

SIERRA

THE MAGAZINE OF THE SIERRA CLUB • JULY/AUGUST 1995

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Photo by Jeff Vanuga



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LETTERS

GROUSING ABOUT OLD GROWTH

I am left with profound feelings of anger, frustration, and utter hopelessness after reading Paul Rauber's "Improving on Nature" (March/April). The reason? Because I know all of it is true.

As part of the Sierra Club's Forest Watch program activities, I often backpack in the Davy Crockett National Forest near my home in Texas. I "adopted" two compartments there because they had some forest plus at least occasional wildlife to enjoy. But in mid-1994, the loggers began a demolition derby in one compartment and didn't stop until they had destroyed about 95 percent of it. Since the other is a hunter camp area with only a few trees, now there is only silence with no wildlife.

Bernice Clark
Groveton, Texas

The problem with the Ouachita Watch League and the Sierra Club is that they keep fighting battles that are over and done with. The 1.6-million-acre Ouachita is being managed in a far more biotic, natural, and diverse style than Rauber's article ever mentions. Clearcutting and pine planting are no longer practiced except in very special situations. A quarter-million acres of managed pine are allocated for uneven-aged, selection management. Conversion of hardwood and hardwood-pine types to pine has been banned. Herbicide use has dropped 80 percent since 1986. Forty percent of the total forest area has been designated for development into old-growth condition.

It would appear that OWL and Mr. Rauber are ostriches with their heads in the sand.

John Gray
Little Rock, Arkansas

Twenty-some years ago I started the Wisconsin Chapter of the Ruffed Grouse Society. I would love to see a big chunk of unmanaged area in the national forest left to old growth. I

know it wouldn't hold many grouse (or deer, elk, or black bear for that matter), but it would be an interesting contrast to the intensely fragmented situation we now have.

Dan Ryan
Amherst, Wisconsin

I am a lawyer who loves to hunt ruffed grouse, woodcock, and ducks. "Improving on Nature" made me sick. Obviously the writer has never been in a "virgin" forest. Virgin forests are ugly, devoid of animal and plant life other than sterile aged trees, and walking in them is like walking in a tomb. I can tell you from 50 years of hiking the woods in northern Wisconsin that if you want to see birds, animals, and plant life, stay out of the aged and dying forest and head for the area where either a fire or a logging operation has occurred within the last ten years.

I am not a scientist or a botanist, but I sure as hell can see what is good and what is bad, and there is very little good in a sterile aged forest.

Dale W. Arenz
Waukesha, Wisconsin

Paul Rauber replies: *While management of the Ouachita has improved over the years, conversion of the forest into a pine plantation continues by a variety of means—including the "selection management" and continued herbicide use mentioned by John Gray. Both OWL and the Sierra Club would be happy to see 40 percent of the Ouachita allowed to return to old growth, especially as none of it is in that condition now. Unfortunately, since the Ouachita Forest Plan fails to define old growth, it can use the term to refer to just about anything that isn't a tree farm.*

Dale Arenz has no reason to fear being mistaken for a scientist. While fragmentation may increase the number of species within a particular habitat (what's known as "alpha" diversity), it decreases the overall ("gamma") diversity of the region. While clearcutting may increase the number of game species like deer and grouse, lack of untouched old growth is why Arenz is unlikely ever to see a wolver-

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LETTERS

ine, pine marten, or yellow lady's slipper. Finally, if virgin forests are as sterile as Anez asserts, why is it that both national and state forest officials in Wisconsin chose to put their nature trails through the oldest hemlock and hardwood stands they have?

ZERO TOLERANCE

"Learn to tolerate a little dirt," advises the eco-cop ("Spring Cleaning," March/April) as she patrols the author's kitchen. This strongly implies that to be ecologically responsible, one must live in a home that's somewhat less clean than those of other folks. Environmentalists have enough problems without others thinking we live in dirty homes! Elbow grease, soap, and water really do work well—and don't take any more time to use than products that "burn and stink." It's important that we bring environmental values into our homes and everyday lives.

Kalia J. Rork
Santa Barbara, California

PEACE AND LOVE

Obviously you still don't get it—the November elections. Nearly six pages in the March/April issue were devoted to "Spring Cleaning"—six pages of drivel. If you choose to continue to talk about orange spice tea, love, and happiness, then your time is past.

Stephen Buchler
Mt. Carroll, Illinois

Reading about the new Congress in the March/April issue left me feeling insecure. Had the issues been fairly represented? The current U.S. political situation may be serious but it is not a "war." Bosnia is at war. Some people have chosen to hate each other there. Are we choosing to hate when we characterize this situation as a "war"? I submit that environmentally concerned citizens are not at war with conservatives. Vigilance, dear Sierra Club members. If we do not care for all, we may truly care for no one.

Barbara Wampole
Saugus, California

BEWILDERED IN PORTLAND

The March/April "Last Words" left me with more questions than answers. There were lots of good ideas about responding to the new Congress, but what could I possibly say to my senators that would pierce their consciousness? They can't be worried about losing my vote, because they are both smart enough to know they never had it. Even if they lose their next bids for re-election, they will have a generous pension for life. And if they take care of the interests of the right people (obviously not me) they may have even further opportunities for income. I feel disenfranchised and bewildered about what to do.

Tim Drewes
Portland, Oregon

Sierra Club Conservation Director Bruce Hamilton replies: *True, sometimes letters or calls to a member of Congress don't work. If that is your situation, take your case to the media. While elected officials may be able to ignore your phone call, they are less likely to ignore bad press. Environmen-*



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HATS OFF

To those recorded in "Earth Day Heroes" (March/April), my sincere thanks. And thanks, too, to the unmentioned heroes—the many thousands of volunteers who, through the years, have worked as Club leaders, who have given many, many hours of time to helping others in understanding and reacting to the needs of Earth.

Louis Schindel

Chatham, New Jersey

Earth Day is likely to prompt retro hippies and persevering lobbyists to resurface, boasting of times when it was exciting and "damned near everything was possible." But of equal importance is creating an agenda for the new generation of Earth defenders who were not around to participate in

the 1970s intellectual transformation, making it their time to educate and incite the countless numbers of people outside the environmental movement.

Emily Gilels

San Francisco, California

CATTLE CALCULATIONS

I subscribe to the premise of "Flesh Wounds" (March/April "Body Politics"), which argues for eating less meat. But the statement that "the typical cow produces 20,000 pounds of manure each year" has to be an exaggeration. That amounts to nearly 55 pounds a day! I am trying to visualize what the 20-acre pasture on our farm would look like with 15 head of cattle dumping that much manure on it.

Virgil Brenneman

Goshen, Indiana

Cattle and poultry are extremely efficient at converting grass and other stuff we cannot eat, or would not want to eat, into our most highly nutritious foods—the foods upon which we

evolved, the foods our bodies are designed to use. Cattle eat grass and grains grown on lands that are not suitable for the cultivation of food crops. They concentrate the energy from these lands, as the buffalo did.

Thomas Anderson, Ph.D.

Summerland, British Columbia

Michael Castleman replies: *Sorry about the error. The correct figure is 2,000 pounds of manure per animal per year.*

It is specious to argue, as Thomas Anderson does, that cattle are fed mostly from land unfit for cultivation of other food. A tremendous amount of prime agricultural land is used to grow animal feed. And when cattle are kept on marginal lands, the results are often overgrazing and severe erosion.

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Carl Pope

Congress, Red in Tooth and Claw

How does one describe what is happening in Washington these days? It certainly isn't conservatism, as it is more interested in upsetting 50 years of complex social arrangements than in actually conserving anything. Some call it revolutionary. (House Speaker Newt Gingrich *does* sound rather like Robespierre as he cheerfully acknowledges that errors will be made in the haste of his "revolution.") But the spirit of the times was better described by the cameraman unhooking my mike after a recent television debate about the War on the Environment now under way in Congress. "The age of the Robber Barons returns," he muttered.

He was right. The ideology of the 19th-century Robber Barons was a perversion of evolutionary theory called Social Darwinism. By applying the maxim "survival of the fittest" to the social and economic spheres, Social Darwinists legitimized greed and made a virtue of cutthroat competition. It was bad biology and worse morality—and now it's back.

For the new Social Darwinists, *Homo sapiens* is the only species that matters, and competition is the highest value. Accordingly, they divide the world into winners and losers, and confuse survival with morality. Representative John Mica (R-Fla.) compares welfare recipients to alligators who get "unnatural feeding" from well-meaning humans; his colleague Barbara Cubin (R-Wyo.) compared them to the wolves reintroduced in Yellowstone who would not leave their pens until they were hungry. And if species are going extinct, would-be California senator Michael Huffington suggested last year, it just meant "the Good Lord is calling them home."

To the Neo-Scrooges in Congress and the right-wing think tanks, govern- ment regulation of pollution and

public land, protection of endangered species, even public access to beaches and parklands are all anathema. Why? Because they benefit everyone, including the losers, and by reducing the pain of being a loser, they encourage an unhealthy reliance on government. If the winners want clean air, wildlife, or recreation, the Social Darwinists argue, they can use the fruits of their competitive success to purchase them in the marketplace.

Newt Gingrich and his colleagues claim, of course, that reducing the pain of losers is fine as long it's done voluntarily, and that it is only government coercion they oppose. For many Barons and Baronettes, however, any obligation to humanity or nature—regulations preventing them from polluting rivers and destroying wetlands, for example—is "coercion." When asked if

*America's new rules:
greed is good, winner takes all,
losers become extinct.*



there were any regulations he would keep, Representative Tom DeLay (R-Texas) replied, "Not that I can think of." (DeLay doesn't think DDT should have been banned, either.) The libertarian Cato Institute, which does much of the intellectual heavy lifting for the government dismantlers, not only wants to kill regulations protecting wetlands, but also attacks the entirely voluntary Wetlands Reserve Program. The Heritage Foundation proposes that the federal government get rid of all national parks except Yosemite, Yellowstone, and the Grand Canyon. The Social Darwinists' objection to parks and public lands is that they belong to

society rather than to the marketplace. They see Disneyland as the appropriate model for public recreation, and they see society as the enemy.

Many environmental problems—global warming, the hole in the ozone layer, disappearing grizzlies—are obviously ill-suited to solution by marketplace competition. This is why Social Darwinists constantly deny their gravity, affecting an Alfred E. Neuman, "What, me worry?" optimism in place of common prudence.

In the face of life's more ordinary perils, however, they apply competitive solutions with ruthless consistency. The risk-assessment provisions passed in the first hundred days by the House would have crippled not only environmental protection but the power of the Federal Aviation Agency to set airline safety standards. These free-marketeters would have knowledgeable passengers—winners—protect themselves by avoiding unsafe airlines, which the market will eventually eliminate after enough unwary passengers—losers—die.

The same homicidal economic theories are applied to drinking water: winners who value their health can do market research and buy high-quality bottled water while losers take their chances. If everyone bought bottled, so much the better, according to the Social Darwinists; even though it would cost billions more than ensuring the safety of all tap water, they would rather have the private, competitive marketplace regulate drinking water safety than the "socialistic" federal government. In a recent debate, Representative Mica defended his vote to undermine the EPA's authority to set clean-water standards for deadly cryptosporidium, saying that he wanted to leave the states and cities the "flexibility" to protect their citizens—or not. A majority of the House voted with him.

Another popular maxim of Social Darwinism was *caveat emptor*—"let the buyer beware." Today it is not only buyers who must beware, but anyone who breathes the air or drinks the water.

The regulation-free world being offered us is a world hemmed in by fear. Most Americans do not want to have to worry about drinking from a water fountain or riding in an airplane. Americans do not want to have to buy bottled water or watch their children get sick. They feel free, not oppressed, knowing that United Airlines is not forced to compete with TWA by firing its mechanics.

Nor do they object to public ownership of land. Most Americans are pleased by the idea that they and their fellow citizens own not only Yellowstone, Yosemite, and the Grand Canyon, but millions of acres of forests, mountains, and prairie that they can enjoy without taking out a loan.

Most Americans believe it is wrong to play God by wiping out other species, who have their own right to exist on this planet.

And most Americans want to compete, but they also want to cooperate. Like people everywhere, they are social creatures who enjoy doing things together. They are also more effective that way.

The Social Darwinists know that however well placed they may be, they are still a minority. Hence their interest in minority rule. They would empower a minority in Congress to block tax increases or new safety standards, and give every property owner a veto over zoning laws. Their hope is to cripple our democracy before they lose power, to render the government unable to protect its citizens, so that those who want clean air or safe drinking water or wilderness or beauty will be forced to seek these rights as individuals—as winners and losers—because it will no longer be possible to enjoy them together as Americans. ■

CARL POPE is the executive director of the Sierra Club. He can be reached by e-mail at carl.pope@sierraclub.org

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CLEARLY SUPERIOR

Paul Rauber

Money Where Your Mouth Is

Let's face it: organic produce is not made to be sold in supermarkets. Stacked up next to the perfectly uniform ranks of bioengineered, pesticide-protected, factory-farm produce, it often looks small, misshapen, blemished. Enormous attention, after all, is devoted to breeding conventional fruits and vegetables so that they can be picked by machines, transported enormous distances, kept in cold storage until convenient, and still appear fresh and perky on the shelves of the neighborhood Shop n' Drop. Organic also costs, on average, about 50 percent more, making it less competitive in the marketplace. Maybe that's why most Americans claim to prefer organic produce, but only one out of five actually ever buys any.

What is needed is either a wholesale change in the aesthetic sensibilities of shoppers (unlikely in the near term), or an alternate form of distribution. The farmers' market is a possible solution, and a popular one in many parts of the country. But while it can be fun for the shopper, it has significant drawbacks for the farmer, who must also act as teamster and salesperson, even at the height of the harvest, and whose livelihood is largely tied to the weather report on market day.

In the past ten years, however, a novel distribution method called Community Supported Agriculture has gained a growing share of the organic-produce market. Originating in either Japan or Switzerland (accounts vary), the CSA idea is remarkably simple. Community mem-

bers buy "shares" in a farm and receive their "dividends" in the form of weekly boxes of freshly picked, organically grown fruits and vegetables throughout the growing season. The farmer packs the boxes and delivers them to a centrally located distribution point—often a church, community center, workplace, or garage of a member—whence members take them home to enjoy produce only hours from the field.

"Farming, by its nature, is fairly solitary work," says Jean Yeager of the BioDynamic Farming and Gardening Association, the country's leading promoter of CSAs. "The idea of being connected in a real, tangible way to consumers is something a lot of growers long for. And for consumers, if you go to a farmers' market, the farmer rarely invites you to see his garden. A CSA is not just about vegetables; it's about people wanting a different kind of relationship."

The sort of relationship people want with their string beans varies widely. Yeager knows of at least 160 CSAs throughout the country, and others estimate as many as 400, with memberships ranging from a handful to several hundred. These are no peas in a



Paul Holmes, harvest manager of Terra Firma Farm, a community-supported organic farm in Northern California.

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pod: while all are organic and many are biodynamic (see "Backyard Biointensive," March/April), no two are the same. Some are highly organized, and involve member meetings, steering committees, and group work days. Some are arranged by groups of consumers who draw up budgets and planting schedules, and then find a willing farmer. Others originate from the farm itself, with the farmer calculating total annual expenses and then soliciting enough subscribers to pay the bills. The price of a share in a CSA varies widely depending on local conditions, but generally falls between \$400 and \$750 a year—more, perhaps, than one would spend on conventionally grown produce in a supermarket, but about 20 percent less than retail organic produce.

In a classic CSA, shares are bought in advance, with the subscribers taking on the risk ordinarily borne entirely by the farmer. Should a plague of locusts wipe out the crop, the subscribers would theoretically share the loss. In practice, however, the farmer still feels obliged to fill the weekly box no matter what.

"If you don't have enough variety for the boxes, you're in trouble with the members, because you've made them a commitment that they're going to get their money's worth," says Paul Underhill, production manager at Terra Firma farm in Winters, California (supplier to the Sierra Club's San Francisco headquarters CSA). "All spring we told people that they were going to be getting less stuff because of the weather, but that we'd make it up to them in the summertime."

A bountiful summer, in fact, can tax subscribers as much as off-season dearth. After a particularly cool spring a couple years ago, says Yeager, his Pennsylvania CSA was delivering two heads of lettuce per share twice a week. "We were eating lettuce for breakfast," he says. "With a CSA, you don't only have to share the risk, you have to share the abundance."

For most members an intrinsic part of a CSA is the link between eaters and farmers. Terra Firma surveys its consumer members for their desires (more

potatoes and carrots) and peevs (too many turnips, radishes, and winter squashes), and invites members to visit the farm twice a year. Jean-Paul Courtens' farm (which services one of the country's largest CSAs, with 450 members in New York City and Albany) hosts two festivals each year, as well as five annual workdays where members come to weed, harvest, or simply visit.

"Of course it has to do with vegetables," he says. "But it's also a real impulse for social renewal. In the process, the farm is being cared for, and people are getting good food out of it."

► *To enroll in a CSA in your area, call the BioDynamic Farming and Gardening Association at (800) 516-7797. If you'd like to start a CSA, read Farms of Tomorrow by Trauger Groh and Steven McFadden, which has a very detailed list of resources.*

GREEN PLATE SPECIAL

TOMATOES WITH BASIL MAYONNAISE

If you're already involved in a CSA program, your weekly box should soon be including a wonderful assortment of heirloom tomatoes. Here is an easy way to show them off to best advantage, courtesy of Odessa Piper's L'Etoile restaurant in Madison, Wisconsin.

Basil Oil

Crush some leaves of fresh basil and pour good quality olive oil over them. Marinate at room temperature for at least a day, then refrigerate. The longer the marinade, the fuller the taste.

Basil Mayonnaise

Whisk 2 egg yolks (at room temperature) until thick. Add 1 teaspoon champagne vinegar and a pinch of salt. Whisk in 1/2 cup basil oil, a teaspoon at a time. The mixture will thicken. Continue whisking, alternating a further 3 tablespoons champagne vinegar (1/2 teaspoon at a time) with another 1/2 cup basil oil (1 teaspoon at a time). Add salt and pepper to taste.

Select the juiciest tomatoes you can find from your garden, CSA box, or local farmers' market. Choose three different colors and shapes, if possible. For best flavor, do not refrigerate. Slice and arrange on a plate, topped with basil mayonnaise and sprinkled with chopped fresh basil leaves, salt, and freshly ground pepper. ■

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Marc Lecard

Notes From Underground

When we lived in Oakland, California, in a neighborhood otherwise remarkable only for its high density of used-car lots, we were lucky enough to have a cityfied creek flowing by our house. It wasn't very deep, except during heavy rainstorms, when it would foam and race. Then we'd walk down to the banks and monitor its rise, a little apprehensive but secretly glad to be witnessing something wild and unruly.

The best thing about this stream—called "Glen Echo Creek" on an old map, but known locally just as "the creek"—was that its banks were natural, not cast in concrete. The creek entered and left our neighborhood in culverts, but for several blocks it flowed through natural grassy banks, meandering among madrones and laurels and redwoods. It made an opening in the paved heart of the city; it was a window on another landscape.

From the perspective of many urban planners or developers, creeks are nothing but trouble. Water goes where it wants to; sometimes that includes basements, roadways, and backyards. To protect against flooding and provide maximum buildable area, watercourses in cities have been diverted, channeled, and driven out of sight.

But a growing number of city dwellers are finding that the dangers are exaggerated and the pleasures worth the minor risk. They've begun bringing buried creeks to light and restoring neglected waterways to their former glory.



Our creek owed its above-ground existence to local architects and planners influenced by the turn-of-the-century "City Beautiful" movement. Wanting to soften this rapidly growing metropolis, they envisioned creeks flowing through landscaped boulevards, all leading to a central lake surrounded by green parkland. Their grand design was never fully realized; a few creeks, several blocks of landscaping, and the lake itself remain. These remnants provide a pleasant contrast to nearby areas designed primarily to accommodate the automobile.

Wildlife can be abundant in and along urban streams, if you're willing to think small. Insects, minnows, crayfish, and other aquatic creatures can thrive, in turn attracting birds to the area—you may not add many rare sightings to your life list, but streamside birdwatching makes a nice change from the pigeon parade. Raccoons and other four-leggeds may also visit city creeks. Native plants, sometimes unseen for years inside city limits, may grow

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mean streets a stream
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again on restored urban streambanks.

