

WILDEARTH



Spring 1998
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David Brower Interview

Exotics & Freshwater Conservation

Wild Politics: Ballot Measures

Motorized Wreckreation



Around The Campfire

by Dave Foreman

Etymology and "Environmental" Problems



Readers of *Wild Earth* know that I reject the notion of a single environmental movement that encompasses both wilderness protection and fighting pollution. I believe that conservation (protecting wildlife and wildlands) and environmentalism (cleaning up pollution for human health concerns) are separate movements with different origins, goals, and players. Both are important, but they are different. In my book-in-progress, *The War On Nature*, I will devote a long chapter ("The Myth of the Environmental Movement") to further explain this difference between the conservation and environmental movements.

One of the reasons I don't like The Myth of the Environmental Movement is the damn word itself.

Environment
Environmental
Environmentalist
Enviro

The word and its variants make my poor ol' stomach feel like a butter chum.

Environment is one of those godawful abstract words popularized by bureaucrats or assistant professors of psychology. How do you love an *environment*? Can you even see an *environment*? Can you get lost in an *environment*?

I can see, feel, and love a mountain, a river, a swamp, an ocean, a forest, a desert, a grassland. But not an environment.

Environment to Nature is like *relationship to love*.

About Wild Earth and The Wildlands Project

Wild Earth (POB 455, Richmond, VT 05477; 802-434-4077; fax 802-434-5980) is a quarterly journal melding conservation biology and wildlands activism. Our efforts to strengthen the conservation movement involve the following:

- We serve as the publishing wing of The Wildlands Project.
- We provide a forum for the many effective but little-known regional wilderness groups and coalitions in North America, and serve as a networking tool for wilderness activists.
- We make the teachings of conservation biology accessible to non-scientists, that activists may employ them in defense of biodiversity.
- We expose threats to habitat and wildlife.
- We facilitate discussion on ways to end and reverse the human population explosion.
- We defend wilderness both as concept and as place.

Wild Earth and The Wildlands Project are closely allied but independent non-profit organizations dedicated to the restoration and protection of wilderness and biodiversity. We share a vision of an ecologically healthy North America—with adequate habitat for all native species, containing vibrant human and natural communities.

The Wildlands Project (1955 W. Grant Rd., Suite 148A, Tucson, AZ 85745; 520-884-0875) is the organization guiding the design of a continental wilderness recovery strategy. Through advocacy, education, scientific consultation, and cooperation with many regional groups, The Wildlands Project is drafting a blueprint for an interconnected, continental-scale system of protected wildlands linked by habitat corridors.

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It was bad enough that Norman French polluted good Anglo-Saxon after Harold got an arrow in his eye on the field of Hastings. It was bad enough that the English intellectual class felt they had to know Latin and use it for church, medicine, science, and the law. But the worst of Latin-English are the abstract, Latin-based words of social science like...*environment*.

Environment begins in Old English in the 1400s as the verb *envi-rounen* meaning "to surround" from the Old French *environner*. It became *environs* in the 1700s as a noun for neighborhood. *Environment* was first used in the 1700s, but was rare before 1900.¹ According to *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, *environment* means "the circumstances, objects, or conditions by which one is surrounded." It is a technical term in social science; indeed, the original (1922) meaning of *environmentalism* is "a theory that views environment rather than heredity as the important factor in the development and esp. the cultural and intellectual development of an individual or group" and the original meaning of *environmentalist* is a social scientist who is an advocate of the above development theory. Though even Aldo Leopold referred to "the normal environment of every citizen" in 1949,² widespread use of *environment* for *Nature* did not begin until the 1960s with the growth of human health groups fighting pollution.

My problem with the word *environment* is not merely a matter of taste or devotion to Strunk & White. Words have power, and when we label Nature with an abstract and meaningless word like *environment*, it is easier to hold Nature at a distance, it is easier to make it a mere commodity. It is easier to destroy it. Using a word like *environment* helps create a dualism between humans and Nature. Both Dolores LaChapelle and David Abram have wisely written about the "Greek Language Problem": with the abstract alphabet of the Greeks (as opposed to pictorial alphabets like hieroglyphics that were grounded in the real, that is, *natural* world), language and thought became cut off from Nature.

