

Chapter 18

Take Back OUR Movement

Trudging down the dusty trail of writing this book, I've become more and more worried that the conservation movement is slipping out of the grasp of Nature lovers. Stuffing conservation in a bag with environmentalism means that people-centered values and concerns come out on top. Arne Naess asked in the final chapter of Soulé's 1986 anthology *Conservation Biology*, "Will the defenders of Nature please rise?"¹ Dear old Arne's plea twenty years ago is even timelier today. If we are to have any chance of halting or even lessening the human-caused Great Extinction, the defenders and lovers of Nature must rise and take back the conservation movement—both the citizen activist movement and the conservation biology movement. We must boldly and credibly stand up for the intrinsic value of other life forms.

Nature needs truehearted conservationists to do that. Not enviro-resourcists who do not *feel* in their hearts the crushing loss of life all around us.

In taking back conservation, we must have mettle, recognizing that we will make enemies and lose friends. So be it. In this final chapter of *The Myth(s) of the Environmental Movement*, I propose some steps to take back the conservation movement. I will sunder them into two groups: those mostly about organizational reforms, and those about reaffirming values, policies, and right action. They are:

ORGANIZATIONAL

- Recognize the differences between conservation and environmentalism, and between conservation and resourcism.

¹ Arne Naess, "Intrinsic Value: Will the Defenders of Nature Please Rise?" in Michael Soulé, editor, *Conservation Biology: The Science of Scarcity and Diversity* (Sinauer Associates, Sunderland, Massachusetts, 1986), 504-515.

- Overcome the “Environmental Stereotype.”
- Reach out to the political mainstream, including reasonable Republicans in the U.S.
- Strategically redirect conservation funding to build a powerful movement for the long term.
- Encourage intellectual inquiry and develop a strong think-tank presence within the conservation movement.
- Face up to the problems of professionalism and corporatism in our organizations.

VALUES, POLICIES, AND ACTION

- Proudly proclaim the basic values of Nature conservation.
- Recognize that the overarching problem is the human-caused Great Extinction, and its driving cause is the exploding population of human beings multiplied by rising affluence and technology and revved up by globalization.
- Be strong and unwavering in stating our values, defending our conservation heritage, and protecting and restoring wild Nature.
- Defend strictly protected areas as “the most valuable weapon in our conservation arsenal.”
- Carefully frame the message of Nature conservation.
- Proclaim and work for a vision that is bold, practically achievable, scientifically credible, and *hopeful*.

These steps rope around each other like wintering snakes, but I'll pull each from the writhing bundle to look at it, remaining mindful that they mess around with each other. The upshot of what I suggest is that the conservation movement needs to re-find

its soul and spine. Conservationists need to rescue and update the good old ideas of Nature protection and put them in the forefront again.

I must apologize once more for my U.S.-centric approach. It was beyond my means to fully incorporate Canada and Mexico into this analysis. Canada's preeminent wolf biologist and Rewilding Institute Fellow Paul Paquet emailed me, "It is not enough to speak of Republicans and Democrats, when most of 'wild' North America is now controlled by Canadian Liberals, Conservatives, and New Democrats. This is important to me as the eco-cons (The Nature Conservancy, Greenpeace, Forest Ethics) collaborate with industry and government in destruction of the most pristine and intact temperate rainforest in the world, and as a prelude to the negotiated destruction of the boreal and Arctic." Paul is dead-on and I hope that The Rewilding Institute website will be able to highlight problems in Canada and Mexico more in the future. Keep in mind that what I criticize about "The Environmental Movement" in the United States goes double for Canada.

ORGANIZATIONAL REFORMS

- *Recognize the differences between conservation and environmentalism, and between conservation and resourcism. I believe that both conservation and environmentalism will be stronger by recognizing the differences. In particular, I think conservation can gain more attention and can appeal to a wider variety of supporters if it is not buried in environmentalism.*

First, let's acknowledge that conservation and environmentalism are different movements, although their interests and foes often overlap. Let's also recognize that the animal rights and Green political movements are different from and separate from both the conservation and environmental movements—and are sometimes at loggerheads with them, as I showed in Part I. This understanding needs to be in our own minds and in how we present conservation to the world.