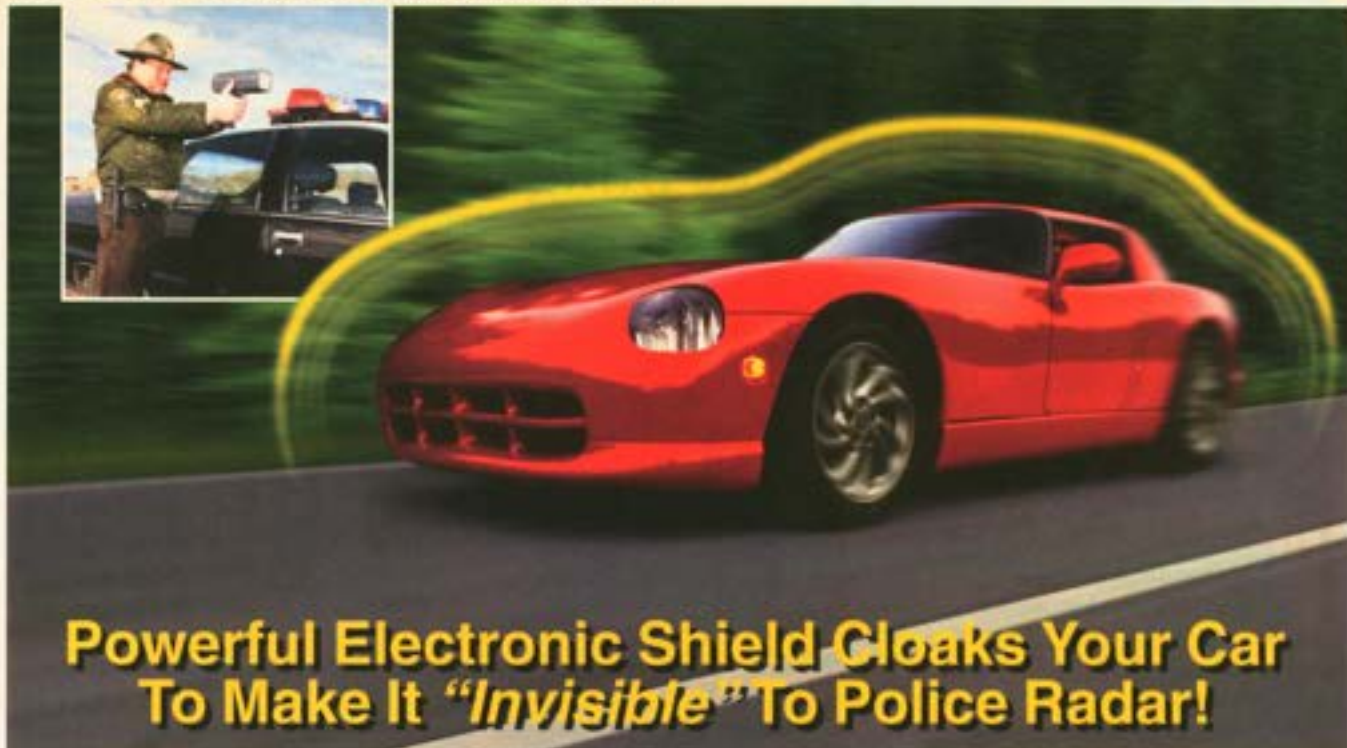
Digging up a creek is not as simple as taking a pickax to the sidewalk in front of your apartment building, however. First you'll have to find out exactly where the creek is, where it comes from and where it goes, and exactly which city agency is responsible for it. And you'll have to maintain it—plant the banks, keep the streambed clear of trash, maybe work on flood and erosion controls. Obviously you won't be able to do this all by yourself; you'll need to contact neighbors and form a group like those that have been springing up all across the country. In the San Francisco Bay Area, for example, the Urban Creeks Council offers advice, education, and resources to people trying to revitalize urban creeks; there are also several neighborhood organizations for the folks who get down in the mud and remove shopping carts and discarded tires from streambeds, research the location of subterranean flows, and write to water departments, urban planning offices, and local politicians.

Organizing the neighborhood to restore a local waterway offers an opportunity to restore community as well. In the often fragmented and alienating urban environment, a creek can serve to bring people together: knee-deep in mud, grappling with weeds and debris, the ordinary separations and hesitations of city life do not obtain.

An important part of understanding your surroundings, according to the bioregionalists, is to get to know the watershed you live in, to be able to trace a drop of rain from the spot where it falls on a hillside to the point at which it enters the sea. Somewhere along its journey it will pass through that creek flowing by your house. Freeing creeks from their entombment is one way of connecting with a world of nature that, too often, seems to be lost among the crowds and concrete of the city. ■

► *The Urban Creeks Council, 1250 Addison St., Suite 107 C, Berkeley, CA 94702; (510) 540-6669, is a nonprofit group devoted to educating the public about urban creeks and supporting creek restoration projects.*

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Michael Castleman

The Sting of Summer

Environmentalists are generally the last people to douse themselves with chemicals bearing tongue-twister names. But for summertime outings, there's one chemical even the most toxics-conscious tend to slather. It's N,N-diethyl-m-toluamide, a chemical better known as "deet," the active ingredient in Cutter's, Deep Woods Off!, Tick Garde, and most other commercial insect repellents.

Developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in the 1950s, deet is the most effective insect repellent currently available. Some 200 million people apply it worldwide each year, and adverse reactions are rare.

But deet is not hazard-free. The chemical penetrates the skin and enters the bloodstream readily. Since 1961, when the *New England Journal of Medicine* published the first report of brain damage apparently related to the use of deet, several case studies have suggested that deet should be used cautiously. After being liberally treated with deet for several weeks, six girls under the age of nine developed toxic encephalopathy, and suffered convulsions. One died. Brief deet exposures have also been blamed for seizures in several other children. In adults, the chemical has been linked to less severe neurological problems, most often irritability, confusion, and insomnia.

Concerns about deet have increased since the late 1980s, when worries about ticks spreading Lyme disease spurred the public to apply bug repellents more frequently and liberally. In recent years, the health departments of New York, New Jersey, and Utah,



as well as the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have all issued warnings about the possible hazards of overzealous application of deet.

So what's an outdoorsperson to do? One approach is to wear lightweight, long-sleeved shirts and long pants, and spray deet on your clothing instead of on your skin. That way, little if any deet has a chance to get into your bloodstream.

Another strategy is to select a deet product with a modest concentration of the chemical. While you'll find plenty of potions on the shelves with deet concentrations as high as 95 or 100 percent, several state public-health departments recommend formulations with no more than 30 percent. The American Academy of Pediatrics goes further, recommending that children use repellents that have 10 percent or less deet, such as Off! Skintastic (7.1 percent), or Skedaddle! (9.5 percent), even though such products are considerably less effective.

Doubts about deet have led to the devel-

*Heading outdoors?
Arm yourself for
the mosquito wars.*

■ ■ ■

opment of several plant-based insect repellents. Since plants have neither arms to brush off insects nor legs to flee them, some have evolved aromatic oils to thwart predators. Anise, basil, catnip, eucalyptus, garlic, pennyroyal, and tansy have all long been used as insect repellents. (Pennyroyal oil is often the active ingredient in herbal flea collars and similar natural pet-care products.)

Most commercial plant-based insect repellents, however, use the oil of citronella, a lemon-scented Asian grass now cultivated in the tropics worldwide. Citronella oil's main problem is that it evaporates rapidly, allowing the bugs it repels to quickly return.

One company, Biopharm Labs, claims to have solved that problem by using a modified version of the oil in a glycerine-based lotion called Treo. Unlike most natural insect repellents, Treo is registered with the EPA, meaning that the manufacturer has supplied the government with required safety and efficacy data. In this case, Biopharm contracted with University of Utah entomologists specializing in ticks and other biting insects to test Treo head-to-head against deet. They found it as effective as Cutter's and Deep Woods Off! in repelling mosquitoes and biting flies, and as effective as Tick Garde in repelling ticks. It should be noted, however, that *Consumer Reports* says even the best deet products deter ticks only 75 to 87 percent of the time, and the Lyme Disease Foundation cautions not to rely on repellent alone.

The Treo formula is also found in Avon's Skin-So-Soft Moisturizing Suncare Plus, a product developed after the company's Skin-So-Soft bath oil had acquired a largely unwarranted word-of-mouth reputation as an effective non-deet insect repellent.

Whether you rub on a plant-based repellent or just wrap yourself in comfortable clothing, you don't have to choose between deet and an armful of mosquito bites. For people seeking a chemical-free walk in the woods, that idea is a natural. ■

MICHAEL CASTLEMAN is a Bay Area writer on health and the environment.

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Absolution for Polluters

By law and custom, certain classes of communication in our society are confidential. These include discussions between attorney and client, doctor and patient, cleric and penitent, husband and wife. Now, state governments across the country are extending official secrecy to a new class of speech: the internal reports in which polluting industries confess their sins.

Most modern industries conduct routine "environmental audits" as a matter of course. They do so not only to satisfy state and federal regulators, but to improve their own processes. Pinpointing instances of waste or contamination, experience has shown, isn't just good for the environment, it's good for business: reducing energy use, improving quality, and averting product liability suits all accrue to the bottom line.

By law, some of this information must now be shared with regulators. There remains, however, a very large "gray area" of technical reviews, safety and health analyses, sampling data, and cost/benefit studies, access to which is currently ambiguous. Seizing on the anti-regulatory fervor in Washington and the statehouses, some industries—particularly in low-tech, high-pollution sectors such as oil and gas, pulp and paper, mining, and toxic chemicals—are now pushing to have their dirty secrets shielded from public view through what's called "audit privilege" (although "pollution secrecy" would



be more apt). In most versions, access to a company's internal environmental reports would be denied not only to its neighbors and the news media, but to law enforcement agencies and the courts as well—even in criminal cases or when innocent victims have suffered health and property damage.

"The difference between civil and criminal violations in most environmental cases is knowledge," says Ross Vincent, chair of the Sierra Club's Environmental Quality Strategy Team. "If company executives knew about the illegal pollution and didn't do anything about it, they could go to jail." For hard-core corporate polluters, environmental audits can be smoking guns—and audit privilege is a "get out of jail free" card. Going to jail instead, in some versions of the bill, would be the whistle-blowers, reporters, or even victims who dared to reveal the contents of an audit.

Why should polluters have the right to

*Easy forgiveness
for industry's
dirty secrets.*

■ ■ ■

keep their crimes a secret? During the debate on the Missouri bill, state Representative Gary Marble (R-Neosho) blurted out the bottom-line rationale: "Because businesses and industries pay more taxes than common citizens," Marble said, "they should be granted more rights."

Those with fewer rights include the predominantly poor and minority neighbors of polluting facilities who will bear the brunt of these bills. Many of their communities have been struggling for—and winning—"right to know" ordinances, which will be at least partially superseded by this new type of legislation. In addition, they will no longer be able to sue polluting facilities like the Georgia Pacific pulp mill on the Leaf River in Mississippi. There, a community lawsuit forced the company to disclose internal documents, some linking dioxin with cancer and birth defects, others speculating on the economic advantages of continuing to poison its neighbors.

"Georgia Pacific was saying it was in compliance while all the damn fish died," says Sierra Club representative Louie Miller. "If this legislation had been in effect then, those people downstream would never have known what they were being exposed to."

Thus far industry has shown great solidarity on the audit privilege issue, despite the fact that the benefits are reaped primarily by a handful of bad actors, and that it runs directly counter to multimillion-dollar public-relations efforts designed to demonstrate environmental openness and sensitivity, such as the Chemical Manufacturers Association's "Responsible Care" program. "This is going to drive a stake through the heart of efforts by industries to build better relations with communities," predicts Vincent. Why, after all, should anyone believe they're trying to act responsibly when they hide their operations from the public? "Responsible Care," it turns out, is not nearly so attractive as "Hide and Seek."

Promoters of pollution secrecy bills persist in their claim that once companies are allowed to do environmental audits free from fear of regulatory or

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legal reprisals, they will clean up their acts and become shining green corporate citizens.

"Yeah, right," scoffs Ken Midkiff, the Club's lobbyist in Missouri, where a coalition of labor and environmentalists has turned back a proposed audit privilege law. "Industries clean up their acts because the laws of the United States and the state of Missouri require them to do so because they are screw-

ing up the planet. If they don't comply, they should be subjected to fines and penalties."

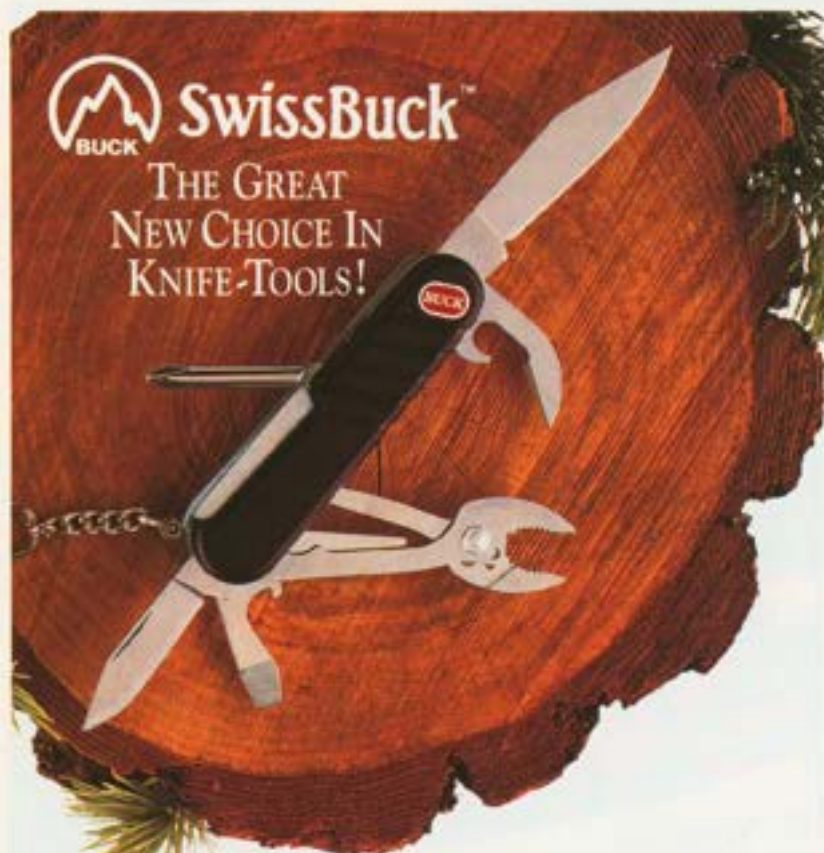
As commonly drafted, pollution secrecy legislation affords industry absolute immunity from a wide variety of sins, because the bills never define what sort of information may or may not be contained in the audit report. "It creates a situation in which reports can be dumping grounds for every bit of damaging information a company may have," says Vincent. "In some cases, a

polluter could quickly conduct an audit after it finds out it is the target of an external enforcement investigation. And in most if not all bills, there is nothing to prevent irresponsible managers from scheduling audits to follow scheduled willful violations."

To date, polluters have had their way in Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Minnesota, Mississippi, Oregon, Utah, Virginia, and Wyoming, while tough lobbying by the Sierra Club and other groups has turned back pollution secrecy bills in Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, Missouri, Montana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and West Virginia. Similar bills have also been introduced in both houses of Congress. This spring, in an attempt to head off the pollution secrecy juggernaut, EPA Administrator Carol Browner offered to waive punitive fines for violations caught and corrected after environmental audits and to refrain from referring such violations to the Justice Department for prosecution. She did not agree, however, to the impenetrable curtain of secrecy desired by polluters. (By contrast, new rules for environmental audits in Germany mandated that results be made public and that companies with positive audits be rewarded with a special label that they could use in advertising.)

Yet even the EPA's half-measure could be swept away should pending legislation pass through the current polluter-friendly Congress. Audit privilege bills have been sponsored in the Senate by Mark Hatfield (R-Ore.) and in the House by Joel Hefley (R-Colo.). Both bills (S.852 and H.R.1047) would confer on polluters the ability to confess their sins to themselves, and then offer absolution: Go thou, child, and pollute some more.

► Ask your representatives in Congress to oppose the Hatfield and Hefley bills cited above. Call Capitol Hill at (202) 224-3121, or write the U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C. 20510, or U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515. Many states are also still considering such bills; check in with your local Sierra Club chapter or call Paula Carrell at (415) 923-5668.



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Stacking the Deck for Extinction

*Congress holds its
kangaroo (rat) court*

As a hostile Congress rushes to judgment on the Endangered Species Act, truth and fairness are as much at risk as condors and manatees. At blatantly stacked "hearings" held in natural-resource-dependent rural districts throughout the country this spring, a congressional task force systematically solicited unverified, anecdotal evidence from opponents of the act, while simultaneously excluding scientists, environmentalists, government officials, and anyone else whose views did not support its preordained conclusion.

The "fast track" of ESA revision was mandated by House Resources Committee Chair Don Young (R-Alaska), who wanted to gather testimony from "real people" (i.e., not environmentalists or scientists) affected by the law. Under normal circumstances, such hearings would be conducted by the Fisheries, Wildlife, and Oceans Subcommittee, headed by Representative Jim Saxton (R-N.J.). But since Saxton supports the Endangered Species Act, Young created a new body headed by Richard Pombo (R-Calif.) that includes many of the most anti-environmental voices on Capitol Hill.

Since Pombo's "task force" is not a regular congressional subcommittee, it does not consider itself bound by the usual rules of balance and decorum. At the April 29 hearing in Stockton, California, for example, Pombo stood by while grade-school kids working to protect the endangered fairy shrimp were booed and heckled by a hostile crowd of Central Valley farmers. (Of 25 invited witnesses at the Stockton hearing, only 4 were in favor of the ESA.) At the hearing in Belle Chasse, Louisiana, Representative Wes Cooley (R-Ore.) even threatened a pro-ESA witness from the Louisiana Wildlife

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Federation: "Don't come to Oregon," Cooley warned, " 'cause you'll be in trouble." The task force purposely avoided hearings in urban areas with strong environmentalist presences, seeking out instead rural districts where Wise Use forces were strongest. Even so, at many hearings supporters of the Endangered Species Act still outnumbered opponents—at least in the audience.

It was a different story on the invita-

tion-only panels. At Belle Chasse, where the ESA hearing was combined with a hearing on wetlands regulation, John Chaconas of St. Amant, Louisiana, was abruptly disinvited when Pombo learned that he planned to testify in support of regulation, rather than against it. Pombo's confusion was understandable, since his colleague Billy Tauzin (D-La.) had been promoting Chaconas as a victim of government "arrogance." In the testimony he was prevented from giving, however, Chaconas blamed his

problems on *lack of enforcement* of wetland policy: "The fact is my family and I have been played as pawns by politicians to justify their opposition to current wetlands law," read Chaconas' prepared statement. "If existing policies and regulations had been enforced I would not need to be here today."

After their labors, task force members adjourned to dine at Armand's in New Orleans' French Quarter—courtesy of the Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation, Midcontinent Oil and Gas Association, the American Sugar Cane League, and the Louisiana Land and Exploration Company. A week later, after a hearing in the middle of cattle country in Boerne, Texas, Pombo's posse was fêted by the Texas Cattle Feeders Association, the Texas Sheep and Goat Raisers, the San Antonio Farm and Ranch Real Estate Board, and the Texas Association of Builders.

So determined was the task force to avoid expert testimony that it canceled a previously scheduled meeting in the Maryland district of Wayne Gilchrest (the only pro-ESA Republican on the task force) after discovering that he had invited Harvard biologist E. O. Wilson and Atlanta zoo director Terry Maple. Pombo's explanation for calling off the meeting was that the hearings were intended to be restricted to "ordinary Americans" (a group including Leighton Steward, chair of the Louisiana Land and Exploration Co., one of the 400 largest companies in the country, who testified at Belle Chasse). "Dr. Terry Maple doesn't look like a scary guy," the *Atlanta Constitution* later editorialized, "but the well-respected director of Zoo Atlanta apparently frightens some people nearly to death."

Wherever Pombo's task force went, it was met by large crowds of environmentalists, including hundreds of Sierra Club activists, who had their say to the media if not to their elected representatives. Even some task force members were distressed by the flagrant lack of fairness and balance. "There has been no effort to be objective," declared Representative Bruce Vento (D-Minn.), the panel's strongest environmentalist voice. "I find the whole

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process offensive and a waste of time."

"I have never seen so many people afraid of information in my life, [or] so extravagantly funded by interest groups that stand to make a lot of money from misinformation," Gilchrest told the *Baltimore Sun*. "To throw the whole thing out without even knowing what you've lost, that's the tragedy of this."

—Paul Rauber

► Call or write your representative and senators in support of a strong Endangered Species Act (see page 28 for addresses), and ask President Clinton (202/456-1414) to veto any weakened version.

Jesse Helms' Family Plan

*The rich get richer,
the poor get pregnant.*

Introducing Pakistani leader Benazir Bhutto to his colleagues recently, Senator Jesse Helms pronounced her "the distinguished prime minister of India." The head of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee seems no less muddled on the subject of international population stabilization. In March, Helms (R-N.C.) unveiled a plan to shut down the U.S. Agency for International Development, the federal government's main vehicle for dispensing foreign aid. Among its many efforts, the agency has helped an estimated 50 million couples worldwide choose the size of their families through its population program.

Helms' scheme calls for USAID's 50 missions abroad to be closed, and its programs to be taken over by a sketchily defined International Development Foundation, which would hand out grants to nongovernmental organizations and volunteer groups. "The foundation will have a sunset provision," says Helms' office, "so that the American people can be sure foreign aid is not a perpetual entitlement."

Like the domestic Contract With America, Helms' "fundamental and

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revolutionary reinvention of America's foreign-policy institutions" simply shifts resources to corporate entitlements. Backed by House Speaker Newt Gingrich and Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole, Helms' plan sidetracks programs to help the poor while making "export promotion a central function of our nation's foreign policy," thus steering control of billions of taxpayer dollars to the corporate sector. The result could devastate international efforts to head off spiraling population growth.

"The danger is that family planning assistance will fall through the cracks," says Karen Kalla, Washington director of the Sierra Club's population program. Family planning, she fears, would become "the orphan" of a revamped State Department, without the money, the ties to local health-care professionals, or the experience to give adequate help to couples wishing to limit their number of children.

While Helms touts his plan as a

strictly cost-cutting move, he is known for his long-held hostility to reproductive rights. On the first day of the Senate's 1995 session, for instance, he introduced legislation that declares that the Supreme Court "erred" in *Roe v. Wade* and that would ban federal funding for virtually all abortions. He also opposed U.S. participation in last year's United Nations population conference in Cairo, where delegates from 180 countries and hundreds of nongovernmental organizations agreed on the need to increase funding for family planning. Perhaps not coincidentally, Helms' proposal would wipe out the State Department job of former Colorado Senator Tim Wirth, who led the U.S. delegation to Egypt.

In spite of the threats to USAID's existence, Wirth's future, and its own budget request for some \$635 million for population programs this year, the Clinton administration has been frustratingly silent on what would be, in the words of USAID director J. Brian Atwood, "the first time in our history that

the executive branch of government was reorganized without its consent."