There is a wealth of perfectly good words, both Anglo-Saxon and Norman, that can replace this dreadful word. Here are a few of them:

Land	Ecosystem
Land, water, and air	Place
Landscape	Country
Habitat	Countryside
Surroundings	Great Outdoors
Home	Natural home
Nature	Outside
Creation	Big Outside

¹ Hoad, T.F. 1986. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. p. 151.

² Leopold, Aldo. 1987. *A Sand County Almanac*. New York: Oxford University Press. p. 48.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 224-225.

Around the Campfire

I would argue stoutly that conservationists should generally replace *environment* with *land*. By doing so, we link our movement firmly to Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic:

*The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land.... In short, a land ethic changes the role of Homo sapiens from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such.*³

*A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.*⁴

"A Land Ethic" has a hell of a lot more punch in it than does "An Environmental Ethic."

Instead of *Environmental Movement* for conservation, we should use:

- Conservation Movement
- Nature Protection Movement
- Land Protection Movement

Instead of *Environmental Movement* for pollution fighting, use:

- Human Health Movement
- Public Health Movement
- Quality of Life Movement
- Pollution Prevention Movement
- Toxic Cleanup Movement
- Healthy Home Movement

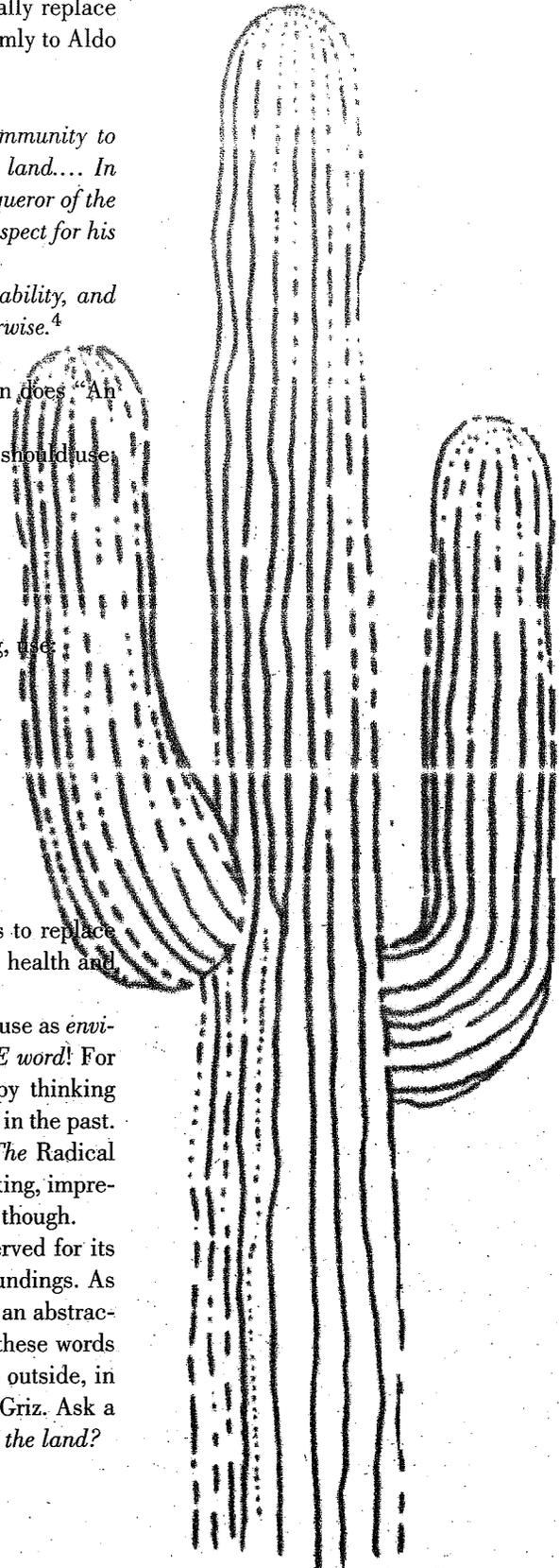
I'm sure others can come up with additional good terms to replace *environment* when describing the campaign to protect human health and the urban quality of life.

Conservationists should never refer to ourselves or our cause as *environmentalists* or *environmental*. Never, never, never use the *E* word! For conservationists to call ourselves environmentalists is sloppy thinking and sloppy use of the language. I know, I know, I'm guilty of it in the past. I was the nitwit who subtitled *The Earth First! Journal* as *The Radical Environmental Journal* in the early eighties. It was an unthinking, imprecise, illiterate thing to do. Even graying hillbillies can learn, though.

