit and lifeline of the group.

In relation to future action for a better environment, I would propose that current structures stretch their existing resources and lend themselves open to new ones. Educators need to be activists and activists need to be educators. Perhaps the greatest investment in the future of our environment will be educating ourselves and our youth in promoting a society of concerned, thinking, environmentally responsible people. We cannot assume that someone else will be "mother earth's mother."

For example, camping education programs can go beyond teaching how to build that fire, prepare that food and set up that camping space in the outdoors. A more comprehensive, interdisciplinary approach on the effects of our actions on the entire ecosystem is needed. "Camping 101" needs to develop into "Low Impact Camping--User Education."

Groups sponsoring outings for their members can add another type of outing: organizing a special project combining the efforts of other groups or individuals. This is not to replace recreational outings, for they have a very important purpose in themselves. For example, the Sierra Club, in conjunction with the Forest Service, could organize a project in the BWCA, inviting non-members. This could create a ripple effect. A Sierra Club liaison could be developed with the Forest Service, possibly assisting in the process of training volunteers. The outing could be educational as well as developing skills for future involvement.

By inviting non-members, the

scope of resources is broadened. Sometimes special interest groups can get caught up in their own jargon and ways of doing things. Hopefully the exposure to the work that needs to be done would foster a sense of relationship in the future for those involved.

Ideally, the DNR, U.S. Forest Service, EPA, Bureau of Land Management and other major management organizations would have their own paid volunteer managers or grant existing staff time to develop programs to support citizen participation. Imagine the impact of such a movement! Although this is unlikely on a large scale in the immediate future, it can begin on a smaller scale as groups engage in developing these networks.

CONCLUSION: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

A river does not stop at the border. It flows without regard to its name or the area it runs through. Minnesota cannot look at its environmental problems solely within its own boundaries. The fact that these issues are of a global nature increases the possibilities of a diverse and resourceful environmental network actively involved in the future of a human ecology.

Movements, networks and publications are gathering people around the world in common cause, trafficking in transformative ideas, spreading messages of hope without the sanction of any government.²⁸ Transformation has no country.

In addition to tapping individuals and groups with skills in leadership and effective management of people and motivations, environmentalists need to go beyond specifics. We need to tend the fire before it goes out. We need to adopt an attitude that will carry the energy beyond a movement to a way of life. Adrenalin is plentiful in a crisis situation; what will sustain those "in-between-times"? Environmentalists need to

accept that our work will take on many forms.

We need to learn a concept of time: that we move in a direction, not to an end. We cannot fool ourselves into thinking we will save our environment in a lifetime, nor is it safe to assume at any one point the environment will be safe. The effects of an ongoing developing technology will continually be a threat or an aid to the environment, demanding our "watchfulness."

This campaign will not end, it will change with change. Evolution and solution will interplay on a continuum. Hopefully we can learn to live with it and enjoy the ride.

FOOTNOTES

¹"The Fate of the Earth Conference," Sierra, January/February 1983, pp. 33-34.

²"Public Likes Conservation," Sierra, July/August 1982, p. 16.

³Susan J. Ellis and Katherine H. Noyes, By The People (Philadelphia: ENERGIZE, 1978), p. 166.

⁴Ibid., pp. 196-7.

⁵Clem L. Zinger, Richard Dalsemer, and Helen Magargle, Environmental Volunteers in America (National Center For Voluntary Action, 1973), p. 2.

⁶American Revolution Bicentennial Administration and Department of Housing and Urban Development, Environment--Challenge/Response (Washington, D.C. 1976), p. 1.

⁷Charles Beitz and Michael Washburn, Creating The Future (New York: Bantam Books, 1974), p. 104.

⁸"The Antinuclear Movement Approaches Critical Mass," New Age, June 1979, p. 24.

⁹Zinger, op.cit., p. 18.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 16.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 29-34.

¹²Environmental Planning and Research, Volunteer Activities in Public Outdoor Recreation and Resource Management Areas, Minnesota State Planning Agency, 1978, p. 3.

¹³Zinger, op. cit., pp. 3-4.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 1.

¹⁵Zinger, op. cit., p. 6.

¹⁶"Sierra Club Conservation Priorities for 1982," Sierra, March/April 1982, p. 19.

¹⁷Priority Dispatch mailed out by National Sierra Club chapter Re: "Dangers We Face in 1983."

¹⁸Zinger, op. cit., p. 18.

¹⁹Ellis, op. cit., pp. 241-2.

²⁰United States Department of the Interior Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, A Resource Guide on Volunteerism for Park and Recreation and Heritage Conservation Organizations. Washington D.C. 1978, pp. 22-23.

²¹"The OSHA/Environmental Network," Sierra, January/February 1982, p. 146.

²²Ibid., p. 146.

²³Interview with David Adams, Executive Committee member of the North Star Sierra Club chapter.

²⁴Project Environment Action Alert, Sierra North Star, February 1983, p. 7.

²⁵Citizens For A Better Environment, CBE Environmental Review,

January/February 1983, Chicago, 1983, pp. 16-17.

²⁶ *Environmental Planning and Research*, op. cit., p. 15.

²⁷ Marlene Wilson, *The Effective Management of Volunteer Programs* (Boulder: Volunteer Management Associates, 1976), p. 26.

²⁸ Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy: Personal and Social Transformation in the 1980's* (Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher, Inc., 1980), p. 409.