—B. J. Bergman

► *To ensure continued U.S. support for international family planning, urge your representatives in Congress to maintain the full \$635 million for population assistance. (For addresses, see bottom of page 28.)*

Plutocracy in Action

*Polluting corporations
cut out the middleman.*

The only way members of the 104th Congress could be more accommodating to their corporate sponsors would be to let them sit in their laps and push the voting button. Industry lobbyists are enjoying otherwise complete freedom on Capitol Hill, down to drafting the anti-



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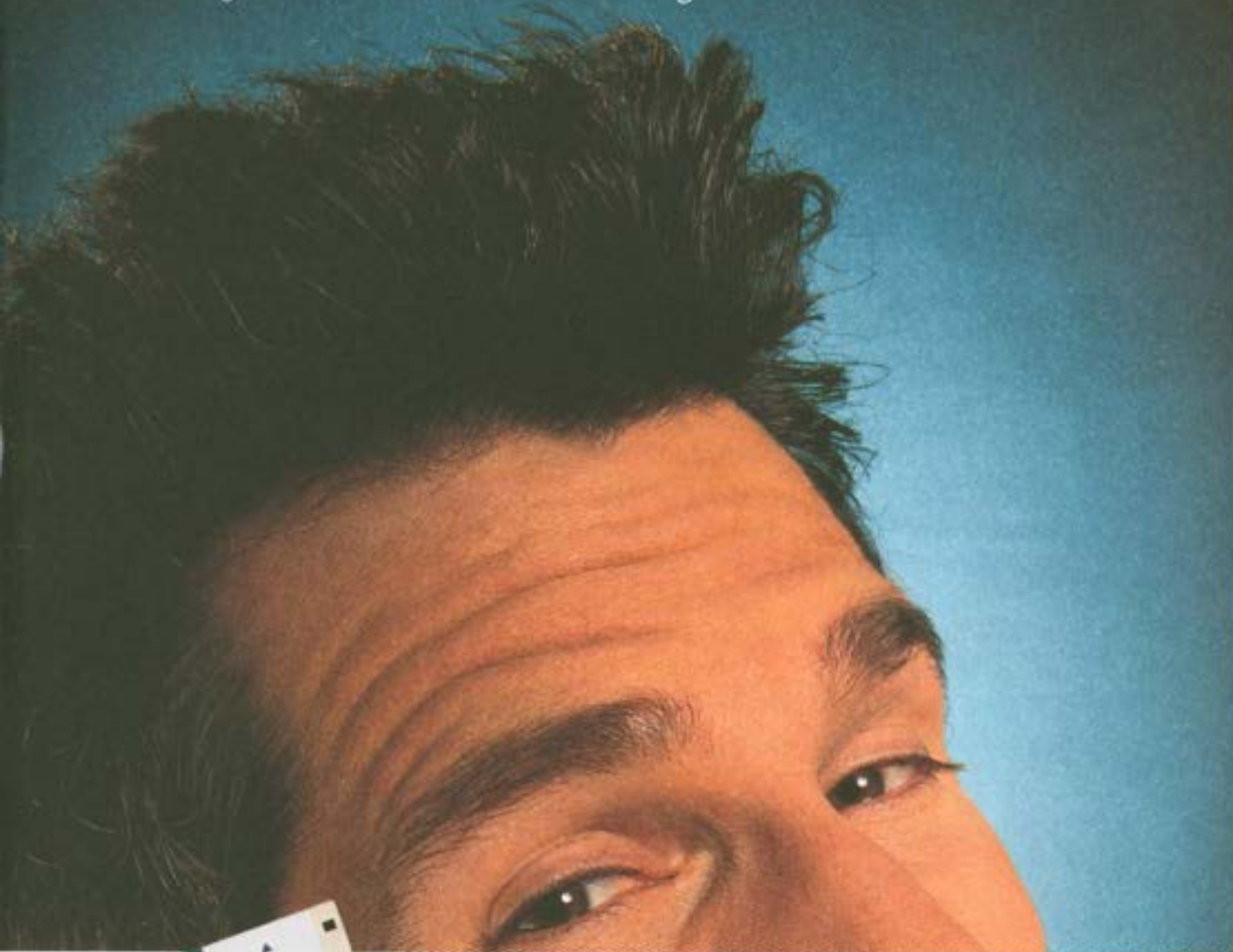
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environmental legislation that their dutiful protégés subsequently attempt to pass into law. Consider these recent headlines from *The New York Times*:

- "Industries Affected by Endangered Species Act Help a Senator Rewrite Its Provisions"
- "Lobbyists Helped the G.O.P. in Revising Clean Water Act"
- "Wood Products Company Helps Write a Law to Derail an E.P.A. Inquiry."

In the first case, Senator Slade Gorton (R-Wash.) let lawyers for an industry group called the Endangered Species Reform Coalition draft major portions of his Endangered Species Act revision. Among other disastrous provisions, it would give a political appointee, such as the Secretary of the Interior, sole authority to say "when, how, and whether to save a species." ("It doesn't undo everything that's been done," Gorton told timber industry executives, "but I suspect it would end up having that effect.") A memo from Gorton aide Julie Kays reveals the pivotal role of the corporate ghostwriters: "The coalitions delivered your ESA bill to me on Friday," she reported to her boss. "It is important that we have a better than adequate understanding of the bill prior to introduction. . . . The bill takes some getting used to." The authors of this legislation include Boise Cascade, Kaiser Aluminum, and the International Council of Shopping Centers; collectively, they contributed \$34,000 to Gorton's reelection campaign last year.

Ralph Nader's Public Citizen has since filed a complaint with the Senate Ethics Committee over Gorton's abdication of legislative duty to industry lobbyists. "It's one thing for industry to urge Congress to change a law," says Michael Calabrese, director of Public Citizen's Congress Watch. "It's quite another for Congress to turn over its law-writing duties to industry."

Another key piece of environmental legislation under attack by the 104th Congress is the Clean Water Act. The executioner is Representative Bud Shuster (R-Pa.), who is rewriting the bill—with a little help from his friends. "[T]he bill's sponsors and a committee of lobbyists worked side by side on the

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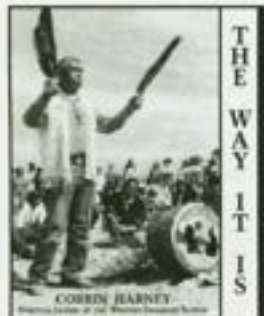
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PRIORITIES

bill," the *Times* reported, "inserting one provision after another to satisfy industry groups like the Chemical Manufacturers Association, companies like International Paper, and organizations of the cities and states covered by the law." The bonbon won by the Chemical Manufacturers Association was a clause saying that they could be judged in "statistical compliance" with the law as long as they didn't exceed pollution levels too often. (By the same logic, drivers might be in "statistical compliance" with the motor vehicle code if they only ran one red light a day.) The paper industry wanted—and got—a provision weakening a new EPA ruling that would have restricted its pollution of the Great Lakes. The EPA was not consulted about Shuster's bill, and was not allowed to see it until it was finished.

The EPA was also blindsided by Senator Bob Dole (R-Kan.), whose staff worked with lobbyists for Georgia Pacific to draft legislation that would de-

rail an investigation of Clean Air Act violations at 26 of its plants. "After the lobbyists nipped and tucked at the wording," said the *Times*, "several key phrases drafted by Georgia Pacific made it into the measure nearly verbatim."

Perhaps the clearest example of the cozy nexus between campaign fundraising and legislative favors is the case of Representative Tom DeLay (R-Texas), or "Mr. Dereg" as he was known in the Texas legislature. As reported in the *Washington Post*, DeLay is the "point man" for businesses trying to undo federal environmental regulation. In the 1994 election season, they contributed mightily to his campaign kitty. "I sometimes overly prevailed" in leaning on the business community, DeLay told the *Post*, saying that he lost count of the amount at about \$2 million. DeLay was then able to use the dough to finance the campaigns of fellow Republican candidates, winning their allegiance for his subsequent election to majority whip. The payback for the business community came when DeLay's mora-

torium on new rules and regulations passed the House 276 to 146.

As the *Wall Street Journal* reported, "Businesses struck it rich during [Congress' first] 100 days; they're just not sure how rich." Rich enough, however, to spread the wealth: *Business Week* found that after the November election industry PACs began dumping money into Republican campaign coffers. "GOP House members received \$170,000 from the top 20 PACs, compared with the Democrats' meager \$22,000," the magazine reported.

Does money buy votes? "I remember the comment of a well-known, big-money-raising state delegate," former Representative Leslie Byrne (D-Va.) told the Center for Responsive Politics. "He said, 'Lean to the green.'" And he wasn't talking about environmentalism.

—Paul Rauber

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**AFTER 100 YEARS OF FIRE
SUPPRESSION, AN INFERNO
AWAITS OUR NATIONAL FORESTS
THIS SUMMER. SHALL WE LET IT
BURN NOW—OR LATER?**

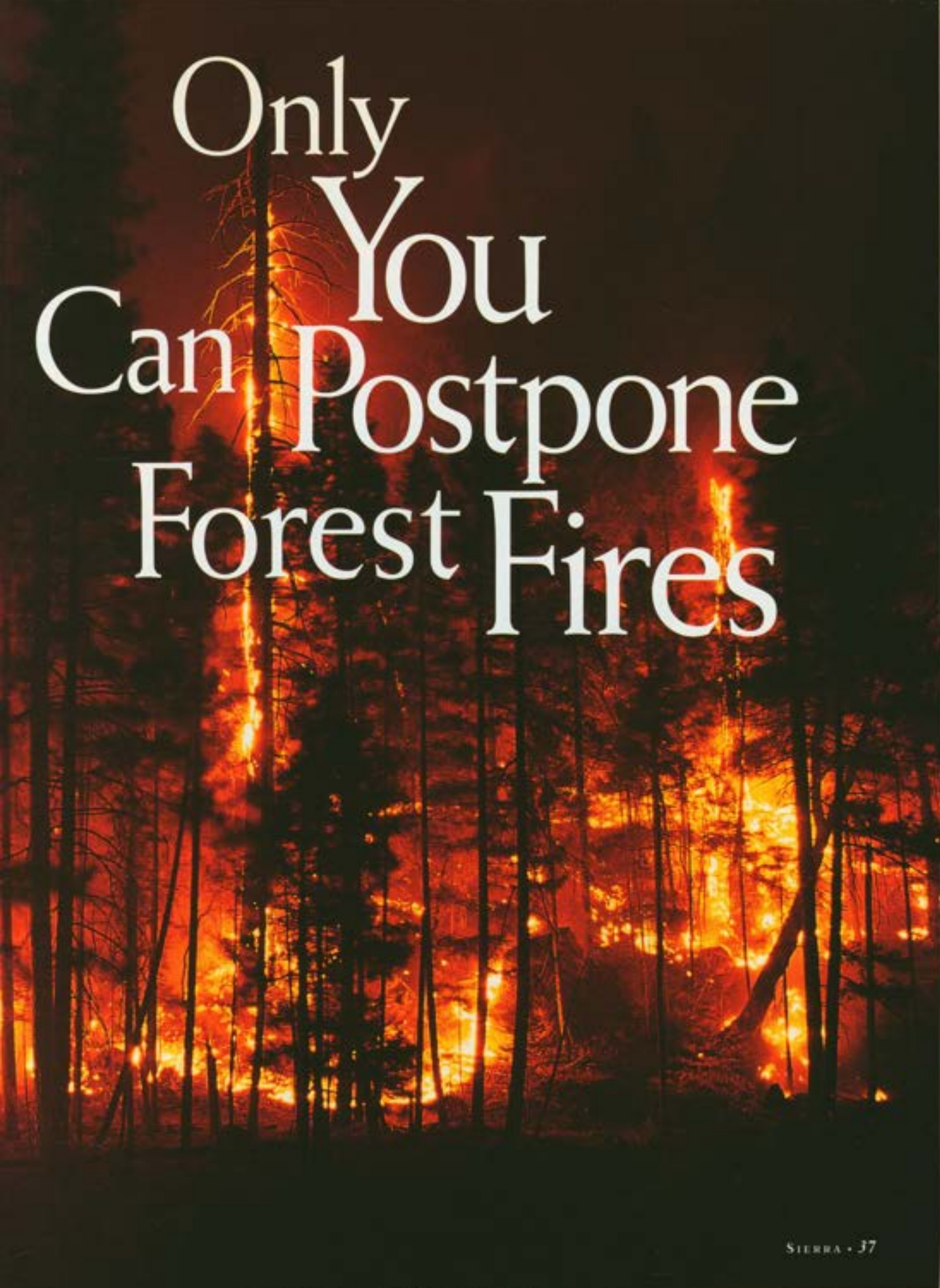
AS A CHILD I WAS TRAUMATIZED BY A FOREST FIRE of unimaginable fury. It was, in fact, the single most destructive wildland blaze the world has ever known, and I was no more than 50 feet from it. I watched in horror as conifers flashed to tinder point and the woods erupted into what ecopyrologists call a "running crown fire." The wilderness was reduced to a smoke-blackened ruin. Squirrels, rabbits, and deer ran in panic; even birds, flying at top speed, were barely able to stay ahead of the ravenous flames. I saw a father entreating his injured, exhausted son to rise from the ground. "Get up. Get up," he ordered. "You must get up!" Painfully, the son obeyed, and with firebrands and burning snags raining around them, they fled to a lake where the son—whose name was Bambi—was reunited with his wife.

About 35 years later I experienced another running crown fire, this time for real. Seven miles up Slough Creek Trail in the northeast corner of Yellowstone National Park, the sky blackened. Explosions, like the banter of distant howitzers, echoed down the valley as mature lodgepole pines were ripped up and slammed to the earth by the rush of air into the vacuum of the charging firestorm. On "Black Saturday"—August 20, 1988—the jet stream dipped out of the troposphere and fanned the flames over 165,000 additional acres, and I, too, retreated to big water. There, at Buffalo Ford in the Yellowstone River, I was reunited not only with my wife but with something that, at least at the moment, was even more exciting—feeding cutthroat trout. The towering convection column of the North Fork Fire covered the sun like a blood-soaked bandage as I shuffled out on lava bars into the main current. Ash flecks and caddis

BY TED WILLIAMS



FRANK S. BULLOCK



Only
You
Can Postpone
Forest Fires

SMOKEY BEAR WON'T SHUT UP LONG ENOUGH TO NOTICE THE NEW BLOSSOMS IN A SCORCHED MEADOW OR THE PINE CONES RAINING FRESH SEEDS ON HIS HEAD.

flies swirled about my neck and shoulders while all around me cutthroats, flanks stained scarlet by the dim, unworldly light, bulged through the glassy surface to intercept floating insects and, now and then, one of my feather imitations. It may have been hell for Bambi and the Old Stag, but it was heaven for me.

Shortly after we left the park, a sign went up at Grant Village warning firefighters to beware of "running bears." Not one was sighted because all the real animals were feeding contentedly or, in extreme cases, shuffling nonchalantly; only Disney animals run from fires. Even the federal government had been educated by *Bambi*, a film identified by Roderick Nash, professor of history and environmental studies at the University of California at Santa Barbara, as "the most important document in American cultural history" on the subject of fire-management policy.

I returned to Yellowstone last summer—six years after the *Wall Street Journal* had reported that the park had been "reduced to a smoke-blackened ruin" and Wyoming Senator Alan Simpson (R) had dressed down the National Park Service for having "destroyed" Yellowstone by tolerating wildfire. The fires, Simpson bellowed on the Senate floor, had "sterilized" the soil, had "blackened [it] to the very depths of any root system." But I saw a different picture in 1994. The paths of the hottest fires—where I had hiked through deep, powdery ashes—now supported a lush, solid carpet of fireweed, pine grass, snowberry, raspberry, elk sedge, lupine, and seedlings of Douglas fir, lodgepole pine, and aspen. I couldn't find a bare spot.

AMERICA'S AVERSION TO WILDFIRE—apparent in our past and current forest management policies—has deep cultural roots. In the late 19th century, forester Bernhard Fernow proclaimed fire the "bane of American forests" brought on by "bad habits and loose morals." Gifford Pinchot, the first chief of the Forest Service, equated acceptance of fire in the forest with acceptance of slavery in the South. Even John Muir lamented that fires did ten times the damage of loggers.

In 1928 the American Forestry Association unleashed its "Dixie Crusaders," who barnstormed the South preaching against the evils of fire. Eight years later Forest Service Chief Ferdinand Silcox announced "an experiment on a continental scale" by which every fire would (he hoped) be doused by ten o'clock the following morning. "Ten a.m. Fire Control," he called it. In the late 1930s the Forest Service even hired an anti-fire preacher who mixed Biblical and government gospel in wailing, ranting sermons. The flames at Pearl Harbor had barely been extinguished when the perpetrators started tossing balloon-borne incendiary bombs to the west wind, the better to consume our Pacific Northwest timber. The devices looked as if they'd been designed by Rube Goldberg and couldn't have been less effective if they had been, but they taught that to tolerate fire in the forest was to support tyranny in the world. In response, the

Wartime Advertising Council hatched a shovel-swinging cartoon bruin that eventually learned to speak through the medium of Washington, D.C., radio personality Jackson Weaver, projecting his voice into an empty waste basket, where, alas, his plans for wildland ecosystems did not remain.



Yellowstone recovery: blackened by the 1988 fire, Swan Flats turned green the following year (above). Opposite page: Near Mt. Washburn, heart-leaf arnica thrives on soil that was said to be "sterilized" (above). At Lewis Lake, a bull elk enjoys the abundant post-burn vegetation (below).



Smokey, like Pooh, is a bear of very little brain. There are, in fact, too few neurons within his noggin to process stimuli from his optic nerves. He can't see the forest or the trees. He won't shut up long enough to notice the lush grove of aspen suckers bursting from a fire-activated root system or the mountain bluebirds nesting in a gutted snag or the new blossoms in a scorched meadow or all the shrubs and deciduous trees releasing dormant buds under the bark of charred branches or even the serotinous pine cones with their resin seals melted away, raining fresh seeds on his head. Smokey never stopped swinging his shovel long enough to perceive that, along with the flames, he was extinguishing ecosystems—Michigan's jack pines, for example, can't re-



produce without fire, and Kirtland's warblers can't reproduce without jack pines. He never figured out that forest fires can only be postponed, never "prevented," and that it is better for everyone—from lichens to fish to owls to bears to loggers—to get them over with on a natural cycle. In just an average workday Smokey did more lasting damage to America's flora and fauna than Japan's firebombers could have achieved had we airlifted them to the Pacific Northwest and put them up in Quonset huts.

Peter's Mountain mallow is a lovely, pink-blossomed perennial related to the hollyhock, whose seeds need to be cracked in order to germinate. When the species was first discovered on a rocky Virginia mountainside in 1927 there were roughly



Only five years after the North Fork fire charred Yellowstone's Madison River country, lodgepole pine seedlings had made a solid comeback.

Mountain mallow. By 1980 the world's population had dwindled to four specimens. In 1992, one year after the National Zoo quietly did away with its environmentally incorrect Smokey Bear exhibit, the Nature Conservancy burned the seed-laced, vestigial habitat of Peter's Mountain mallow. Within a few days the population had increased from 4 plants to 14. A hotter prescribed burn a year later produced 500 more.

According to Don Despain, a plant ecologist with the National Biological Service, Yellowstone's lush new lodgepole-pine forests could not have gotten started without the mineralized soil left by the 1988 wildfires. The seeds, he says, have little resistance to the "damping-off fungus" that lives in unheated forest duff.

Forests on the dry, east-facing slopes of Washington and Oregon were originally dominated by big, fire-resistant trees such as ponderosa pine, western larch, and Douglas fir, whose deep bark is a better insulator than asbestos of equal thickness. Historical accounts describe these forests as open, park-like, and supporting luxuriant grasses important to wildlife. But after 70 years of fire suppression, thin-barked species like grand and white fir that used to be kept in check by slow, low-intensity ground fires have become "fire ladders" to the forest canopy, so that now fire kills the big trees, too. The same process is under way on dry sites throughout the inland West. Forest Service Chief Jack Ward Thomas calls the situation "unhealthy."

50 plants. The site had burned naturally every ten years or so, and the heat had always cracked the seeds. But then Smokey came around in the 1940s and started preventing Peter's

THERE IS NO WORD MORE AMBIGUOUS than "health" as applied to an ecosystem by an ecologist. For example, a stand of diseased, insect-riddled timber is the healthiest of all woodpecker habitats. Thomas, the first ecologist ever to head the Forest Service, understands this, but he is now speaking as a resource steward, a position new and strange to him. By "unhealthy forests" he now means forests incapable of giving humans what they want. "We cannot, in my opinion, simply step back and wait for 'nature' to take its course," he said after the 1994 fire season, the most expensive in the nation's history, costing the lives of 33 firefighters and \$1 billion in federal fire-suppression funds. "I do not believe that what happened is acceptable as a solution to the problem. Fires at this scale and intensity are too hot, destructive, dangerous, and too ecologically, economically, aesthetically, and socially damaging to be tolerable."

Accordingly, the Forest Service is pursuing an aggressive health-care initiative for the national forests. Fuels are to be removed by thinning and prescribed burning, and timber killed but not consumed by fire, wind, insects, or disease—anywhere from 1.5 billion to 2 billion board feet—is to be "salvaged" from half a million acres. Some members of Congress would push the agency even further. The "rescissions" bill that at press time had passed the House and the Senate but had not been signed by the President would triple the agency's salvage target.

For half a century the Forest Service has been diddling and fiddling with our national forests to fix them up—with the general result that it has fouled them up. Now it says it needs to diddle and fiddle to fix the mess. One can't blame the environmental community for being skeptical.

An appalling one out of five of the areas the Forest Service has targeted for salvage cutting lie in wildlands un-

SALVAGE LOGGING ALLOWS ROADS TO BE CARVED INTO THE BACKCOUNTRY, THE LAST REMAINING HABITAT FOR SENSITIVE SPECIES.

scarred by roads. "This health thing is designed to get into roadless areas," says Craig Gehrke, the Wilderness Society's field representative in Idaho. "Either you cut in the roadless areas or you drop the timber cut, and Thomas figures he hasn't got the political power to drop the cut." A "scam" is how Sara Folger of Washington State's Inland Empire Lands Council defines the initiative.

Charlie Ogle, the Sierra Club's national forest coordinator in Oregon, says that the Forest Service believes that this time it honestly knows what it's doing. But good intentions have never protected the national forests. "According to mainstream thought, we're in a heroic battle to beat back nature," Ogle says. "As long as that's the view, we're

Sold to the public as a way to make the best of a burn, "salvage" timber sales—like this one in Montana's Gallatin National Forest—can wreak havoc with streams, soils, and biodiversity.

going to have major environmental problems."