Second, let us acknowledge that resourcism or resource conservation is different from Nature conservation and that they are often at war. Sustainable development and ecosystem management as they are now practiced are types of resourcism that are replacements for protected areas, not complements. Let us also understand that environmentalists can be either conservationists or resourcists, and that enviro-resourcism is a growing worldview and path that undermines conservation.

Third, the environmental movement should become more explicitly about human health and safety. Environmentalists should see the American Lung Association and such groups as part of their movement.

Fourth, conservationists should *never* refer to our community or ourselves as *environmentalists* or *environmental*. For conservationists to call ourselves environmentalists is sloppy thinking and sloppy use of the language, which befuddles everyone. Similarly, conservationists should never call ourselves *greens*.

Fifth, both conservationists and human-health advocates should recognize the danger posed by the doctrinaire Left and make every effort to ensure that both movements appeal to all Americans regardless of the political spectrum in which they place themselves. (It is one thing if a majority of conservationists tend to political progressivism; it is altogether another thing for conservation to be a leftist cause.)

Sixth, conservationists (including hunters and sportfishers), environmentalists, and animal-welfare activists should figure out how to work well together on campaigns of mutual interest, establish a basis for continuing cooperation, and recognize that at times they will disagree.

And finally, I have come to believe that conservationists should oust enviro-resourcists from our organizations if they persist in undercutting our Nature-first values and making-over conservation groups into corporate pabulum.

Lumping conservation in with environmentalism is why enviro-resourcists have been able to grab influential roles in conservation. As long as we work as a single

“Environmental Movement,” environmentalists will overwhelm conservationists. Seeing the protection and restoration of wildlife and wildlands as a separate conservation movement will get rid of the murkiness and allow Nature lovers to key in on *our* priorities, and it will make it easier for Nature lovers to take back the conservation movement instead of having to take over “The Environmental Movement.” I think this will also lead to more friendly and effective cooperation between conservationists and environmentalists, including enviro-resourcists.

- *Overcome the “Environmental Stereotype.” The Environmental Stereotype—Democratic, progressive, politically correct, antihunting, vegetarian—is harmful to the image of conservationists (and environmentalists) and keeps potential friends from becoming conservationists. It unnecessarily limits our movement and turns away many allies.*

There are many people in the United States who are not fundamentally opposed to conservation or environmentalism but who are opposed to *environmentalists*, because of the perception that environmentalists (including conservationists) are politically correct left-wingers who want to take their guns away or who are socialists. We should not dismiss such folks because they are foolish paranoids or because their beliefs are wrong. However false their characterization of environmentalists may be, it is real to them, and it keeps them from backing conservation measures that they might actually like. In some cases, such folks may not be hardcore biocentric conservationists, but they will support our proposals to protect wildlands and wildlife from wasting.

Let me underline this paragraph. I am not damning conservationists and environmentalists who happen to be political progressives, active in the Democratic Party, vegetarian, and even somewhat politically correct. Many are. Our movements would not exist without such folks. For decades I have been surrounded by them. They

are my friends! All I object to is the widespread assumption that nearly all conservationists and environmentalists fit into the Environmentalist Stereotype. I quarrel with those leftist environmentalists who want to drive away potential friends of wilderness protection (and pollution cleanup) who may not back affirmative action, gay marriage, gun control, and so on. There is no need to link these issues to conservation. Similar “greenie” stereotypes plague conservationists outside the United States.

If we wish to grow our political power, our challenge is to show the diversity in lifestyle and politics of those who love wilderness and wildlife. Conservationists (and environmentalists) need always be aware that the Environmentalist Stereotype shadows them, and need to be ready to run it off—even *when such individual conservationists largely fit into the stereotype*. Do not let reporters and politicians get away with assuming the Environmentalist Stereotype. Challenge them on it. We need to encourage folks who obviously do not fit the Environmentalist Stereotype to be public leaders. Groups such as REP America, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, Trout Unlimited, state wildlife federations, and the Coalition of National Park Service Retirees need to be more face-forward in the conservation movement. I believe that the New Mexico conservation movement is as strong as it is because such folks are public leaders in the state. In New Mexico, we have proved that Nature lovers across every possible spectrum can work together, camp together, party together.