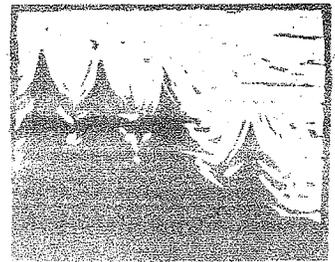
Let us resolve that the word *environment* should be reserved for its technical social science sense of outside influences or surroundings. As long as conservationists or human health advocates use such an abstraction, the harder it will be to grab people at their hearts. Let these words roll around on your tongue, let them dance in your heart. Go outside, in the wind, in the storm, far from the maddening city. Ask the Griz. Ask a saguaro. Are they part of an *environment*? Or are they part of *the land*?

—Dave Foreman

Jawbone Mountain, New Mexico



A Wilderness View



Beautiful Piece of World

You like wilderness, let's suppose, and you want to see some of it saved. Not just a thin strip of roadside with a sign saying "Don't pick the flowers." Not just a wild garden behind the hotel or a pleasant woods within shouting distance of the highway. But real wilderness, big wilderness—country big enough to have a beyond to it and an inside. With space enough to separate you from the buzz, bang, screech, ring, yammer, and roar of the 24-hour commercial you wish hard your life wouldn't be. Wilderness that is a beautiful piece of world....

—David Brower¹

Several decades ago, when David Brower wrote these opening lines in his essay "Wilderness—Conflict and Conscience," it probably seemed to him that the war on Nature was at its apex. If so, it may have been one of the rare occasions when he was wrong.

Indeed, with two billion additional humans on Earth, all the trains, planes, and automobiles of a global human population nearing six billion, and uncountable noisome artifacts of consumer culture not yet invented when Brower wrote—personal computers, fax machines, cell phones, VCRs, 4-wheelers, jet-skis, to name but a few—the cacophony of industrial humanity is louder than ever. Fortunately for wilderness and wildlife, David Brower [WE Interview] is still fighting to turn down the volume.

Alas, the "screech, ring, ...and roar" of snowmobiles in Yellowstone, ORVs in the Daniel Boone National Forest, or jet-skis in Hells Canyon are problematic not merely because they offend the aesthetic sensibilities of wilderness travelers seeking spiritual renewal in our remaining wild places. (Of course such violations are a real problem; recently, while paddling alone on an Adirondack wilderness lake, I was buzzed by a helicopter. For hours thereafter I could not shake the Bruce Cockburn lyric "If I had a rocket launcher..." from my head.) The burgeoning popularity of motorized recreation is a large and growing obstacle to biodiversity protection and recovery efforts. In this issue, a trio of wildlands defenders [Kevin Proescholdt, Jean Smith, Scott Silver] highlight industrial recreationist threats to Minnesota's

Boundary Waters, Colorado's Kreutzer-Princeton area, and public lands nationwide.

Also in this issue, biologist Anthony Ricciardi explains how invasions of exotic species imperil freshwater ecosystems; activists John Clark and Alexis Lathem speculate on how pending changes in the electric industry may affect wildlands; and Pat Opay warns that protections for Costa Rica's Tortuguero Conservation Area remain incomplete.

We'll temper these sobering reports with some good news [Jocassee Gorges and Big Tree Updates], good writing [Tracks], and good strategies—economic [Earth in the Balance Sheet], legal [Pittman Robertson], and personal [The Abstainers]—for combating threats to wildlands.



It's spring! And in spring, at least in election years, a young person's thoughts turn to—politics. With another political season upon us, biodiversity advocates around the country will be engaged in electoral campaigns. We've asked a few battle-tested balloteers [Sally Cross, Andy Kerr, Bill Marlett, Jonathan Carter] to share their thoughts on using referenda to further the cause of conservation [Forum on Ballot Initiatives].

Although this *WE* stresses conservation strategy, philosophical considerations are not altogether ignored. In "The Myths We Live By" and "Geophilia," George Wuerthner and Paul Faulstich, respectively, explore the mythic narratives and possibly innate affinities that undergird the movement to protect Nature.

¹Brower, David: 1964. Wilderness—Conflict and Conscience, in *Wildlands in Our Civilization*, David Brower, ed. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.