Environmentalists' prescription for forest health involves attempting to mimic nature—not taming or cashing in on it. "Thin-

ning would be a good idea in roaded areas where you have an even-aged plantation—essentially a cornfield of 20-year-old trees—and you want to mix up the species composition," Ogle says. "Where the system has evolved around fire, it's appropriate to reintroduce fire by letting a natural one go or jump-starting the process with a prescribed burn."

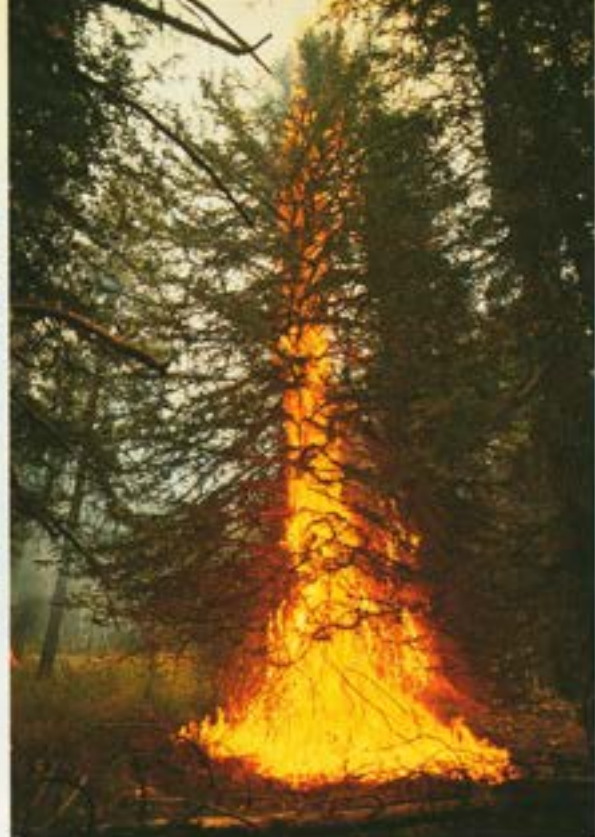
Thinning is also a justifiable fire-suppression tool in roaded areas where the opportunities for prescribed burns have been exhausted. "Take the money the Forest Service spends every summer trying to put out fires and turn those firefighters into fire technicians," says Andy Kerr of the Oregon Natural Resources Council. "Work them all year; let them do thinning, too. But we *cannot* make thinning into a timber sale because the economics of abuse skew the whole process."

Skewing the process like a dough squeezer at a pretzel factory is, for example, the Forest Service's 10.5-million-board-foot Sugarloaf sale, justified as a preemptive strike against wildfire and awarded last August to the Boise Cascade company in spotted-owl habitat high in the roadless headwaters





Thinning small trees can prevent "ladder fires" (right), which move upward to consume bigger, older trees. Useful for reducing fuels near settlements, the technique is inappropriate on all wild, unroaded land.



of Oregon's Siskiyou National Forest. It's another of what the Forest Service and the timber industry keep calling "win-win situations": you hack out some of the healthy old growth, helping out a mill or two in the process, and thereby "fire proof" everything that's left. There is, however, no evidence that such a strategy will work and a good deal of evi-

den that it won't. Old-growth stands tend to be cool, wet, and flame resistant; and if they need any tweaking by man, it's a reduction of the pioneering and less merchantable fir that carries fire to their crowns. According to David Perry, professor of ecosystem studies at Oregon State University, the Sugarloaf sale is "likely to degrade owl habitat and make the stand more vulnerable to wildfire."

Even for an enlightened scientist like Thomas, steering the old guard away from temptations for abuse is going to be a daunting challenge. Consider the seductive features of "salvage logging." Because the public perceives burned forests as "dead anyway," salvage is an easy sell. And, under a provi-

KINDLING A NEW FIRE ETHIC

AS ANOTHER FIRE SEASON APPROACHES, anxiety about fires in the West is building as inexorably as piles of dead wood on the forest floor. Some members of Congress are using this concern as an excuse to suspend environmental safeguards. Agencies are coming up with wise and unwise "forest-health plans" that involve thinning, controlled burning, and "salvage logging." Peering through the rhetorical smoke are conservationists who see both the danger of out-of-control wildfire and the disaster of uncontrolled logging.

Sierra Club activists have come up with the following practical guidelines:

MAKE IT OFF-LIMITS. In those few remaining areas of our public forests that have never yet been cut, logging of any kind should be forbidden, even "thin-

ning" in the name of fire protection and "salvage sales" cloaked as cleanup. Streamside corridors, national parks, and wilderness and other roadless areas should also be closed to timber sales.

LET IT BURN. Naturally occurring fires should be allowed to burn where scientists consider periodic burns beneficial. Decisions to try to put out human-caused fires should be made on a case-by-case basis. Carefully controlled prescribed burns should be allowed in areas where wildfire could pose an unreasonable threat to human life or important biological communities. In areas included in or proposed for the National Wilderness Preservation System, however, the forest should be managed primarily by the forces of nature.

LIMIT SALVAGING AND THINNING. Overzealous salvage logging and thinning have already done far more damage to our nation's forests than fires. Both should be restricted to areas heavily logged and roaded in the past. Neither activity should be above the law.

PUT IT OUT. When fires do pose an unacceptable threat to human lives or communities, prompt suppression efforts should be undertaken.

KEEP IT SIMPLE. Minimum-impact methods should be used to control or prevent fires, not destructive, military-style sieges.

SITE SENSIBLY. Development should be discouraged in areas of high fire risk.

"ACCORDING TO MAINSTREAM THOUGHT, WE'RE IN A HEROIC BATTLE TO BEAT BACK NATURE. AS LONG AS THAT'S THE VIEW, WE'RE GOING TO HAVE PROBLEMS."

tion. A commonly used mechanism called the "categorical exclusion" allows the Forest Service to do away with public participation and environmental review simply by declaring an emergency. And with salvage sales the Forest Service gets to keep receipts to spend on roading and administering new salvage-sale sites, an arrangement that discourages cheaper, more effective medication. Congress' latest salvage initiative will only make things worse, by boosting the salvage cut and exempting salvage sales from regulations protecting fish and wildlife.

The mind-set of the agency Thomas has inherited is revealed in an internal memo leaked from the Malheur National Forest in eastern Oregon. In this astonishing document, dated December 17, 1992, senior Forest Service staff instructed their employees: "Even if a sale is totally green, as long as one board comes off that would qualify as salvage on the Salvage Sale Fund Plan,

In 1988, some Yellowstone firefighters battled from helicopters, scooping up river water to douse the flames (right). Others marched into the danger zone (below).

it should be called Salvage. It's a political thing."

Salvage has much more to do with economics—and politics—than with ecosystem health. There is no justification for it in roadless backcountry where log removal by helicopter is rarely cost effective, where even dead trees shade and hold in place the desiccated, mineralized soil, and where road construction destroys wilderness. Andy Kerr describes such "health care" as "mugging the burn victim."

MOST EVERYONE AGREES that some human intervention is justified in and around the subdivisions that keep pushing up against the edges of public forestland—even if they wouldn't have approved the development in the first place. Here, existing roads can act as fire breaks for prescribed burns, and public ordinances can require homeowners to cover roofs with fire-proof shingles and cut flammable vegetation out from under the eaves. Some progress is being made. California and Nevada now have laws requiring 30-foot swaths around

Continued on page 67



THE WINNER OF SIERRA'S
1995 NATURE-WRITING CONTEST

Looking for Otters

BY SHERRY SIMPSON

At north Bridget Cove, a bluff of slate and greenstone wedges itself into the beach, the plateau crowned by rainforest. It wasn't easy, clambering 40 feet up this stony prow for a better look across the water. Otter biologists call this kind of high, protected place an "altar," and it's true I feel something like a supplicant as I kneel in the moss to study the oddments strewn beneath a twisted young hemlock. My hands drift among the broken shells. A half-dozen sea urchin tests lie cracked into green and lavender hollows. Blue bay mussels scatter in pearly constellations, and chalky steamer clams rest in the downy moss like weathered bones. A few drops of rain-water pool in lustrous curves that once cupped briny, living flesh. The water spills across my hands as I turn the shells over, fingering their coolness.

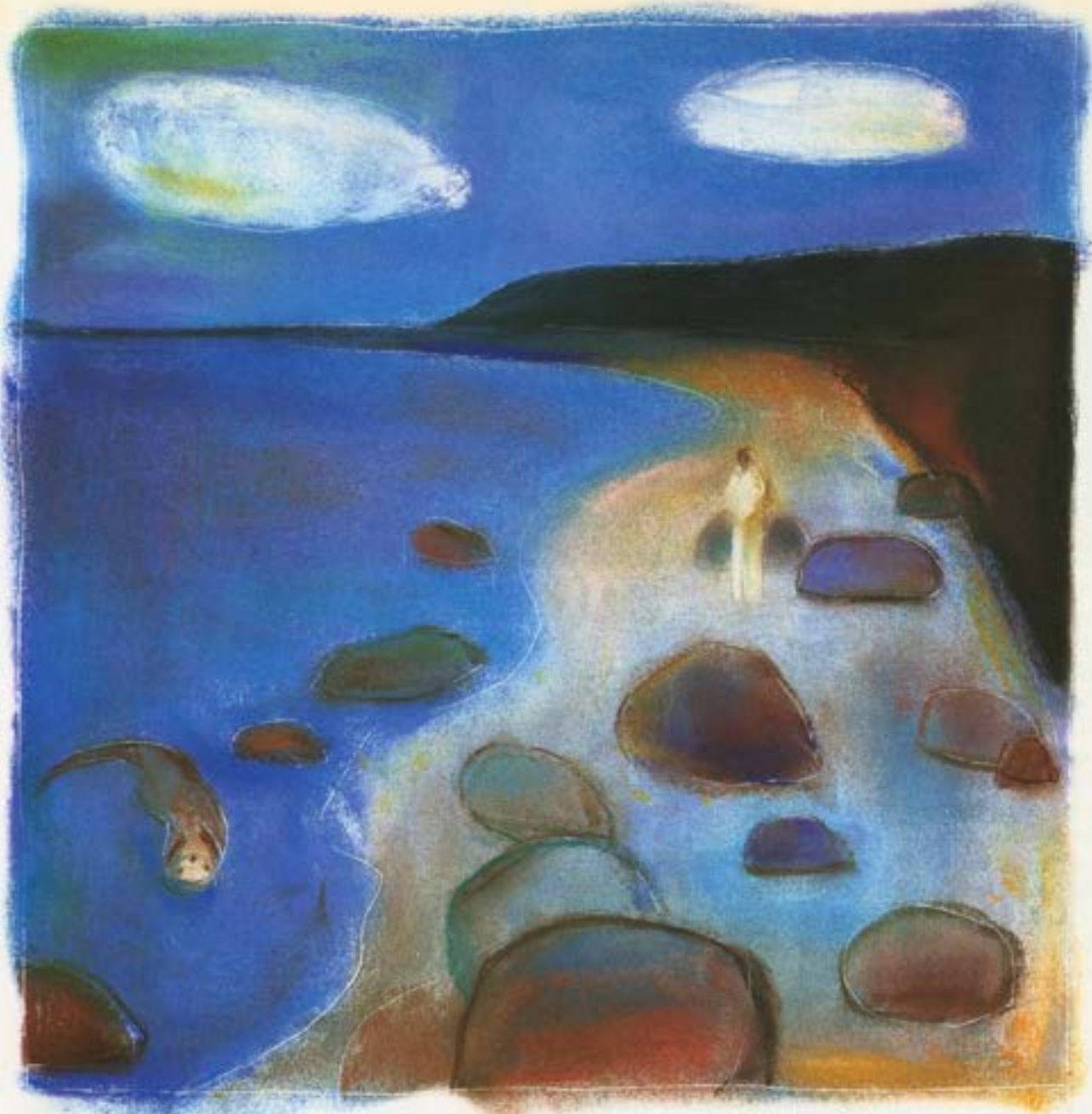
Once it would have puzzled me to find these shells washed up at the foot of trees, so high above the tide line. Now I recognize the leavings of otters, who scampered up the bluff more effortlessly than I. They search out high reaches to eat chitons, mussels, octopi, herring, urchins, crabs, and whatever else they've gathered. Despite the meal's marine character, these were not the sea otters of Southeast Alaska's outer, wilder coast, but river otters. Sometimes people call them land otters, the ambiguity of the name reflecting the way they forage at sea and along rivers, lakes, and coastlines, but den, sleep, and give birth in the forest. Few animals are so fluent in the ways of both water and earth.

I struggle out of my daypack and lean against a rock so I can scan the water. Bridget Cove puckers the coast 40 miles northwest of Juneau in a rumple of rocky beaches and shoals. Mab Island floats a few hundred yards away, a forested buoy that shields the cove from northerly winds funneled through Lynn Canal. The water's surface gathers

rare July sunlight and tosses it about frivolously, like small change. High tide brims against the shoreline. Maybe I'll get lucky. Maybe an otter will come along. It pleases me how easily I can name what I see. I learned something about otters from a naturalist named Richard Carstensen, a man who observes the world with the devotion of a monk and the acuity of a scientist. Richard is the kind of person who each March writes down the exact date that varied thrushes return. He can fit together the Lilliputian bones of a meadow vole teased from an owl pellet, or draw in fine, stippled detail the sassiness of a red squirrel or the wingstroke of a Canada goose in flight. Every scrap of information, every act of attention, weights his ideas about forest succession, glacial uplift, ecosystems. "We're not just tracking otters, or voles, or bears," Richard likes to say. "We're tracking something larger." He calls it natural history, but I'd call it what happens when we're not looking, the way the world shapes and scars and rearranges itself, leaving behind the spoor of glaciers, rainforests, otters.

No tracks brand this high point, but the duff doesn't lend itself to the footprints of otters. I'd know them if I saw them. One misty spring morning, Richard led me and other novices along the banks of the Eagle River, 20 miles to the south. We knelt to study five-toed otter tracks pressed into glacial silt so clearly we could distinguish claw points and even webbing between the hind toes. At three inches or so across the tread, an otter's prints spread large enough to be mistaken for a big dog's. A dog has four toes, though, and usually lacks the sense of purpose revealed in the direct course of an otter.

By learning to read tracks, to name what I see, I understood for the first time the way every living thing somehow inscribes its passage through the world. All we need do is



look for the markings, decipher the signs. Now when I tramp through the tidal meadows near the Eagle River, where the sea floods the delta twice a day, I search along salt marshes and riverbanks for clues. Sometimes the grass reveals where otters have wrestled beach rye into secret beds to mark their territories. Along a grassy dike, rain dissipates otter scat dense with thready fish bones and the rosy splinters of tiny shells, and I kneel to sniff the pungent odor so I will recognize the territory of otters. I peer into shadows eddying below spruce trees, looking for dens hollowed among the roots. Beside sloughs I inspect mud for skid marks that show where otters slip into the water.

Once, near the Eagle River, a friend spied on a family of

five otters frisking on a slide. She described the way they splashed into the slough and then romped back up the bank, over and over. It was as if a magician had parted the curtains for a few moments to reveal backstage sorcery usually unwitnessed. My friend's account of the otters' unself-conscious play pierced me with envy and longing. I have walked and walked along those banks, hoping my steps would somehow pay the price of admission to such a sight. The search leaves me kneeling in the rain, poking at bones, or stooping low to the ground as I follow tracks, hoping that I will look up and see the animal pausing to look back at me.

I suppose by looking for otters, I am trying to name the

world. Porcupine, beaver, marten, and bear: I recognize the eccentricities of their prints. I can distinguish a hermit thrush from a varied thrush by sight and by sound. From afar I know the difference between a sea lion and a harbor seal by the shape of their heads, their motion through waves. Field guides to birds and flowers, mushrooms and mammals, become as books of the Bible (let us now turn to the Book of Peterson). Paging through pictures and descriptions, I try to divine a deeper meaning from names both English and Latin, echoes of my forgotten Catholicism. *Corvus corax*, I murmur at the derisive croak of a raven. *Strongylocentrotus droebachiensis*, I sound out, wondering how the name of a sea urchin can stretch longer than its spines. I intone scientific nomenclature as if reciting fragments of lost poems: *Nereocystis luetkeana*. Bull kelp. *Ursus arctos horribilis*. Brown bear. *Lutra canadensis*. River otter. Say it again, like an incantation: *Lutra canadensis*.

Names are the tracks people leave, autographing the world as we go along, practicing Adam's original trade. We name and name, believing that once we name something, we know it, we own it. It is a comforting act. I think of early explorers in Alaska, who often called strange marine creatures they encountered by the common names of animals already known to them. Perhaps they craved some familiar hold on a landscape that must have overwhelmed them. So the sea otter was known to Vitus Bering's 1741 expedition to Alaska as "sea beaver." Sailors knew the fur seal as a "sea cat" by its long feline whiskers. Russian hunters called the gentle northern manatee a "sea cow" and ate it into extinction within a quarter-century. George Steller himself, the first western naturalist on these shores, lent his name to the sea cow, the sea lion, and the brilliant blue jay that stays the winter. A mysterious creature he glimpsed in the Gulf of Alaska he called a "sea ape." Each creature was likened to some unrelated animal rather than being given its own name, seen for its own remarkable self.

I am no different. I take refuge against the heave and tangle of life by classifying, ordering, sorting out the world and its belongings. Not content simply to admire the pink blush of a certain flower that grows in the shade of a giant Sitka spruce, I hunt through a wildflower guide, comparing photographs, reading descriptions, finally discovering what I believe to be its "true" name: *Calypso bulbosa*. Calypso orchid. And yet, when I look from the picture back to the flower, the bloom trembles slightly in the breeze, not any truer than it was a moment before, nor any pinker, nor any lovelier.

Name all you want, and see where it gets you. What can names reveal of the world? They say nothing of the raven's glottal stops, the urchin's slow creep through life, the supple way bull kelp travels with the tide, the bend of ryegrass before a southeasterly. Naming is a way to assemble the realm before you, the way Richard Carstensen can reconstruct the splintered scaffolding of a vole.

Still, the name is not the thing, just as a five-toed track

etched in wet sand is not an otter. A name, though useful, cannot draw the world any closer, nor make it any dearer. A name, in fact, can veil the purity of sight so delicately that you never notice that you do not see. A sea lion is no lion at all. A brown bear is not horrible. And George Steller walked this continent but a single day before sailing back across the cold Bering Sea, leaving only his name behind.

So I look for otters. I walk along the sloughs, ascend altars, wait by the shore for the world to reveal itself. It did once at Point Louisa, where it is said the Auk Tlingits left their dead shaman on his passage to another realm. On a sunny morning, as I sat on a cold rock just above the high-tide line, an otter slid ashore a hundred feet away, a small flounder clamped in its mouth. I stilled myself. The otter gulped the fish in a few swallows, using clever paws to cram in the white flesh. Somehow the act of eating, the most ordinary and necessary event of life, became something miraculous because I was witnessing a creature completely at ease in its universe, a universe perceptible only for a moment. The otter slipped back into the bay, and I leapt up and scrambled across seaweed-covered rocks to the water's edge. It glided past me just below the surface, a shadow that did not even dimple the membrane separating this world from that. So smoothly, so elegantly, did the animal swim that it seemed an idea given shape and purpose by the sea itself.

What I really want—others confess this longing, too—is for the land to possess me, to name me. Thus the compulsion to recite all the names scribed in all the books, even though the world does not require me to unscroll the register of names, to trace the handwriting scrawled across the universe. Somewhere in the list, I'm looking for my name. But I try to remember something related by Richard Carstensen, who knows much more than names, who paraphrased an observation by literary critic and scholar Northrop Frye: "People spend a lot of time trying to figure out who they are. The real question is not who am I but where is here?" And so I answer:

Here is a summer day on an uninhabited cove scalloped by an ocean perpetually arriving from somewhere else. Forty feet above the beach, on a stone plateau rimmed by rainforest, a woman fingers the cracked shells of creatures that once lived within the clock of tides. Some sleek, dark animal carried them up this bluff, far above the pull of water, and pried them open to gulp the cool, saline flesh. You can call this place an altar. You can name the shells. It does not matter to the woman. She lies against the green mat of living moss and closes her eyes. The sun circumnavigates the sky and the ocean sucks mildly at the shore and a gleaming black bird swoops over the promontory, taking a better look at the world naming itself. ■

SHERBY SIMPSON grew up in Juneau, Alaska, and now lives with her husband outside Fairbanks. Her essay "Where Bears Walk" appeared in *American Nature Writing 1994*, edited by John A. Murray (Sierra Club Books, 1994).



THE 1995 SIERRA MAGAZINE PHOTO CONTEST

C A T E G O R I E S

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Pattern and form in nature's abundance

WILDLIFE

All creatures great and small
in their natural habitats



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LANDSCAPES

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the grandest vistas

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Sierra magazine invites all photographers, amateur and professional alike, to enter our 16th annual photo contest. The winning images will appear in our November/December 1995 issue.

PRIZES: In addition to a Grand Prize, first and second prizes will be awarded for color and black and white entries in each category, unless the judges fail to identify qualifying images.

ELIGIBILITY: Sierra Club staff, their immediate families, and suppliers to Sierra magazine (including photographers whose work we have published since 1990) are not eligible. Photos must be taken and owned by the entrant, and may be submitted in any or all of the listed categories. The \$5 entry fee covers 16 images, no more than 16 images may be submitted overall. Color prints or color negatives from print film will not be considered. For black and white photos, please send prints, black and white negatives will not be considered. Previ-

ously published work, photos pending publication, or photos that have won other contests are not eligible. Void where prohibited.

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DEADLINE: All submissions must be postmarked by August 1, 1995. Sierra's responsibility for loss or damage to any material shall not exceed the amount payable to the magazine under any insurance carried to cover its liability for such loss or damage. We are not responsible for material lost or damaged in the mail.