- *Reach out to the political mainstream, including reasonable Republicans. Many Americans (as well as people in other countries) love Nature and wild animals and wish to protect them. However, they are turned off by their perceptions of the environmental movement.*

The two greatest political challenges for United States conservationists are to make conservation bipartisan again and to find support in small towns and rural areas. Shucking the Environmentalist Stereotype is the first step. Showcasing the key role of

hunters and anglers in conservation history comes next. When folks hear “wilderness supporter,” they should be no more surprised to see a man or a woman with a gun, fishing rod, or straddling a horse than to see a hiker, birder, or river runner.

Here, framing becomes a key need. Too often the rhetoric of conservation (environmentalism even more so) is couched in the rhetoric of the class-struggle, politically correct left. Never mind the ideas; it is the words being used to convey the ideas that turn off many potential supporters. Conservationists need to identify such terms (privilege, people-of-_____, hegemonic...just to scratch the surface) and find more appealing replacements. One of the ways conservationists could reach political moderates and Nature-loving Republicans would be to study the values of traditional conservatism, as I did in Chapter 13. Those values are also the values of conservation: Piety, Prudence, Posterity, Antimaterialism, Responsibility. Conservationists need to incorporate these words into how we explain our proposals. Ditching the buzzwords of the Left and using the values of traditional conservatism to sell conservation would be a powerful step in reaching out to the millions of Americans turned off by “environmentalists.”

If we pull apart vital conservation votes in the House and Senate, we often see the conservation side losing by a rather small margin despite the larger margin of control by the Republicans. A few Republican representatives and senators vote regularly with conservationists. If we could double that number of conservation-voting Republicans, conservationists would win most floor votes, even without Democrats in majority status (I write this before the 2006 election). Conservationists have a great opportunity to do that now as moderate Republicans are stiffening their backbones against the Animal-House antics of Abramoff and Delay. As an example, in November 2005, twenty-two moderate Republican House members in the “Main Street Coalition” were able to pull oil leasing in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge out of legislation on the

floor.² This Main Street Coalition should be a focus for conservationists. Earlier in the book, I pointed out that one reason Republican members of Congress don't vote with conservationists is that they are seldom lobbied by conservationists. Led by REP America, Trout Unlimited, the Coalition of National Park Service Retirees, and similar groups, the conservation movement needs to identify potential conservation voters among the Republicans in Congress and then cultivate them with visits from conservationists who can talk to them.

However, I think conservationists should visit and talk with even anticonservation Republican office-holders, at least those who are not thoroughgoing Nature haters. Sometimes members of Congress oppose conservation measures in their districts partly because they dislike local conservationists. When we go out of our way to build a relationship with them and when they hear from Republican conservationists, they may not block a wilderness-area bill or other project. In such cases, we do not need to compromise or sell out; we simply need not be strangers.

Now, some enviro-resourcists are also calling for conservationists to reach out to rural folks. However, they seem to think that in order to do so, conservationists need to compromise our values, soften our positions, and pretend that ranchers and others have not caused grave ecological harm. We do not need to sell out to find rural friends, however. The first rule in reaching out to others is that you only go to the reasonable, moderate members of that group.³ Al From of the Democratic Leadership Council recognizes that truth. "You're not going to convince the hardcore to turn around, and you shouldn't even try because you would compromise your own values."⁴ Conservationists need to appeal to the center, not to the radical right or the Nature

² David S. Broder, "After Lengthy Exile, Moderates Finding Their Voice," *Albuquerque Journal*, November 14, 2005.

³ This may seem to contradict what I just wrote in the paragraph above, but it is a different situation.