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His boat—and his community—idled by the closing
of Newfoundland fishing grounds, Bernard Martin
sends a warning to the world. — by Susan Pollack

THE LAST FISH

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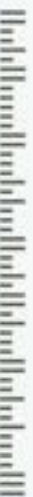
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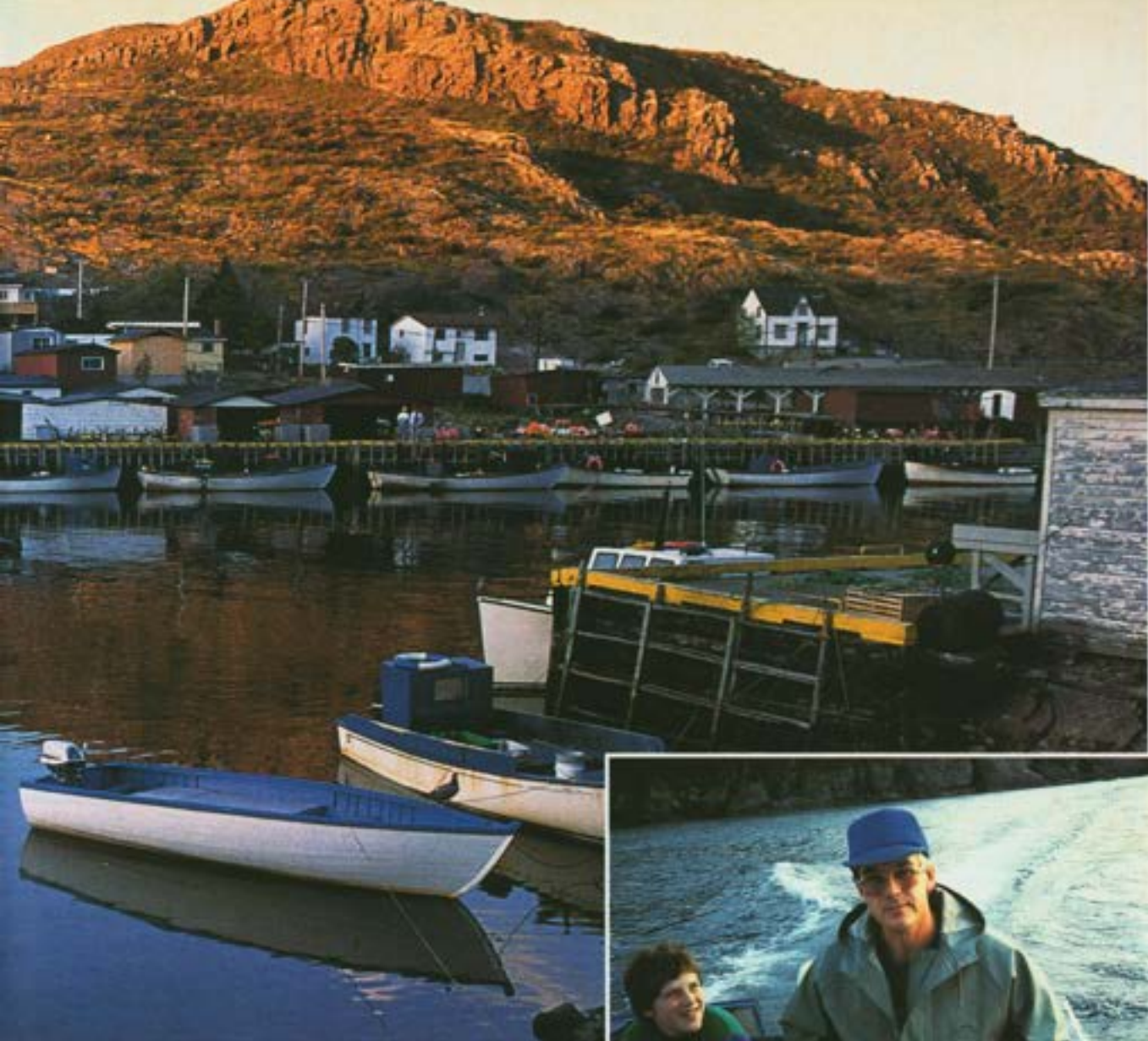
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BERNARD MARTIN is at the stove, slicing garlic and ginger into a wok of sizzling peanut oil. With his black hair, widow's peak, glasses, and baggy sweats, he resembles a shy, rumpled Jack Nicholson. There's no hint of the anger that drives this former fisherman now staring into a future with no fish. Outside his kitchen window are Newfoundland's fog-shrouded fishing grounds. The austere scene—rocky cliffs, black water, and wooden boats—evokes sea ballads, not tales of ecological plunder.

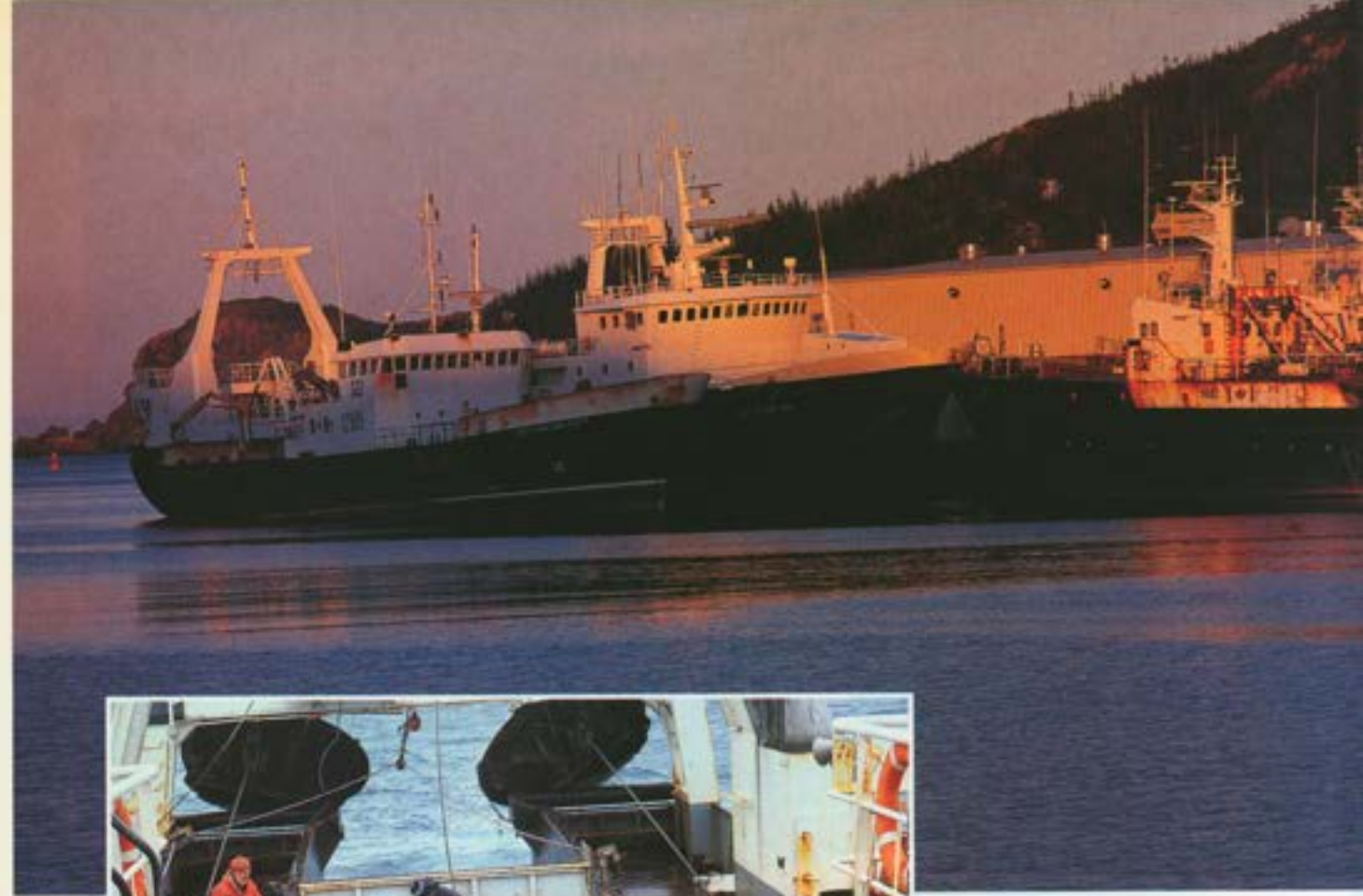
Since Newfoundland's once immense northern-cod fishery collapsed three years ago—causing the Canadian government to ban all cod fishing and putting more than 40,000 people out of work—Martin has traveled as far as New Zealand to warn other nations not to repeat Canada's mistakes. He has publicly challenged Canadian leaders at the United Nations. And he has gone to jail for his beliefs.

"I didn't plan to be an activist," Martin tells me. "When the fishery failed I did the only thing I could do—I began

Petty Harbour is typical of the hundreds of quaint—and now quiet—fishing "outports" along the coast of Newfoundland (top). Bernard Martin, fisherman turned environmental activist, and his son Simon (below).

writing and speaking out. This is not the time to be diplomatic; it's not the time to be meek or humble."

Martin's 11-year-old son, Simon, sits at the table drawing an elaborate picture of underwater fishing lines while his father cooks. Martin's wife and fishing partner, Victoria Silk, has gone to British Columbia to look for work, taking their youngest son with her. Martin does not often speak of the



With ice-breaking steel hulls and advanced electronics, large trawlers such as this one owned by Canada's Fishery Products International can fish year-round (top). The crew of FPI's *Zamora* with a catch of flounder (below).

gardens, drives his son to school, and cares for a menagerie of household pets.

After dinner, when Simon is settled upstairs doing his homework, Martin allows the fiery environmental activist to emerge. He speaks with the tinge of an Irish accent. (In more remote Newfoundland ports, the brogue is so pronounced you would swear you were in Ireland.) Martin

personal loss he has experienced due to the end of the cod fishery, but it's obvious. Overnight the 41-year-old man has become a single parent collecting a government check. Before the fishery was closed, he spent long days at sea. Now he cooks, cleans,

night / Rage, rage against the dying of the light").

"The collapse of the fishery was a rude awakening for a lot of us," says Martin. "We wanted to believe the government would protect us. It was a little like whistling past a graveyard. We were hoping the worst wouldn't happen. But, in fact, we knew in our bones it was inevitable."

The cod gone, all that's left is the arguing over who's to blame. Martin now finds himself working with Sierra Club Canada, Greenpeace, Canadian Oceans Caucus, and other fishermen to tell the world the story of how a high-tech Canadian trawler fleet exterminated the largest cod population in North America—just as hunters with high-powered rifles wiped out the buffalo more than a century ago.

Canada's neighbor to the south has not done a much better job of conserving its marine resources. Last December, the United States closed part of the once-rich Georges Bank

turns to poetry for inspiration as others might turn to the Bible, quoting, for example, Shelley on failed leaders ("Rulers, who neither see, nor feel, nor know / But leech-like to their fainting country cling"). He recalls Yeats, on the eve of Ireland's uprising ("All changed, changed utterly: / A terrible beauty is born"). And he clearly admires the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas, whose words seem tailor-made for his cause: ("Do not go gentle into that good

fishing grounds off the coast of New England. By the end of this year, the U.S. government may be forced to ban fishing along the entire bank because cod, flounder, and had-dock have all but disappeared. (See "Is New England Next?," page 52.)

With thousands of its own fishermen out of work, Canada has made good on its threat to begin policing overfishing on the high seas. This spring, Canadian gunboats seized one Spanish trawler and destroyed the nets of another, sparking an international incident. The fireworks occurred on the coveted Grand Banks, just beyond Canada's 200-mile maritime boundary. Environmental groups, including Sierra Club Canada, have praised Canada for trying to protect the dwindling stocks of groundfish (bottom feeders like cod and flounder), but the European Union, backing Spain, has condemned Canada's actions as piracy.

Newfoundland's story is heartbreaking, but not unique. Other common species of fish are vanishing all over the world. New Zealand's orange

roughly, the Gulf of Mexico's red snapper, the Atlantic's bluefin tuna and swordfish, and the North Sea's herring have been virtually wiped out because no nation has been willing to take fewer fish than it possibly could. As a result, 70 percent of the world's fisheries are commercially depleted, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization.

FIVE HUNDRED YEARS AGO, explorer John Cabot marveled at the Newfoundland waters, so full of fish they could "be taken not only with the net, but in baskets let down with a stone, so that it sinks in the water." English and Irish settlers came to Newfoundland not



Scenes from a vanishing Newfoundland, clockwise from upper right: a local boat's brail full of cod; unloading the day's catch at Petty Harbour dockside; a fisherman unhooks a cod from his handline.





Gloucester Harbor, Massachusetts

IS NEW ENGLAND NEXT?

THE FIVE-FOOT-LONG, HAND-CARVED, solid pine "Sacred Cod" that hangs in the Massachusetts state house may soon be an anachronism, and New England's 300-year-old fishing heritage only a memory. Just three years after they were wiped out in Newfoundland, once-abundant cod are now on the verge of collapse in New England.

The cod population at Georges Bank, New England's prime fishing grounds, has diminished by two-thirds since the late 1980s. Another staple of the region's groundfishery—yellowtail flounder—is even more depleted, and haddock is almost extinct.

"We're seeing the same scenario as in Canada," says biologist Steven Murawski of the National Marine Fisheries Service. "The danger," he adds, "is that if the cod population plunges much lower, restoration will be difficult. Right now, the stock is not beyond recovery."

To rescue New England's shrinking groundfish population, in December 1994 the National Marine Fisheries Service banned fishing on part of Georges Bank. But the fish are still dwindling. In the months ahead, the United States could be forced to follow Canada's lead

and shut down all fishing on the Bank.

In ports from Maine to Rhode Island, fishing families are in shock. Some have tied up their boats; others worry that banks will foreclose on them. Fishermen who have fished all their lives are urging their sons and daughters to stay in school rather than go to sea. But finding alternatives is not so easy for a 45-year-old fisherman with no education.

Last year, Washington pumped some \$30 million in emergency aid into New England's beleaguered fishing industry. Recently, lawmakers ponied up another \$2 million for an experimental vessel-buyout program. But an adequate buyout—one that would significantly trim New England's overcapitalized 1,000-boat groundfish fleet—is estimated to cost at least \$100 million to \$150 million.

Meanwhile, in March Massachusetts Governor William Weld asked President Clinton to declare the fishery crisis a natural disaster, a move that would make fishermen eligible for unemployment compensation. (Unlike their Canadian counterparts, most U.S. fishermen do not receive such benefits because they are considered self-employed.) But there's a catch. To qualify, Weld would have to

prove that the fishery collapse is not primarily manmade. Most scientists agree that overfishing is the cause.

It didn't have to be this way. Just as Newfoundland's codfish collapse was foreseen, U.S. scientists predicted the New England catastrophe. More than a decade ago, Murawski and other scientists warned that fishing pressure on cod was twice as high as it should have been.

In the United States, as in Canada, politics prevailed over protection, and the short-term interests of industry won out over the long-term health of marine resources. It took a 1991 lawsuit by the Boston-based Conservation Law Foundation to force the issue. Finally, last spring, the federal government enacted a tough new fishing plan. By then, however, New England's cod, haddock, and flounder had plummeted to the lowest levels ever recorded.

By early 1996, the government hopes to institute a second plan, one stringent enough to stop the hemorrhaging, and begin rebuilding stocks to the level that nurtured a healthy fishery for hundreds of years. With Newfoundland as an all-too-close example, no one can say the United States hasn't been warned. —S.P.

for religious freedom, but for cod. The unglamorous but abundant fish was like Ireland's potato, the staple of the region's remote island economy. It was currency shipped all over the world as salt cod and fillets.

For more than 400 years, Newfoundland's huge northern-cod population supported hundreds of island communities. Newfoundlanders began fishing in spring, when codfish returned to coastal waters, and continued until the first snows, giving the fish a rest in the winter. Women split, salted, and dried cod on wooden racks called flakes. Youngsters Simon's age sharpened knives and cut out cod tongues—a local deli-

cacy. The fishery also filled the holds of Portuguese, French, English, American, and Canadian schooners, whose crews set baited hooks for cod from Labrador all the way to the fish-rich Grand Banks, southeast of Newfoundland.

The trouble began in the early 1960s, when the first fleet of European factory-trawlers launched a massive fish hunt on the Grand Banks. These huge fishing ships towed immense nets, scooping up every fish in their paths. They ravaged the cod fishery 365 days a year—until 1977, when Canada extended its jurisdiction out to 200 miles to stem the destruction of the fishery. The foreign ships gone, the

cod started to rebound. Bernard Martin and other inshore fishermen again saw plentiful schools of white-bellied cod streaming into coastal waters. Few suspected that the northern cod would survive a foreign onslaught only to be decimated by Canadians themselves.

But in the wake of the European factory-trawlers came a fleet flying the Canadian flag. Corporate fishing companies from Atlantic Canada moved in with ice-breaking, steel-hulled trawlers that strip-mined the ocean of fish year-round. Using state-of-the-art electronics, these trawlers can pinpoint and capture every last cod. As they drag the seabed for cod, trawlers also kill clams, scallops, sea urchins, and other bottom-dwelling creatures, turning the ocean floor into a wasteland. More than a decade ago, Martin and his neighbors warned the government that trawlers were systematically massacring cod where the fish are most concentrated and vulnerable: on the spawning grounds.

One of the first to protest was Sam Lee, a short, stocky man who talks fast as we examine idled cod traps heaped in a waterfront storage shed. "If they'd paid attention when we cried 'foul' ten years ago, there would have been no need to shut down the fishery," says Lee. The 44-year-old fisherman spoke out after watching his catches dwindle in the rocky coves as trawlers picked the ocean clean a hundred miles offshore. Even more galling was the waste: every day the trawlers were shoveling overboard thousands of tons of unwanted young fish, known unceremoniously as "bycatch."

Lee helped organize the Newfoundland Inshore Fisheries

Association, which in 1989 sued the federal government to force it to ban harmful trawling practices. They lost in court, but fishermen in Lee's and Martin's hometown, Petty Harbour, continued to publicly challenge government fisheries policy.

Petty Harbour has always been a bastion of resistance. This mountain-ringed enclave, only half an hour's drive from Newfoundland's capital, St. John's, is a world apart, its iconoclastic local laws a thorn in the government's side.

More than a generation ago, Petty Harbour fishermen outlawed destructive practices like trawling and gillnetting. Petty Harbour allows only conservation-oriented fishing gear—old-fashioned handlines like the ones Martin uses and cod traps like Lee's. Until recently Petty Harbour fishermen shunned capelin fishing, since this smelt-like fish is vital food for cod.



Mending nets and waiting for the fish to return.

GOVERNMENT POLICY IS AT THE core of Newfoundland's fisheries problem. Canada's bureaucracy supported and even subsidized high-tech fish hunts because federal and provincial leaders wanted a modern domestic seafood industry to supply cod to international markets all year. The government also had a stake in two private fishing corporations, both heavily invested in expensive offshore trawlers, that it bailed out in the early 1980s. It granted half the northern-cod quota to offshore businesses, which employed less than 10 percent of the fishing population. This gave four or five companies disproportionate con-

Continued on page 72

SIERRA CLUB PROTECTING THE GLOBAL COMMONS

TIME TO FISH OR CUT BAIT

THE FATE OF U.S. FISHERIES AND THE communities that depend on them is now up to legislators on Capitol Hill. Congress is currently debating the reauthorization of the Magnuson Act, the 1976 law that successfully stopped foreign fishing boats from scouring U.S. fishing grounds—while allowing (and even encouraging) domestic fleets to continue the carnage.

The Sierra Club wants a revised fisheries management law that sets "take" levels to ensure stable fish populations and minimizes bycatch—the wasteful destruc-

tion of large numbers of "non-target" and juvenile fish. Club activists are seeking provisions that protect habitat; that means preserving critical coastal rivers, bays, marshes, offshore reefs, and seagrass meadows. The Club is working to ensure that the Magnuson Act's eight quasi-governmental fisheries councils—now stacked with industry interests—provide genuine public participation. Also crucial is adequate funding for management, enforcement, and research. That's a tall order for the current troglodyte Congress,

but Club activists hope that the grim experiences of Newfoundland and New England, along with dire warnings about the imperiled state of fisheries along both the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, will inspire even these legislators to protect the seas.

For more information or to get involved, contact Shirley Taylor, Chair, Sierra Club Coast/Marine Task Force, 1414 Hilltop Dr., Tallahassee, FL 32303; (904) 385-7862; e-mail address: shirley.taylor@sierraclub.org



Trouble

on

Tap

RISE FROM THE OCEANS, RIVERS, AND LAKES, THEN raining back on the land, water moves in a vast circle as broad as the earth and sky. As it washes and flows across the continents, down mountainsides and over city streets, draining from farms, parks, and backyards, water bears with it the story of where it has been.

In groundwater and surface streams it gathers up minerals essential to our health. Along the way, water also picks up insidious substances such as manure, storm sewer runoff, agricultural chemicals, and industrial discharges.

Here in the United States we assume that our modern technology and scientific knowledge keep those contaminants out of our drinking water. In fact, the federal government made that very promise to the American people when it passed the Safe Drinking Water Act in 1974. It strengthened the same law in 1986, and, through the EPA, has set maximum contaminant levels for 84 dangerous substances and pathogens.

Yet 20 years after passage of the law, safe drinking water remains a promise yet to be fulfilled. Some of the contaminant standards set by the EPA are far too weak—weaker than those in other developed countries. Rules for many dangerous pollutants are still being phased in; some poisons are not regulated at all. Among the latter are certain synthetic organic compounds, radioactive materials, heavy metals, pathogens, and the toxic by-products created by chlorination or other disinfection techniques.

Even for regulated contaminants, enforcement is poor. From 1992 to 1994, close to 36 million people received water from systems violating EPA drinking water standards and more than 80 million from systems violating monitoring and reporting rules. In other words, close to a sixth of the U.S. population drank water that was at times polluted and another third drank water of questionable quality.

According to the Natural Resources Defense Council,

more than 53,600 systems violated EPA rules in 1991 and 1992 alone. Together they broke the rules for contaminants 25,000 times and for reporting and monitoring 217,500 times. Yet the EPA issued fewer than 4,000 fines.

The results of this neglect can be deadly. In April 1993 a protozoan called cryptosporidium caused almost 400,000 cases of illness in Milwaukee and left more than 100 people dead. In May 1994, another outbreak of the same parasite killed 19 and sickened more than 100 people in Las Vegas. A survey of water utilities found cryptosporidium in more than 80 percent of the rivers and lakes that supply 66 major water systems nationwide; yet the EPA does not require testing for it.

In 1993, outbreaks of *E. (Escherichia) coli* bacteria in the water supply forced Washington, D.C., and New York City to alert residents in affected neighborhoods not to drink their tap water. The Washington case was tied to a malfunctioning treatment plant. New York's was attributed to inadequate protection of the city's reservoirs from contamination, in this case by bird droppings. Instead of responding to this drinking water crisis by strengthening the law and stepping up enforcement, in 1994 Congress turned in the opposite direction and tried (un-

successfully) to weaken the Safe Drinking Water Act. The current Congress is even less friendly to environmental protection. Hidden within the Contract With America's "risk assessment" and "unfunded mandate" provisions passed by the House early this year are measures that will seriously dilute drinking water protections. New moves to weaken the Safe Drinking Water Act are anticipated. Evisceration of the Clean Water Act, which protects lakes and rivers, is already well under way, as are efforts to increase salvage logging, a practice that would degrade the watersheds in dozens of communities.

Utilities and state and local government agencies

BY SCOTT ALAN LEWIS

If we're so technologically advanced, why can't we safely drink the water from our faucets?

have claimed they cannot afford to meet the requirements of the Safe Drinking Water Act and other environmental laws without more money from either the states or Congress. They complain that these regulations are "unfunded mandates," a charge that has become a rallying cry for anti-environmental extractive, industrial, and development interests as well.

Yet the cost of upgrading antiquated water-treatment systems is a mere \$30 per average household annually, according to EPA statistics. Institutional inertia and a rigid anti-government ideology are much greater obstacles to improving public water systems than budgetary constraints.

The price of inaction is high. Consumers spent \$4.2 billion dollars on bottled water and home purification in 1994. Milwaukee needed an estimated \$54 million to deal with the 1993 cryptosporidium outbreak. Add to that the

H₂O HYPOCRISY

**Eighty-eight percent
of the members of
Congress who tried to
weaken water standards
in 1994 had bottled
water delivered to their
Capitol Hill offices.**

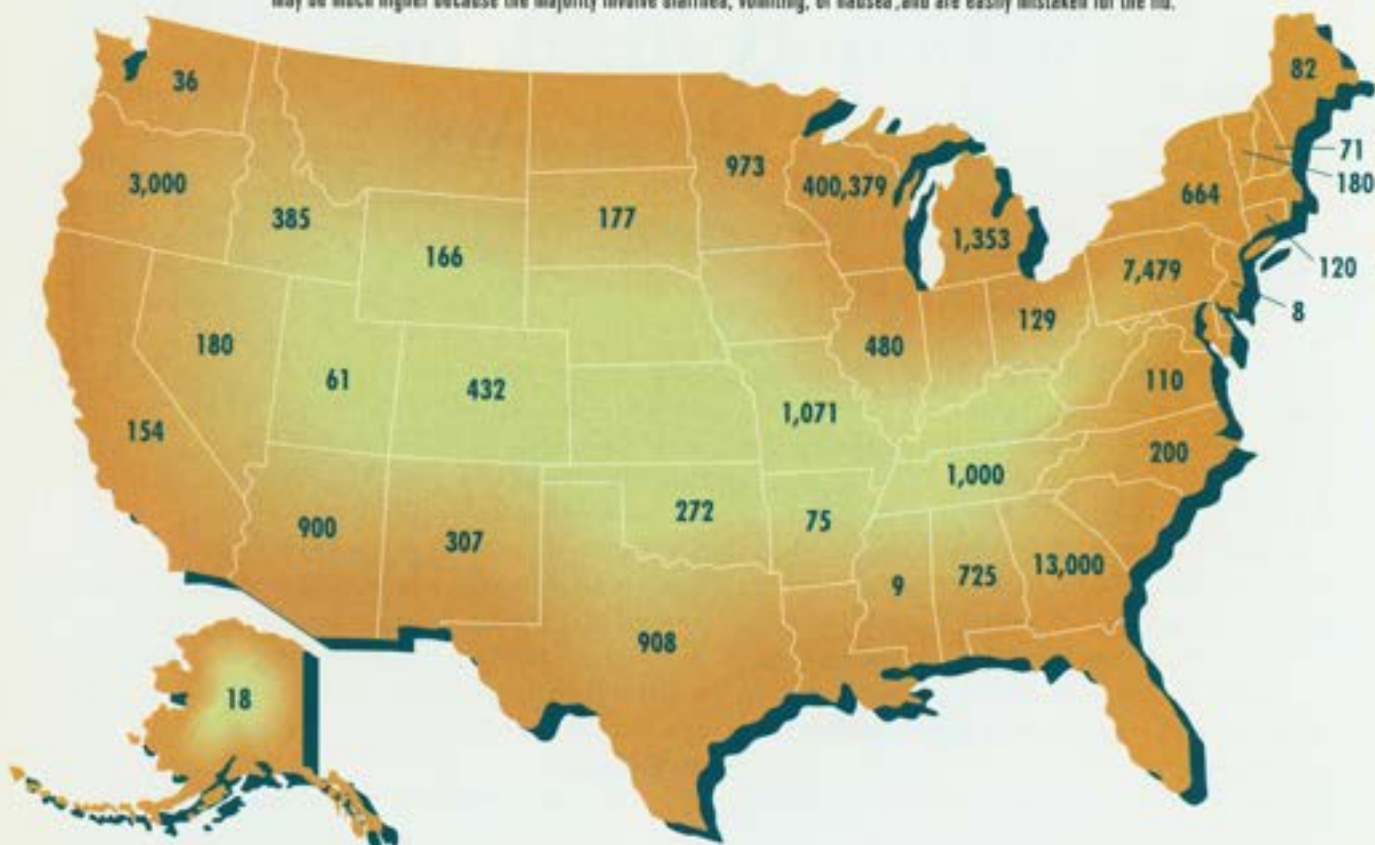
cost of the illnesses, lead-induced learning impairments, and the deaths caused by contaminated drinking water throughout the nation, and investment in water treatment facilities begins to look like a bargain.

The steps needed to improve our drinking water supply are well understood. The problem is not insufficient information or inadequate technology. We know the answers. The only missing piece of the safe drinking water puzzle is legislative resolve. As voters and taxpayers, we must demand that our elected representatives at every level of government commit to providing safe drinking water to all Americans.

SCOTT ALAN LEWIS is the author of *The Rainforest Book* and of the upcoming *Sierra Club Guide to Safe Drinking Water* (Sierra Club Books, 1996), from which this article is adapted.

TAPWATER'S TOLL

The map below shows the number of cases of waterborne disease reported to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention between 1986 and 1994. During these years, a total of 116 recorded outbreaks struck more than 450,000 individuals. The actual number of cases may be much higher because the majority involve diarrhea, vomiting, or nausea, and are easily mistaken for the flu.



WHERE DRINKING IS DANGEROUS

23 CONTAMINATED CITIES

OF THE 202 LARGEST PUBLIC DRINKING WATER SYSTEMS SURVEYED BY THE EPA, THOSE IN THESE CITIES REPORTED VIOLATIONS OF CONTAMINANT STANDARDS ONE OR MORE TIMES FROM 1992 TO 1994.

The numbers under the heading *Population* indicate how many people are served by the system. *Violations* shows the total number and types of infractions. *Response* indicates whether local congressional representatives voted for (+) or against (-) safe drinking water in 1995, as measured by the February 28, 1995, final vote on the House risk assessment bill (H.R.1022). (A vote for the bill is considered a vote against safe drinking water, because H.R.1022 would set up a one-sided array of procedural and analytical roadblocks to water safety.)

Among the types of infractions: "coliform" indicates the possible presence of pathogens from human and animal fecal wastes, which can cause stomach and intestinal distress; "cadmium," from galvanized-pipe corrosion, natural deposits, or batteries and paints, is harmful to the kidneys; "turbidity" is water cloudiness; it interferes with disinfection and may indicate parasites are present; "alpha" radiation, from the decay of radioactive materials, can cause cancer; "kepone," a synthetic organic compound used as a pesticide and fungicide until it was outlawed in 1976, is a carcinogen and can cause nervous system disorders.

Cities absent from this list are not necessarily safe. Many fail to test or report their results to the EPA.

STATE	CITY	POPULATION	VIOLATIONS	RESPONSE + PRO-PROTECTION - ANTI-PROTECTION
ARIZONA	SCOTTSDALE	174,170	(1) ALPHA	- JOHN SHADIG
ARIZONA	TUCSON	478,641	(1) ALPHA	- JIM KALBE
CALIFORNIA	CASTAIC	160,000	(1) KEPONE	- HOWARD MCKEON
CALIFORNIA	FRESNO	390,350	(2) COLIFORM	- GEORGE BABADYICH
CALIFORNIA	SANTA ANA	293,700	(2) COLIFORM	- ROBERT DORNAN
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA	WASHINGTON	595,000	(2) COLIFORM	(NO ALIQUOT VOTE) ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON
FLORIDA	BRADENTON	187,501	(1) COLIFORM	- DAN MILLER
FLORIDA	NORTH MIAMI BEACH	160,000	(1) COLIFORM	+ CARRIE MEER
GEORGIA	MARIETTA	350,000	(1) COLIFORM	- BOB BARR (NO ALIQUOT VOTE) NEMT GINGRICH
KANSAS	KANSAS CITY	603,262	(1) COLIFORM	- JAN MEYERS
KENTUCKY	LOUISVILLE	718,182	(1) COLIFORM	(NO ALIQUOT VOTE) MIKE WARD
MISSISSIPPI	JACKSON	197,252	(1) COLIFORM	- MIKE PARKER
NEW JERSEY	JERSEY CITY	228,537	(3) COLIFORM	+ DONALD PAYNE + ROBERT MENENDEZ
NEW JERSEY	LITTLE FALLS	270,000	(1) COLIFORM	- WILLIAM MARTINI
NEW JERSEY	TRENTON	225,000	(1) CADMIUM	- CHRISTOPHER SMITH
NEW YORK	NEW YORK CITY	6,552,718	(5) COLIFORM, TURBIDITY	*
NEW YORK	YONKERS	188,082	(1) TURBIDITY	+ ELIOT ENGEL + NITA LEWY
OHIO	CLEVELAND	1,428,000	(1) COLIFORM	- MARTIN HORE + LOUIS STOKES
OHIO	KENT	308,000	(1) COLIFORM	+ TOM SAWYER
SOUTH CAROLINA	GREENVILLE	230,555	(8) COLIFORM	- BOB INGLIS
TEXAS	HOUSTON	1,576,900	(1) COLIFORM	**
VIRGINIA	ARLINGTON	175,000	(1) COLIFORM	- JAMES MORAN
VIRGINIA	RICHMOND	369,000	(2) COLIFORM	+ ROBERT SCOTT - THOMAS BLUER, JR.

* New York City votes: + Gary Ackerman; + Floyd Flake; + Thomas Manton; + Jerrold Nadler; + Charles Schumer; - Edolphus Towns; + Major Owens; + Nydia Velazquez; - Susan Molinari; + Carolyn Maloney; + Charles Rangel; + Jose Serrano; + Eliot Engel; + Nita Lowey

** Houston votes: - Bill Archer; + Ken Bentsen; - Tom DeLay; - Gene Green; + Sheila Jackson Lee

4 CULPRITS

PATHOGENS are microorganisms, including algae, bacteria, viruses, and protozoans. They enter drinking water from human sewage or animal feces, and cause diseases such as dysentery, hepatitis, giardiasis, cryptosporidiosis, typhoid fever, and cholera. They sicken 940,000 people a year in the United States, and kill 900, usually those with poor resistance to disease, including the very old, the very young, and those with immune system disorders. Chlorine alone will kill some waterborne pathogens, but filtration is required to remove viruses and parasitic cysts. More than 1,000 big water systems that provide water to more than 13 million people have not installed the filtration systems required to protect public health.

LEAD is commonly used in pipes, faucets, and the solder used to join components of plumbing systems. Water then corrodes the metal and carries it to your glass. More than 800 U.S. cities have water that contains what the EPA defines as dangerous levels of lead.

ARSENIC is a potent carcinogen even at very low levels. University of California researchers estimate that more than 300,000 people drink water containing in excess of 50 parts per billion of arsenic, the EPA maximum allowable level and an amount that poses a 1-in-100 cancer risk.

CHLORINE has proven to be a helpful disinfectant for drinking water, having been used to neutralize bacteria and other waterborne pathogens since 1908 in the United States. In the 1970s, however, scientists discovered that it reacts with naturally occurring organic chemicals left in the water by contact with soil and decaying vegetation to create "disinfection by-products," such as chloroform. Disinfection by-products may cause more than 10,000 rectal and bladder cancers each year in the United States and may also be linked to pancreatic cancer and birth defects. To keep these by-products from forming, water companies must remove organic materials prior to chlorination, by filtration or other means, or switch to disinfectants that cause fewer problems.



Cryptosporidium

BUILDING SAFER SYSTEMS

1. More protection at the source. Protecting watersheds and groundwater from erosion and chemical and animal wastes helps ensure a cleaner drinking water supply. The Clean Water Act, Safe Drinking Water Act, and Farm Bill legislation should be strengthened to reduce the amount of urban runoff, sewage overflows, and industrial and farm waste that flows into rivers, lakes, and aquifers used as sources of drinking water.

2. Basic treatment for all systems. Unless they have pure source water, all large surface-water systems must have the basic technologies to treat their water: some combination of sedimentation, coagulation, and filtration, depending on the local contaminants.

3. Modern technology for systems that need it. Cities and towns with water supplies contaminated by industrial waste, pesticide runoff, or high levels of disinfection by-products must install either granular-activated-carbon or other advanced purification systems. Currently, fewer than 10 percent of large systems use these modern techniques. Yet EPA data indicate that the cost of such improvements is less than \$30 per household per year for most U.S. cities.

4. Improvement of distribution systems. Crumbling water mains, lead and lead-soldered service lines, and leaking waste and sewage lines must be upgraded, improved, or replaced. As with source protection and purification improvements, these actions can be paid for over time and will ultimately save far more than they cost.

5. Consolidation of small systems. The vast majority of community water systems—50,000 in all—serve less than 3,300 people each. Together, these systems provide water to 10 percent of the population, yet often cannot afford a trained water-treatment staff or even the most basic treatment technology. The EPA has estimated that half of the small systems could combine with larger ones nearby to improve the water quality for millions of users.

6. Improvements to the Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act. New or strengthened provisions must include strict protection of watersheds, financial and technical assistance to needy public water districts, penalties for states that do not fully fund their own programs, strengthening of public notification and information requirements, a ban on all lead in plumbing, faucets, and fixtures (current law allows fixtures with up to 10 percent lead to be sold as "lead free"), and increased funds for enforcement, state grants, and research. ■

SIERRA CLUB ENDING THE TOXIC THREAT

WHAT TO DO ABOUT YOUR WATER

To find out how safe your drinking water is, contact your water company, your state water agency, the EPA or a private testing laboratory. One good place to start is the EPA's Safe Drinking Water Hotline: (800) 426-4791.

A well-documented 36-page booklet, *Danger on Tap: Protect America's Drinking Water*, is available from the Sierra Club Great Lakes Program. For a copy send \$10 to the Sierra Club's Midwest office, 214 N. Henry St., Suite 203, Madison, WI 53703; (608) 257-4994.

The quality of your water depends,

more than anything else, on the commitment of your elected leaders. Here are some things you can do to help:

Call and write local and state elected officials. Tell them the quality and safety of your drinking water is important to you, and that you want a protected water supply and state-of-the-art purification. The government section of your phone book can tell you how to reach your mayor, city council, and county commissioners.

Contact your national elected officials by calling the congressional switchboard

at (202) 224-3121 or by writing them at the U.S. Senate, Washington, DC 20510, or U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515. Ask them to strengthen the Safe Drinking Water Act and the environmental provisions of the Farm Bill. *Most urgent of all:* ask your senators to oppose the Clean Water Reauthorization Act, which would roll back the existing law's safeguards, allowing more poisons in tap water. Written by industry lobbyists and pushed by Representative Bud Shuster (R-Pa.), it really ought to be called the Dirty Water Act.

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Join Our Petition to the U.N. for Global Sunset of the Organochlorine Pesticides and Chemicals

This is the year that the United Nations can recommend banning the organochlorine poisons from the face of the Earth.



to the general environment, the extinction of marine mammals would be inevitable".

1) **Time for Action:** We and over fifty groups, experts and citizens petitioned the United Nations in mid-May 1995... We asked for a global phaseout and sunset of all of the "semi-volatile" persistent organochlorine pesticides like DDT, chlordane, mirex and toxaphene and the industrial chemicals like PCBs.

2) ✓ We are still collecting petition signatures. Now is the best chance in thirty years to make progress on this issue. Please join your name.

3) Today, every person on Earth and even the plankton in the seas is contaminated with the organochlorine pesticides and chemicals. Human contamination levels are high enough to affect the functioning of the hormones and health.

4) Over thirty years ago, the American author Rachel Carson, moved by the widespread death of songbirds exposed to high levels of DDT, wrote Silent Spring (1962). This book led to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 1970, and to a series of full and partial bans of DDT, PCBs and other organochlorines.

Thirty Years After Rachel Carson

5) Worldwide, less progress has been made. Even DDT - banned in most industrial nations - is still in production in Mexico, India and elsewhere. PCBs are still in use in electrical equipment in Europe and in developing nations where the chemicals are starting to leak out into the environment from worn-out equipment.

6) Scientists from Japan, completing a round-the-world monitoring cruise, confirmed in 1993 the findings of others. Frightening levels of organochlorine pesticides and chemicals were found everywhere in the surface water and air above the oceans from the Arctic to the equator, and also blowing toward Antarctica.

Extinctions - Arctic Buildup - Threats to Even Us

7) A massive buildup of Arctic organochlorine pollution is even now in progress. Levels in polar bear, seals, walrus, fish, and the breast milk of Inuit people are alarming.

8) Joseph Cummins of the University of Western Ontario predicted in a 1988 Ecologist article that "if the PCBs held in the Third World nations were released

9) The largest recorded marine mammal die-off in history occurred in 1988, when 60 to 70 percent of the harbor seals of the North and Baltic Seas abruptly perished. Dutch scientist link this disaster to immune system damage from organochlorine and other chemicals.

10) Louis Guillette of the University of Florida finds alligator reproduction to be severely stunted in Lake Apopka because of a DDT spill. Life everywhere is affected from male Florida panthers, to coral reefs, to birds, to fish, to turtles, and to ourselves.

UN Agenda 21 Delegates Call for Global Sunsets

■ Delegate experts under the auspices of the United Nations (UNEP) met in Iceland in March 1995 to develop a "global program of action to protect the marine environment from land based sources of pollution".

■ The Nordic nations circulated a paper entitled "Considerations of Global Measures on Persistent Organic Pollutants". There was agreement that action should be taken towards phaseouts. The final meeting will be held in Washington, D.C. in November 1995.

◆ The United States and Canadian delegations will be key in whatever UNEP recommends.

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THE SIERRA CLUB BULLETIN

THE NEWS FORUM FOR SIERRA CLUB MEMBERS

A Wilderness Revival

by Dan Smuts

In passing the Wilderness Act in 1964 Congress swore to "secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness." Now, with a retrograde Congress threatening to undo the wilderness protections of the last 30 years, the first of those "future generations" is taking the security of that resource into its own hands.

But these young people aren't entirely alone. For nearly a hundred high-school and college activists born a decade or more after the Wilderness Act's passage, a recent Sierra Club conference in Washington, D.C., was a rare opportunity to absorb the wisdom of elders who have blazed the trail of wilderness preservation. For the elders, it was a way to replenish the movement with new blood, raw energy, and unbridled enthusiasm.

"Several students told me the conference changed their lives," says Melanie Griffin, director of the Club's land protection program, who helped organize the event. "They learned what it means to be part of a larger movement, part of history." The four-day conference "Wilderness: The



At the Capitol, new voices for wilderness.

Next Generation" was originally planned to celebrate America's seminal wilderness law, under which supposedly "inviolable" protection has been extended to more than 100 million acres of wilds. But the students' reaction to the designs of the current Congress—which views public land as a resource for private industry—transformed it into something akin to a revival meeting.

**A new generation
of the Sierra Club
is "psyched to
fight" for its
wildland heritage.**

Spirituality, in fact, was the topic of a panel discussion that included a Christian pastor, a Buddhist, and an Alaskan native. "Everything in my life depends on the land," explained Faith Gemmill, a Gwich'in from north of the Arctic Circle. "We must learn to respect everything for its contribution." Brian McLaren, a minister from Maryland, expressed concern that so many Christians have fallen under the sway of the anti-environmental "religious right." They must be reminded, he said, that "respect for the artist is shown in respect for the artwork."

But discussion was only the beginning for the participants—most of them members of the Club's Sierra Student Coalition or involved

in its Inner City Outings Program. They were, in the words of outgoing coalition director Mark Fraioli, "focused on action," and plenty was offered. In addition to briefings, workshops, and brainstorming sessions, students lobbied congressional aides and held an enthusiastic rally on the Capitol steps. They also listened to the stories of more seasoned activists.

There was Dr. Edgar Wayburn, the Sierra Club's honorary president, who joined the Club in 1939 "to go on a burro trip" and has stuck around ever since, becoming a leader in the fights to preserve Redwood National Park, the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, and Alaska wilderness. There was Sierra Club Chairman Mike McCloskey, who was a student himself at the University of Oregon law school when he joined the Club in 1960. There was Lenny Kohm, whose unflagging commitment to Alaska's wilds earned him a Gwich'in nickname that means "the little white man who never sleeps." (See "Volunteer Spotlight," page 64.) There was Rick Johnson, a longtime Club staffer who now heads the Idaho Conservation League, reminding students of the

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words of Howard Zahniser, one of the chief architects of America's wilderness system: "We are not slowing down a force that inevitably will destroy all the wilderness there is. We are generating another force, never to be wholly spent, that, renewed generation after generation, will always be effective in preserving wilderness."