⁴ Terry M. Neal, "GOP Corporate Donors Cash In on Smut," *Washingtonpost.com*, December 21, 2004.

haters. To talk to ranchers about wolves, you ignore the paranoid wolf-haters, but find reasonable ranchers interested in solutions; they are out there even if their voices are drowned out by the radicals. This social overlordship by landscapers is one reason why the consensus working groups of “stakeholders” are bad news. They are usually dominated by the loudest mouths among the dying extractive industries of the West. In small towns and rural areas there are folks who culturally aren't Sierra Clubbers but who have a deep love and respect for wild Nature. We need to find them. And then let them work with moderate, reasonable folks in their community. In other cases, we can appeal to our erstwhile foes with solutions that benefit them, such as the voluntary-retirement option for public-lands grazing permittees.

Conservation Biology tucked away a splendid article called “Conservation and the Myth of Consensus,” in its 2005 volume. The authors, wildlife biologists and social theorists, point out, “Consensus processes are philosophically rooted in social constructionism. From a constructionist perspective, the existence of any ‘reality’ independent of human values, symbols, and meanings is questioned....[This] approach...has been used to legitimize existing patterns of environmental degradation.” They see the roots of this fad in the 1987 Brundtland Report that made sustainable development gospel for the United Nations. They further warn that the consensus approach among stakeholders “jeopardizes conservation specifically by legitimizing existing hegemonic configurations of power and precluding resistance against dominant elites.”⁵ Despite masterful performances as whining victims, irrigators, ranchers, loggers, miners, boomers, and other “Lords of Yesterday” are still the dominant elites of the West. This is why conservationists who really understand the West refuse to play

⁵ M. Nils Peterson, Markus J. Peterson, and Tarla Rai Peterson, “Conservation and the Myth of Consensus,” *Conservation Biology* Vol. 19, No. 3, June 2005, 762-767. I admit a bit of an irony with what I quote from this article—it is in the language of social analysis that I encourage conservationists not to use.

the consensus game so touted by *High Country News* and existing power structures, including privatization think tanks and the federal government.

- *Strategically redirect conservation funding to build a powerful movement for the long term. Conservation funders need to carefully study the success of right-wing philanthropy and follow suit. New stress should be placed on long-term general-support funding of conservation organizations for stability, developing and supporting specific conservation leaders and effective spokespersons, and backing conservation think tanks. Moreover, conservation leaders need to think about how to revolutionize conservation funding to eliminate the constant treadmill of money grubbing.*

When I started in conservation in the early 1970s, there was not much of a funding establishment for the conservation movement. Groups like the Sierra Club and The Wilderness Society (TWS) received most of their operating income from members or from a few major patrons and bequests. Most local groups were ad hoc: unincorporated and with no charitable tax status. There were very few paid staff. Most of the work was done by folks who had regular jobs. Nonetheless, the conservation movement got a lot done.

Since the 1980s, the funding world for conservation has radically changed, and because of it the conservation movement has radically changed. Dozens of grantmaking foundations now give millions of dollars every year to conservation groups. Member recruitment and retention has become an industry. The cultivation of high donors is one of the most important things a conservation organization now does. As a result, the conservation movement has much more money. Even small local conservation groups are now incorporated with paid staff and formal boards of directors. It seems that paid staff almost outnumber volunteers. With this phenomenal growth, conservation groups get a lot done.

Thank goodness for the foundations who fund conservation work. My criticism is meant to be constructive, not mean-spirited, or unthankful. Despite all the good that funders have accomplished, however, I think some have unconsciously helped to make a bit of a mess in the conservation movement and have kept it from being as strong and effective as it could be. I discussed the problem in chapters 4 and 5; now I want to offer some solutions. The first thing is to carefully study how radical-right funders have operated during the last thirty years. Bart Semcer, a Sierra Club staffer for hunter/angler outreach and a Rewilding Institute Fellow, notes in an email message that “the right-wing political machine has been very good at investing in people....[and] recognizing the importance of capital investment in technology.” He goes on to say, “Based on my experience in the conservation movement I have seen little focus on nurturing talent.”