The resilience of the wilderness movement was much in evidence. In one presentation, volunteers with the Club's Inner City Outings program spoke movingly of the importance of expanding the horizons of young city-dwellers. "We're here to help you save trees," explained Val Joseph, a student at Morehouse College, "so we can take our kids out and show them what a tree looks like." Sierra Student Coalition leader Stephanie Jowers had a similarly forward-looking view: "I don't see us as the next generation," she said. "I see five-year-olds as the next generation."

The future—and not just of the wilderness movement, but of the Sierra Club itself—might have been glimpsed outside the Capitol, where students sang, waved banners and American flags, and gathered signatures for the Club's Environmental Bill of Rights petition. They were joined by Democratic Representatives Bruce Vento of Minnesota and Maurice Hinchey of New York, two of Congress' most vigorous wilderness champions. After a sudden cloudburst—prompting chants of "Keep rain clean!"—Vento and Hinchey addressed the rallyers, who responded with choruses of "Psyched to fight! Psyched to fight!"

"This isn't your same old Sierra Club," said one observer to Vento.

"No," agreed Vento, grinning. "It certainly isn't." ■

DAN SMUTS serves as legislative assistant in the Club's Washington, D.C., office.

The Paperless Sierra Club

An important reason for the success of the Wise Use movement has been its ability to exploit the latest in electronic technology. Now the Sierra Club is fighting back with an electronic activist network available to anyone with on-line access. Subscribers to SC-Action Alert receive daily updates on the latest skirmishes in the War on the Environment—with details about how they can most effectively make their voices heard. To enlist, send an e-mail message to majordomo@ijc.apc.org with the message "subscribe sc-action" and you'll be enrolled. For those navigating the Internet via a "gopher," gopher.ijc.apc.org will lead them to the same action alerts. Those using EcoNet as their service provider will find them in the *sc.action* conference.

Although the Club is fairly new to the electronic age, increasing amounts of information beyond calls to action are available on-line. Club headquarters on the Internet is our "home page" on the World Wide Web, located at <http://www.sierraclub.org> and easily accessible through web-browsing programs such as Netscape or Mosaic. In addition to the above-mentioned action alerts, the Home Page includes an introduction to the Club and its history, a searchable collection of Club conservation policies, descriptions of Sierra Club books, the full text of the Club's activist newsletter *The Planet*, details of our Critical Ecoregions Program, and directions on how to contact local Club chapters. One of its most popular features is an updated listing of current Sierra Club outings. Catalogs and brochures for upcoming trips can be ordered from national.outings@sierraclub.org or directly through the Net. In the future, Sierra also hopes to be accessible through the Club's home page. (Sierra now accepts letters to the editor and "Last Words" responses via e-mail,


send to sierra.letters@sierraclub.org and sierra.last.words@sierraclub.org respectively.) The Club home page is apparently filling a need: even before it was officially announced in March, it was recording 9,000 "hits" a week.

While the above services are essentially one-way, a general talkfest devoted exclusively to the Sierra Club takes place at alt.org/sierra-club, a Usenet newsgroup on the Internet. This is what's known as an "unmoderated" newsgroup; it is not managed by the Club, but is a wide-open forum for discussion of any Club topic.

At present, the only locus for organized group discussion is the Club's small internal electronic-mail system, which cost and technical constraints limit to staff and key volunteers. More promising as general member-forums are the "bulletin board systems" (BBSs) now being conducted by chapters and groups. Bulletin boards offer a venue for the dissemination of local news as well as for group discussions, and can be contacted by anyone with a computer and a modem; Internet access is not necessary. Sierra Club BBSs are currently operated by the Georgia, Hoosier, Kansas, Oklahoma, Rocky Mountain, San Diego, and Tennessee chapters, and the Austin and New York City groups. In addition, the Illinois, North Star, and South Carolina chapters and the Central Arkansas, Fort Worth, Shawnee, and Spokane groups operate Club conferences on BBSs owned by other organizations or individuals. (To log onto these forums, contact your local chapter for details.)

What's next? Later this year, a prototype national Sierra Club bulletin board will be tested; if all goes well, it will someday link the regional BBSs, providing Sierra Club members with a powerful new tool for communication and activism. ■

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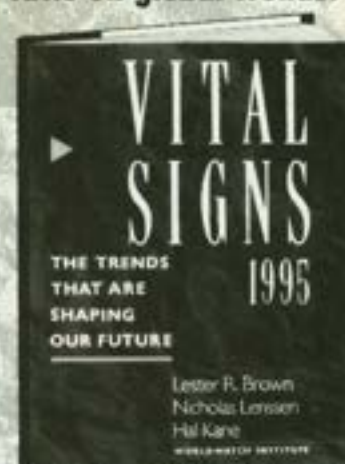
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Volunteer SPOTLIGHT

A Camera and a Cause

by Amy Wilson

When you call Lenny Kohm at home in North Carolina, you'll most likely get his answering machine. This "overworked and underpaid wilderness warrior," as his recorded message describes him, usually can't come to the phone. Warriors spend much of their time on the road.

Kohm's mission is to protect arctic wildlands from industrial development. A true evangelist, he's devoted the past seven years to presenting a slide show about this "last great wilderness." From New York City to Gallup, New Mexico, and "just about every place in between," he preaches the gospel of arctic wilderness.

Kohm shows his slides of migrating caribou, polar bears, arctic wildflowers, rolling tundra, and native Gwich'in people to Sierra Club gatherings, colleges, churches, libraries, schools, and community groups. He's presented the show more than a thousand times, and estimates that he'll do it several hundred more this year.

"The show establishes a sense of place for people who may have never heard of the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge," he says. "If we allow development there—especially on the scale that the new congressional leadership is proposing—we'll lose the biological heart of the last complete ecosystem in North America, and we will probably lose yet another valuable native culture, too."

In the summer of 1987, Kohm,

then a freelance photographer based in Northern California, journeyed to the Arctic to photograph the wildlife refuge for a magazine article. "It was the purest form of wilderness I'd ever experienced," he remembers. "Staying in Gwich'in communities, I would go 100 yards outside of a village and be surrounded by wilderness."

During his visit, Kohm learned that the 1.5-million-acre coastal plain of the refuge, the only remaining stretch of Arctic coastline spared from oil-and-gas leasing, was targeted by the oil industry for large-scale development. Oil interests tout the coastal plain as "another Prudhoe



LENNY KOHM

Bay" (an oil-rich area in northern Alaska that has been industrialized and severely polluted), even though the Interior Department says there is only a 1-in-100 chance that the region harbors such large reserves.

Kohm returned to the Arctic for four months in 1988, and developed lasting friendships with the villagers who shared their homes with him. The Gwich'in people showed him how their subsistence culture would be devastated by the pollution and wildlife habitat destruction that accompany oil-and-gas exploration, for they are heavily dependent on the caribou that use the coastal plain as a calving ground.

Back in California, Kohm and some friends created a slide show telling the story of the fragile Arctic, its people, and its wildlife. In 1989, to broaden his network of advocates,

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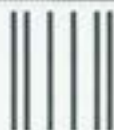
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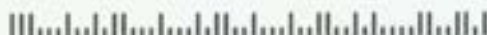
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Kohm joined the Sierra Club.

Traveling on a shoestring budget, Kohm is usually a one-man show. But his presentations are especially effective, he says, when he is accompanied by representatives of Cwich'in villages. "People get a much more vivid understanding of the importance of saving this place, not just for its wildlife but for its unique human culture," he says.

While Kohm builds grassroots support, oil interests are increasing the pressure on Congress to open the coastal plain to development. Several bills that would have protected the area by designating it as wilderness have been defeated, and Alaska's own congressional delegation is expected to introduce legislation this year to open the coastal plain to oil-and-gas drilling.

But Kohm doesn't call himself a warrior for nothing: he's in this battle for the long haul, regardless of the challenges thrown his way. "Being an eternal optimist, I have to say, 'Thank you, Newt, you woke us up!' The new political leadership represents an incredible opportunity for Arctic activists."

Representative Bruce Vento (D-Minn.) has introduced legislation to designate the coastal plain of the Arctic as wilderness. The Morris K. Udall Wilderness Bill (H.R. 1000) has 80 cosponsors. A companion bill in the Senate (S. 428) introduced by Senator William Roth (R-Del.) has 15 cosponsors.

That's progress, but not enough to satisfy Kohm. "If you find a place on Earth that you have a connection with, you're lucky," he says. "If it's not threatened, you're very lucky. Well, the place I'm passionate about is threatened. If you find a place like that, you've got no choice but to fight for it." ■

AMY WILSON is senior editor of the Sierra Club's activist newsletter, *The Planet*.

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Ecoregion ROUNDUP

In 60 chapters and hundreds of local groups spanning 21 ecoregions and two nations, Sierra Club members are hard at work for a healthier planet.

by Tracy Baxter

Great Lakes

OHIO At \$22 million per mile, the proposed 3.6-mile Buckeye Basin Highway through Toledo's urban wetlands might as well be paved with gold. The Sierra Club's Ohio Chapter is pushing an alternative proposal simply to upgrade an existing thoroughfare. Besides sparing the habitat of assorted wildlife, including more than 180 species of birds, the Club-backed plan would save taxpayers \$50 million and increase access to local businesses. But political inertia favors the wasteful design. Chapter members are leaning on Representative John Kasich (R-Ohio), chair of the House Budget Committee, to reduce the extravagant highway's federal funding by a fatally large sum and back the cheaper road.

Atlantic Coast

VIRGINIA The scrappy Virginia Chapter is opposing a state-level War on the Environment with the Sierra Club's most effective weaponry: grass-roots mobilization, political lobbying, and legal action. Recently, 50 Sierrans trekked to the state capitol and fanned out across the general assembly to lobby against gutting the state's environmental standards. The daylong

event doubled as an educational forum, with briefings on how best to repel anti-environmental assaults. In the courtroom, the chapter has also intervened on behalf of the EPA in a suit filed by the state against the agency. The EPA is standing up for the public's right to breathe clean air by rejecting a state proposal to allow industries, but not citizens, to voice opinions on emissions standards at official hearings.

Great North American Prairie

ILLINOIS Two hours southwest of Chicago lies the potential for ecological renewal on a grand scale. Of the 23,000 acres soon to be vacated by the Joliet Army Ammunitions Plant, 19,000 could become the new Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie. For the 10 million inhabitants of the Windy City and environs, the conversion from arsenal and pastureland to park would provide easy access to fishing, biking, and camping—as well as the opportunity to witness a truly ambitious wildlife-restoration work-in-progress. The Illinois Chapter is working hard to pass the necessary legislation in Congress (H.R.714 and S.449).

American Southeast

FLORIDA Though Viacom insists that a shift in priorities led them to scrap plans to pave over wetlands for the Blockbuster Sports and Entertainment park in Broward County, coordinated opposition to the \$1.75 billion complex undoubtedly sapped the megacorporation's enthusiasm for the project. Dubbed "Wayne's World" by locals, the 2,500-acre development would have included a hockey arena and baseball stadium to house sports impresario Wayne Huizenga's two professional teams, the Marlins and the Panthers. But the Sierra Club's Ft. Lauderdale and Miami groups balked at the cost to the imperiled Everglades

as well to taxpayers, who would shell out hundreds of millions over the years for the deal. High-profile Club-organized demonstrations at Blockbuster's Ft. Lauderdale headquarters put the public on the alert. Facing the prospect of continued protest and lengthy regulatory review, Viacom threw in the towel.

TEXAS A mobile billboard rolled through the streets of downtown Bastrop trumpeting news of an outlandish project: \$500,000 in matching federal conservation funds were earmarked to expand a golf course in Bastrop State Park. "No way!" roared back the Sierra Club's Lone Star Chapter and other groups, who busily set up a multi-front resistance. A hundred letters, petitions with 2,000 signatures, and numerous phone calls all protesting the conversion of public land to private use at the environment's expense convinced the National Park Service to turn down the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission's request for the money. Yet Bastrop golfers and the commission refuse to lay down their clubs. They're now lobbying Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt to restore funds to bulldoze 50 acres of woodland for an additional nine holes.

Pacific Coast

CALIFORNIA In this era of all-out assault on our cherished wild places, sticking to the straight and narrow could be a liability. With its unanimous approval of the formation of a gay-and-lesbian section, the San Diego Chapter is giving the earth a better chance through its recognition and promotion of diversity. ■

► To share news from your ecoregion, send it to Tracy Baxter, Sierra, 730 Polk St., San Francisco, CA 94109; e-mail: tracy.baxter@sierraclub.org

FOREST FIRES

Continued from page 43

each forest house, and, in Washington state, fire-zone residents—chastened by newspaper editorials—have put up signs with such messages as, "I was a dumb ass to build here. If a fire comes through, don't risk anybody's life to save my house." But the developers keep building, the houses keep burning, and the wildland firefighters—ill-trained for what are essentially urban fires—keep dying.

"We have a national flood-insurance program where if you build your house in a floodplain, you're required to have flood insurance," says Andy Stahl, director of the Association of Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics (AFSEEE). "Why don't we have the same thing for building your house in a fire zone? I'm surprised that the nation's insurance underwriters haven't banded together to impose a surcharge on these people. The rest of us are picking up the tab."

The chaparral of Southern California is a mountain ecosystem based in fire. Unless chaparral burns, seeds won't germinate and basal buds won't sprout. Organic material scarcely decays in this dry climate, so where Smokey has done his thing for 30 years, each square mile contains roughly 25,000 tons of dry, dead tinder. When the fire wind screams off the Mojave Desert and you have to keep blinking your eyes to keep them moist, you can gaze up at the canyons and see the shimmer of volatile hydrocarbon gasses synthesized for self-immolation by plants like ceanothus. Chaparral, especially after fire suppression, doesn't just burn; it explodes. Building houses in it and other flammable forest types is like sleeping on subway tracks. But people keep doing it anyway.

In 1976 Harold Biswell, a fire researcher at the University of California, Berkeley, looked up at the surrounding hills and said, "There's going to be a catastrophic fire up there." With that, he rounded up his students and began thinning. But local fire-zone res-

idents heard the chainsaws and complained to the university that someone was attacking the forest—killing trees. Eager to oblige, the university stopped the project. Fifteen years later, on October 20, 1991, adjacent hills erupted into a firestorm that killed 25 people and destroyed 3,354 houses and 456 apartments.

Two years after that Southern California erupted. This time 1,200 structures were lost. Two firefighters died trying to keep a wall of flames away from a wall of houses built ten feet from a national forest boundary. Here and elsewhere Forest Service professionals had to be redeployed from wild-fires to emergency yard work for the improvident—moving their firewood, clearing their debris, cutting their brush, trimming their overhanging branches.

BUILDINGS NEED TO BE PROTECTED BY common-sense ordinances and, when these fail, by fire lines, fire engines, and fire itself. But in undeveloped areas a question that needs to be asked by advocates of nature and fiscal prudence is: should we try to put out major forest fires? The *Wall Street Journal* says we should. The U.S. Congress says we should. Companies that manufacture or rent out fire-suppression equipment (who lobby Congress) say we should. According to a nationwide survey commissioned last October by the timber-oriented conservation group American Forests (formerly the American Forestry Association), 55 percent of all U.S. citizens say we should try to extinguish not only major forest fires, but all forest fires.

Yet the only real environmental damage associated with forest fires issues from human attempts to extinguish and prevent them. During last summer's Thunder Mountain fire on Okanogan National Forest in Washington state, 18 miles of fire line were bulldozed into the Long Swamp roadless area through a watershed designated as critical for salmon under the Clinton administration's forest plan. "They basically turned it into a war zone," reports Mark Lawler, national-forest

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chairman of the Cascade Chapter of the Sierra Club. "There are almost no limits to what they can do. They didn't inspect any of the equipment going into these backcountry areas for seeds, so now we're going to have noxious weeds blooming all through this pristine area. They knocked down just about every tree along Smarty Creek for a mile, ran lines along other creeks, too. It's a disaster." The Thunder Mountain fire—which burned through a forest of mature, fire-dependent lodgepole pine—hardly responded to the Forest Service attack. It fizzled out when two inches of rain fell in 24 hours.

On July 6, 1994, fourteen firefighters died trying to contain a blaze on the White River National Forest in western Colorado. They gave their lives not for a cause—as suggested by fast-selling T-shirts depicting them ascending Storm King Mountain to "glory"—but for that superstition called "10 a.m. Fire Control." After a three-month investigation, the Forest Service and other federal agencies issued a 75-page report on the "incident" in which they offered vague suggestions—such as "Develop a user-friendly system that allows all levels to easily input and update resource (personnel) status"—but not a word about why a fire crew had been placed on a pile of tinder that, sooner or later, was going to explode no matter what.

"They were building a fire line across the mid-slope of a ridge," says AFSEEE's Andy Stahl. "They were trying to prevent the fire from going up the hill. What was valuable further up the hill? Nothing! It was piñon, oak, and juniper. It had no economic value, and ecologically it was more valuable burned than unburned. It was a fire-created community; it needed fire. There were some houses at the bottom of the canyon. Why not just build a fire line down there and let the fire take off in the other direction? And the fact is, it *did* take off in that direction; no one could stop it."

This brings up an even more pertinent question: "Can we put out major wildfires? In most cases the answer is No, and federal resource agencies know

it. During the Yellowstone fires the only successful suppression effort was mounted by the Church Universal and Triumphant, a major wildland developer whose spiritual leader, Guru Ma, says she used to be Marie Antoinette. As fire approached the group's sacred meeting ground at Mol Heron Creek, Guru Ma organized her flock into rotating, mantra-chanting brigades of 300 that instructed the flames to "roll back." It worked. A month later, when the fire circled the church's 30,000 acres and came in from the opposite side, Guru Ma ordered up a cold front from the appropriate archangel. That worked, too. Meanwhile, the Forest Service and Park Service were spending \$130 million basically putting on a show for followers of Guru Smokey. Even in 1988 both agencies were admitting that their summer assault had virtually no effect on acreage burned.

But so spooked were the feds by the reaction of Congress and the public to the "incineration" of America's first-born national park that they abandoned their enlightened management policy which, in certain remote areas, allowed natural fire to do its thing. Six years later, both the Park Service and the Forest Service have natural-fire policies back on line, albeit timid, confused ones. "In general the [constraints] we've had to put on don't make any sense," says one of the federal government's most respected fire researchers, who asked that I not use his name. "Now we're not supposed to have extreme fires. We've reached a political cap."

But extreme fires in such habitat as lodgepole pine, for example, are healthy and necessary, and they are going to happen whether politicians approve or disapprove. "Forbidding extreme fires," says fire ecologist James Agee of the University of Washington, "is like declaring that there shall be no more earthquakes."

THIS BRINGS UP MAYBE THE MOST pertinent question of all. Even though the feds know that fighting major forest fires doesn't work, are they willing

to destroy the bloated industry that has grown up around it? As a money-maker, wildfire suppression is catching up to timber removal. Chinook helicopters, for example, rent for \$109,396 a day. Fixed-wing, P3-A Orion tankers go for \$40,600 a day. A water truck owner can make \$1,852 a day. During major fires, accountability goes out the window. For instance, three years ago during the eight-day Fountain Fire in California's Shasta County, the state spent \$1,005 on telephones (missing after the fire) and paid one firefighter \$21,206.

The "job fire," ignited by seekers of employment, is becoming a western tradition. Last August 29, according to the Longview, Washington, *Daily News*, Ernest Earl Ellison pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit arson, admitting that he had set three forest fires in California's Trinity County as part of a plot to make money for companies that lease firefighting equipment. More arrests are expected.

Forest fires provide work even after they're out. After an arsonist torched 9,700 acres of roadless spotted-owl habitat along Oregon's Warner Creek, Willamette National Forest Supervisor Darrel Kenops declared a salvage sale, targeting ten times the timber his own scientists had determined could safely be removed before the fire. When Forest Service biologist Eric Forsman suggested that this might teach that crime pays, he was severely reprimanded and ordered to make a public apology to "all honest, hardworking loggers." When civilians suggested the same thing, Kenops allowed that probably his investigators had been wrong in finding that the fire had been deliberately set. After loud derision, Kenops quickly re-embraced the arson theory. But then the Forest Service denied all public appeals, thereby eliciting a lawsuit from the Sierra Club and the Oregon Natural Resources Council (at press time a decision was still pending). A fire sale of Warner Creek timber would send a clear message to loggers who aren't honest or hardworking: "Don't like spotted-owl 'lock-ups'? Light 'em up."

When the Forest Service wants to do

prescribed burning, it has to use previously appropriated funds. When, on the other hand, it wants to launch military-style assaults on big wildfires, it has only to reach into the Forest Fire-fighting Fund—an enormous, self-filling cookie jar in which funds accumulate by an automatic appropriation process set up by Congress. And if ever the Forest Service wants more than the cookie jar can hold, Congress obliges, as it did in 1994 when it tossed in an "emergency appropriation" of \$450 million. Fire historian Stephen Pyne of Arizona State University likens American fire management to American medicine: "capable of spending unlimited third-party funds for heroic intervention on behalf of dying seniors, unable to immunize its children."

Some things never change. Last summer, as I hiked through Yellowstone National Park's new growth, its old growth—this time in the southwest corner—was burning again. Again, the *Wall Street Journal* was puffing and blowing about a government gone soft on wildfire: "Letting [fires] burn has become one of the cherished dogmas of the environmental elite, a group now firmly entrenched in the various agencies of Mr. Babbitt's Interior Department and gaining ground. . . . As we've come to expect from environmentalist theology, however, natural regulation theory ranks humanity, its livelihoods and its property relatively low on the chain of being, at least below the spotted owl."

Again, the Park Service was throwing big money at a lightning-caused blaze, placating politicians and the public until the weather could quench the flames. Again, in national forests from California to Idaho, the Forest Service was trying to save nature from itself. Again, I retreated to big water. While the West burned around me, I waded out on a lava bar at Buffalo Ford, stringing up my fly rod as if it were a fiddle. ■

TED WILLIAMS, who has been writing about environmental issues for the past 25 years, shares an obsession with fishing, but not baseball, with the "real"—or as he much prefers, "elder"—Ted Williams.



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At the Capital's Back Door

The imposing ramparts and dense hardwood forests of the Blue Ridge once blocked colonial settlers' efforts to reach the country's interior. Today, with the same range girdled by interstate highways and inundated by visitors, it's the nature lover who is stymied. But even in northern Virginia, where mountains merge with metropolis, a visitor willing to get off the beaten path can find wilderness among the still-majestic hemlock, oak, and birch forests.

The numbers are daunting. Shenandoah National Park, which straddles the 95 miles of the Blue Ridge closest to Washington, D.C., hosts 2 million visitors each year. The Blue Ridge Parkway, which dips and curves along the crest

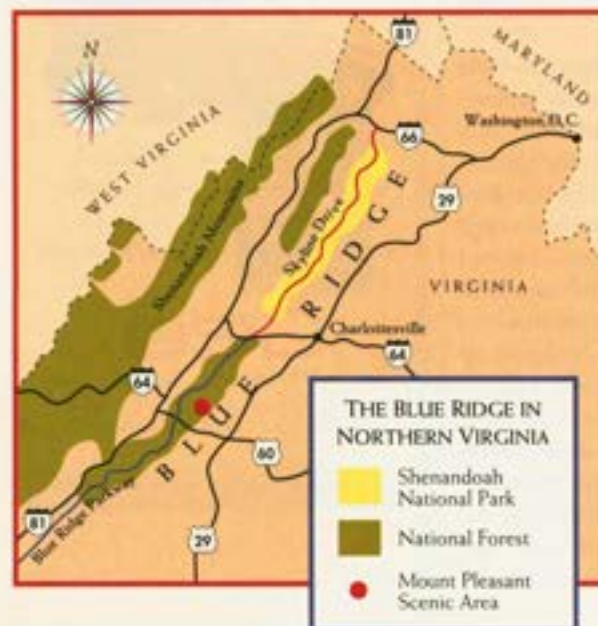
of the range for 469 miles from Shenandoah to Great Smoky Mountains National Park in North Carolina, is the most popular unit in the national park system. Visitors begin arriving en masse in the spring, when the wild azaleas, trillium, lady's slippers, and dogwoods bloom, and they don't let up until the end of October, when the last of the brilliant fall foliage is gone.

But the crowds keep to the Blue Ridge's admittedly spectacular scenic drives and its most accessible hiking destinations along the Appalachian Trail. In Shenandoah, solitude-seeking hikers can choose from among 500 miles of trails that lead away from cars and congestion. Within a few miles of the trampled trails to the summit of Old Rag and the waterfalls of Whiteoak Canyon, for example, backpackers can head out on a nearly primitive 20-mile circuit through the Big Run watershed.

And the million-plus acres of George Washington National Forest, which lie just west and south of the national park, offer nearly 275 hiking trails. Along the Blue Ridge south of Shenandoah is



Dogwood blossoms and valley views from the Blue Ridge Parkway.



St. Mary's Wilderness, the largest wilderness in the national forest and one of the best places in Virginia to see rhododendrons. Farther along the range is rarely visited Mt. Pleasant, where hikers can explore waterfalls and 4,000-foot mountains, and drink in ridge-to-ridge vistas.

While clever Blue Ridge hikers can avoid the crowds, they can't avoid the air pollution that besets the region. Auto exhaust combined with industrial pollution from hundreds of miles away frequently blots out ridgetop panoramas, and is slowly poisoning the famous forests. To put the blue back into the Blue Ridge, public-lands agencies and environmental groups (including the Sierra Club) have formed a regional coalition called the Southern Appalachian Mountain Initiative.

NUTS & BOLTS

HOW TO PREPARE

Weather in the Blue Ridge is temperate, with warm, humid days and cool nights in sum-

mer. Spring and fall are cooler, while winter can bring cold and snow. Visitors should expect fog and rainy conditions anytime.

Backpacking permits for Shenandoah Park are available at park headquarters, visitor centers, and ranger stations. Open fires are not allowed in the backcountry, and camping restrictions are tight because of the park's popularity. Three campgrounds can be reached from Skyline Drive, and seven overnight huts serve long-distance hikers on the Appalachian Trail.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Shenandoah National Park, Route 4, Box 348, Luray, VA 22835; (703) 999-2243. George Washington National Forest, 101 North Main St., Harrisonburg, VA 22801; (703) 564-8300. For Appalachian Trail information, contact the Appalachian Trail Conference, P.O. Box 807, Harper's Ferry, WV 25425; (304) 535-6331.

FOR FURTHER READING

Fifty Hikes in Northern Virginia by Leonard M. Adkins (Backcountry Publications, Woodstock, Vermont; 1994). This guide provides detailed maps and descriptions of trails throughout the region. The author also wrote *Walking the Blue Ridge* (University of North Carolina Press, 1992), which describes more

than 100 trails reached from the Blue Ridge Parkway; *Hiking Virginia's National Forests* by Karin Wuertz-Schaefer (Globe Pequot, 1994); *Hiking the Old Dominion* by Allen de Hart (Sierra Club Books, 1984).

THE POLITICS OF PLACE

Last fall, Club activists popped the cork in celebration when permanent federal protection was granted to the 7,600-acre Mt. Pleasant region. Concerned about threats to water supplies, local officials joined with environmentalists to protect the area, one of the most rugged and scenic in Virginia. In the new Mt. Pleasant Scenic Area, logging and road construction are prohibited.

Elsewhere in George Washington National Forest, the Club is seeking protection for the Laurel Fork, whose 10,000 acres contain an eponymous stream that feeds the Potomac River. The area has the largest concentration of threatened, endangered, and sensitive species in the national forest. The Club's Virginia and West Virginia chapters are fighting a proposal to construct a 32-mile natural-gas pipeline on the wild area's western boundary. For more information, contact the Sierra Club Virginia Chapter, P.O. Box 14648, Richmond, VA 23221; (703) 256-4541. ■

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ENDANGERED FISHERIES

Continued from page 53

trol over Newfoundland's resources.

Having set the stage, Ottawa then ignored evidence of an impending disaster. By 1992, when the government finally shut down fishing, it was too late to save the cod.

The moratorium has caused the most massive layoff in Canadian history. All told, 40,000 people are out of work in Atlantic Canada—30,000 of them in Newfoundland—and the government is paying dearly for its mistakes. Today Ottawa is spending nearly \$400 million a year to support unemployed fishery and plant workers, and it will continue pouring multimillions into what is known as "the package" for the next few years; the fishing grounds are not expected to recover and reopen before the year 2000.

Canadian officials have tried to blame Mother Nature for the codfish collapse. They say that several consecutive years of unusually cold water may have caused codfish to migrate further south. (Biologists acknowledge that colder water may also slow the cod's recovery, but there's no evidence it kills any mature fish.) The government also suggests that a growing population of fish-eating seals may have diminished cod, too. They also point to salinity changes and declining stocks of capelin (which has itself been overfished). When not blaming nature, officials tend to accuse non-Canadians, whose aggressive fishing outside Canada's 200-mile zone probably did help eradicate the northern cod. But Canadian officials are reluctant to discuss the undeniable primary cause: domestic overfishing.

As Canada's former fisheries minister, John Crosbie is the man who pulled the plug in July 1992, when there were no more cod left to catch. The son and grandson of St. John's fish merchants who have long ruled Newfoundland politics and commerce, Crosbie is used to wielding power. For hundreds of years, merchant families like his controlled life in towns like

Petty Harbour—buying fish in the summer and advancing fishermen only enough credit to make it through the winter. "The package" is just a modern-day twist on this feudal arrangement.

As a powerful member of Canada's 1980s conservative government, Crosbie could have stopped the destruction of his province's centuries-old cod fishery. But in addition to ignoring warnings from inshore fishermen and independent scientists, he disregarded the advice of his own staff. For years the Department of Fisheries and Oceans had overestimated the abundance of northern cod and set excessive fishing quotas. By 1989, however, the agency's scientists conceded that cod were being overfished and urged that the yearly 300,000-ton quota be slashed. Some minor cuts followed, but Crosbie did not take substantive action until after Atlantic Canada's two major offshore fishing companies docked their vessels in February 1992, their holds empty.

Crosbie announced the shutdown of the fishery to a roomful of reporters at a St. John's hotel. Angry inshore fishermen who had lost everything were waiting just outside. Sam Lee, who led Petty Harbour's legal assault on overfishing a decade earlier, demanded that Crosbie address them. When Crosbie ignored him, the normally calm fisherman began beating on the door—until police pulled him away. I can still hear the sounds, recorded by a CBC radio reporter, of Sam's pounding fists, the sounds of rage and frustration.

Leslie Harris, former president of St. John's Memorial University and the author of a well-publicized government report calling for a cutback, claims that Crosbie delayed acting because of intense lobbying from the two big companies, Fishery Products International and National Sea Products. Crosbie denies the charge, saying that he was reluctant to act earlier because unemployment already hovered at 18 to 19 percent. "What was I supposed to do?" he asks. "Shut down the fishery and throw tens of thousands of people out of work? I didn't do that until it was absolutely necessary."

In 1993, as Martin, Lee, and other inshore fishermen were struggling to come to grips with a future with no fish and no jobs, Fishery Products International was posting record sales of \$600 million—enough to be named the fifth-most-profitable company in Atlantic Canada. National Sea Products had sales of \$266 million.

Since the collapse, both companies have shut down plants, laid off thousands of workers, and sold many of their deep-sea trawlers to Third World countries. They're now making profits processing and selling imports like farmed shrimp from Asia, and groundfish from Norway and Russia.

"We built a world-class company based on a Newfoundland resource," Victor Young, FPI's chief executive officer, tells me. "Today we're building a world-class company based on someone else's resource."

Young argues that his company has not forgotten the 6,000 employees it was forced to lay off. "There's nothing more important to FPI than the people who work for it," he insists. Then, sounding like a born-again environmentalist, Young tells me: "Whatever we do in the future, we cannot do what we did in the past." But Young insists there's not enough evidence to abandon trawling. What's needed, he contends, is a scientific study to document what's wrong with current technology.

"HOW MUCH MORE PROOF DO YOU need?" fumes Martin back at Petty Harbour, where, arms covered with grease, he is working on the boat engine he'll rely on if the fishery ever reopens. He wants to ban trawling once and for all. He picks up a handful of spark plugs, tosses them on the ground, and bursts out: "We've had 40 years' experience with trawler technology and it's totally destroyed the fishery. Trying to regulate trawlers is like trying to regulate nuclear or chemical warfare. It simply can't be done."

Martin often links trawling to clearcutting. In 1992 he became concerned about the province's forests, which were also under siege, with less than ten years' timber supply left. "The

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pulp-and-paper industry was desperate," Martin recalls. "After wiping out Newfoundland's forests, they were talking about moving north into Labrador, where it takes a century to grow even a small tree." (Timber companies have not yet abandoned plans to cut in Labrador, despite protests from environmentalists and native Innu.)

Martin easily embraced the cause of ancient forests. "There's no difference between timber companies felling the last big trees and National Sea and FPI catching the last cod," he says. "It all boils down to corporate greed and government mismanagement."

Martin joined Sierra Club Canada on a cross-country train trip in 1993 to protest destructive fishing and forestry practices. Over 100 people made the journey, including naturalist and writer Farley Mowat, who warned a decade ago that Newfoundland's cod fishery would fail if fishing practices were not changed. The train was named the Clayoquot Express, after British Columbia's threatened rainforest.

The trip culminated in the arrests of Martin and 18 other protesters who blockaded a logging road in Clayoquot Sound. Martin says he "crossed a line" when he got arrested. "Going to jail strengthened my commitment to speak out for the forests, the oceans, the whole environment." He returned to Saskatchewan the following winter to talk with farmers and activists about the parallels between the disappearance of family farms and the family fishing operations. Last summer, he journeyed to New Zealand to caution that the orange roughy could suffer the fate of Newfoundland cod.

Today Sierra Club Canada and other organizations are working to have the dragging of spawning grounds banned when the Newfoundland fishery reopens. Elizabeth May, Sierra Club Canada's executive director, admits that a dragging ban is an uphill fight. After all, trawling is the most popular modern fishing method—employed not just by 100-foot corporate vessels and foreign factory-trawlers, but by smaller, family-owned boats in old fishing towns like Yarmouth, Nova

Scotia, Port au Choix, Newfoundland, and Gloucester, Massachusetts.

Some scientists are joining the call for restrictions on dragging. George Rose, a Canadian federal biologist who spends months at sea studying cod, says there's nothing radical about banning fishing in spawning and nursery areas. "Wildlife has been managed this way all over the world," he says. "It's a big ocean out there. We can wipe it out, or, if we do things properly, we can set up a system that's sustainable."

So far, though, there's no sign that the northern-cod population is recovering. When the fishery was opened for four weekends in the fall of 1994 to allow residents to catch and freeze fish for their families, the pickings were so slim that Martin returned to shore. "I went out two days and realized this is crazy. If the fish are as scarce as they appear, we have no business catching them." Martin says he and other fishermen in their 40s "are beginning to realize that the fishery may not return in our lifetimes." And if it does, will there be fishing communities like Petty Harbour to make the catch, or will the corporate trawlers that destroyed the northern cod fishery simply start all over again?

ANOTHER EVENING AFTER WORKING on his boat, Martin serves Simon a quick dinner of squid, rice, and fresh garden greens. It's been a long day, but Martin is used to longer ones. When he was fishing, he'd leave home by 3 a.m. to get a good spot on the fishing grounds. By the time fish started biting at daybreak, he'd have tossed out his baited lines. Sometimes he wouldn't get home until after dark, exhausted, splattered with fish scales from gutting fish, but happy.

Martin misses his work terribly. Fishing, he says, "is part of what defines me as a person; it's what I do, it's in my blood. It's part of my way of life. It's hard to let go of it."

After dinner, Martin relaxes and turns expansive. "We need a point of view that extends 90 years, not 90 days until the end of the next business cycle," Martin tells me. "We need an

ethic that takes old ways into account, but makes them new." For generations, the fishery was seasonal and fishermen didn't fish on spawning grounds—not because of a conservation ethic, but because they did not have the technology to get out there. "Can we incorporate such historical practices in a new, more conscious, conservation ethic?" Martin asks. "Can we learn once again to live within limits?"

Simon calls down to his father that he's ready for bed. As Martin reads his son a story, I think about my first evening in Petty Harbour, when Martin and his son took me to the town's summer fair. We listened to balladeers sing a haunting song about a Newfoundland schooner whose 40 hands were lost at sea in a winter gale. Another group played brighter music and Newfoundlanders began to dance. Sam Lee danced with young and old, family and friends. He was light on his feet; he made even the most hesitant dancer look graceful as he swung his partners to the tunes of fiddle and accordion.

Less than a week later, Sam had a heart attack. Now he is recovering. But this vigorous fisherman turned activist makes me wonder: How much stress can a person take? How much stress can a community take? How much punishment can an ecosystem take?

It's nearly midnight when Martin comes downstairs and brews another pot of tea. The fog has rolled in, screening out the lights across the harbor. Martin puts two steaming cups of tea on the kitchen table, and picks up where he left off. For this man committed to speaking out against the plunder of the world's fisheries, there's too much to say and too little time to say it. "We have to stop looking at the ocean as something to exploit," he says. "We have a responsibility to future generations to be good caretakers, to leave the ocean in better condition than we found it." His message, so painfully understood in Petty Harbour, needs to be heard in Ottawa, Washington, and beyond. ■

SUSAN POLLACK is a Boston-based writer who specializes in fisheries, the environment, and Asian culture.

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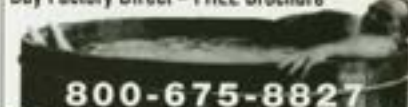
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The question can't be *should* we manage—virtually every decision we make affects nature and the environment and is part of our management “plan.” Even a hands-off policy is management, which will have a number of effects, good and bad. The only question is: should we manage the environment intentionally or unintentionally? I, for one, am convinced we'll be better off if we act with good intentions. Don't get me wrong—we'll make mistakes, but not as many as we would if we didn't consider the consequences of our actions.

*Stephen Sentoff
West Chicago, Illinois*

To speak of managing something of infinite complexity that we had no hand in creating, comprehend but little, and that we have already managed to mishandle requires a vast quantity of brass. The best we can hope for is some degree of repair of the wounds we have inflicted and the humility to understand that, of all the earth's species, we are the ones without which nature could best manage.

*Anita G. Brown
Colorado Springs, Colorado*

Humans are part of nature. The greatest management should be of our own endeavors to insure our good place in the natural scheme. This means planning our population, planning our development, and planning our means of transportation, taking into account that we are not the sum of nature. If we neglect to make such an account, then nature will manage us—like a disease.

*Robert Kermode
Greensboro, North Carolina*

“Managing” wildlife today means “harvesting” the “surplus” animals of “modified environments.” That is, animals whose habitats are fragmented and destroyed by developers, ranchers, and loggers, animals shot by “nature-loving sportsmen.” We need to manage nature through protecting wilderness from human encroachment, not through the issuance of hunting permits. God forbid any “superior” animals should ever manage human overpopulation in the same manner.

*Kelly J. Cowan
San Diego, California*

In the wild (and there should be more, much more of it), humans should not manage, manipulate, or molest nature, except by way of repairing the damage they have

TO WHAT EXTENT SHOULD HUMANS MANAGE NATURE, IF AT ALL?

done, and protecting places from further destructive human influence.

Where humans have made their living space (and there should be less, much less of it), management should take the form only of maintaining health and habitable conditions, with emphases on cooperation and integration with wild things.

*James Jett
Germantown, Maryland*

The earth continues to need rule and cultivation. The mandate of dominion given by God continues. It involves the tasks of production, labor, and stewardship.

*Robert Jones
Warren, Michigan*

“To manage nature”—what an arrogant concept.

*The Reverend Robert M. Honig
Hobe Sound, Florida*

Isn't the “need” for nature management the outcome of failed management policies? Hasn't this been done before with catastrophic results? The whitetail deer populations throughout the eastern United States are a good example of what happens when we tamper with the natural balance for human interests. We are not capable of out-managing nature. We should stop trying.

*David Jordan
Kennesaw, Georgia*

“Nature Management” is an oxymoron.

*Mark Andrew Withers
Athens, Georgia*

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We can manage to kick the dying mule of fossil fuel for a while longer. We can manage to delude ourselves into thinking liquid nitrogen cold storage will salvage genetic diversity. We can even manage to survive in a dying environment, for a while.

Rephrase the question. Ask instead, “Can we manage to leave nature alone?”

*Michael S. Arant
Kearneysville, West Virginia*

The very idea implies a human presumption that we alone, as one single species among millions of others, have the power to set nature back in balance. Any justification of management rings of Judeo-Christian notions of stewardship and manifest destiny—the two ideals at the heart of this predicament and the premise of the management debate. Let's stop playing doctor, unconditionally take our hands off the land, and have faith in Mother Earth's powers of regeneration. I hope she has mercy on us.

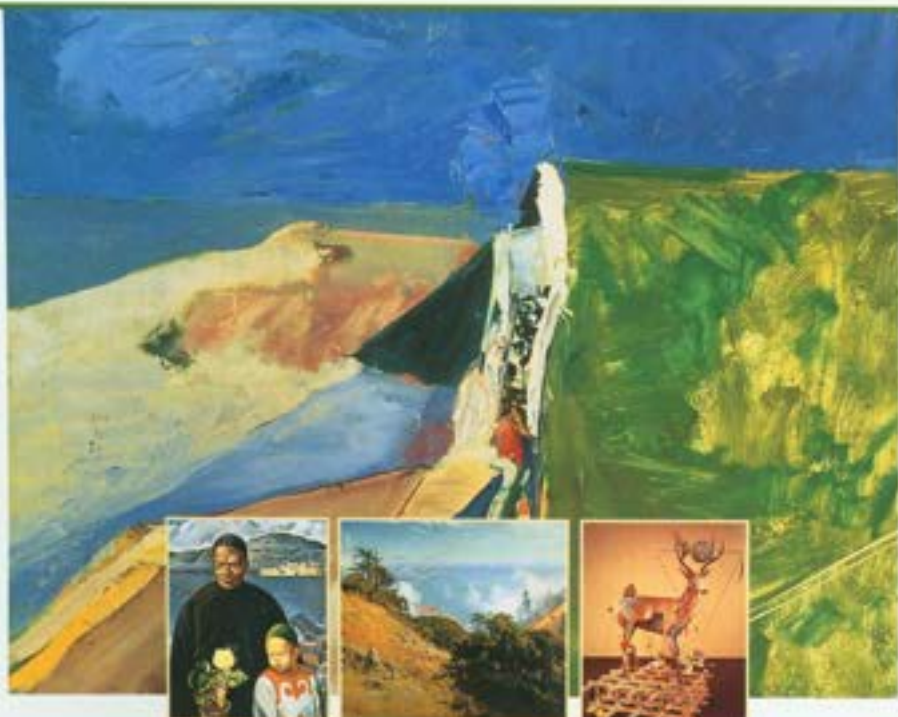
*Alexander Sebastian
Mill Valley, California*

Nature doesn't need us much except to make right what we've done wrong. How to begin correcting the problems? First manage your own reproduction. Next, become a vegetarian. If saving acres of rain-forest and reducing suffering isn't enough incentive, then do it for the joy of knowing that it really aggravates right-wing fanatics. Then develop a healthy sense of humility tinged with a little guilt. I micromanage the quarter acre of the planet I “own,” knowing that I cut down forest when I bought my way into suburbia. I've applied an affirmative action to my environs—feeding the fauna, gardening organically, planting fruit trees—hoping to make up in some way for the past. Last, work on creating a new grassroots mind-set. Management means domination in our society. It should mean nurturing.

*Walter A. Holberg
Stratford, Connecticut*

Eons before humans came into the picture, nature was a self-managing system, and still is. As humans, we need to stop thinking that everything on earth is for our taking and acknowledge that every living thing has a purpose. Nature in itself is very diverse. The best way to manage it is to leave it alone!

*Michael J. Scherer
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Images: Richard Diebenkorn, *Seawall*, 1957; Jose Mora del Pino, *Chinese Mother and Child*, 1923; William Keith, *Looking across the Golden Gate from Mount Tamalpais*, ca. 1895; Robert Hubton, *Running through the Woods*, 1975.

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