Peter Lavigne and David Orr offered a laundry list and a strategy for reforming conservation philanthropy in the fall of 2004. Among their recommendations are: fund general-operating support and infrastructure; support people and leadership; fund systemic approaches for abating ecological degradation; and fund ideas. Many foundations now only fund short-term, specific projects with defined outcomes, and do not fund general support for organizations. This needs to change. Many of the most talented and effective leaders and thinkers in the conservation movement struggle for financial support. Major donors and foundations need to recognize the vital importance of these folks and then make sure that they are funded to do whatever they do best.

Open-minded foundations and other donors need to work with critics in the conservation movement to develop a more effective approach to funding.

All of the above is well and good, but I have become even more worried about conservation fundraising in the final writing of *Myth(s)*. Former Senator Ernest F. Hollings (D-South Carolina) was one of the more thoughtful and honest members of that

body. He recently wrote, “There is a cancer on the body politic: money.” He is on-target, of course. However, politics is not the only one to suffer from the pursuit of lucre. I now believe that there is a cancer of the body conservation: money. Hollings points out that “almost one-third of a senator's time is spent fund raising.”⁶ This is roughly true for conservation organizations large and small, unfortunately. The upshot is that the money-cancer eats away at the health and integrity of conservation institutions and—more importantly—the conservation community and the work of conservation.

Conservation organizations of all sizes are damned to a Sisyphean hell on the fund-raising treadmill. This treadmill is relentless and gets faster and faster. From far away and close at hand, I see conservation groups—unconsciously for the most part—choosing fund-raising as their overarching purpose and first task. This choice is seen as simple survival by the employees and board members of groups. Running after dollars, however, corrupts conservation and is the underlying cause for many of the problems I've identified in these pages. It is essential for conservationists—donors and grantees—to find ways to stop the treadmill. Here I have space to only toss out a few ideas on how this might be done. It is up to the conservation family to refine and implement such solutions.

Conservation donors need to take the steps suggested earlier along with additional ones. As for their interactions with organizations to which they provide grants, foundations need to stress multiyear, general-support grants. They need to trust their grantees' judgment to do right with the money. Overall, foundations should make it as easy as possible for conservation groups by reducing paperwork and organizational demands on them. Foundations also need to make internal changes in their own organizations to make their requirements less time consuming on grantees and to free up more money for them. Some foundations, such as the Weeden Foundation, do their

⁶ Ernest F. Hollings, “Stop the Money Chase or Bid Ethics Goodbye,” *The Washington Post*, reprinted in *The Albuquerque Journal*, February 26, 2006.

work with minimal staff and office overhead. Most foundations, however, are overstaffed and bloated in their operations. By taking a leaner approach, more of their money could go to do the real work of conservation. Similarly, foundations should reduce support to consultants and such to free up more money for hard-working groups.

Large individual donors should develop roles as patrons of certain conservation groups and leaders, as some do now. By adopting groups with large, multiyear grants, individual donors can make organizations more secure and reduce the time and effort they need to spend in fundraising.

Conservation groups (“grantees”) can do much to reduce their need for money. Fundamentally, they need to drop the ideology of organizational growth. Before increasing budgets, hiring more staff, opening more offices, taking on new programs, an organization—and not just the staff and board—needs to harshly question the need for growth. The larger a group becomes, the higher the percentage of its budget and energy goes into administrative overhead. Only when expansion of any kind is essential to accomplishing the mission of the group, should it be carefully embraced. Of course, new groups need to grow, but even they should grow prudently.

Conservation groups today are staff-reliant. Once upon a time there was very few paid conservation staff. Many effective conservation groups had no staff at all. Volunteers did all the work. Many of these groups weren't even incorporated and had tiny budgets. For example, my wife Nancy Morton, a hospital nurse in Chico, California, helped start and lead the Northstate Wilderness Committee in the late 1970s. Other key players included a struggling professional photographer, a gardener, a recycling center manager, the owner of a print shop, one of his employees, college students...and so on. They got the Ishi Wilderness Area and others established, improved management of Lassen National Park, blocked timber sales, got the Forest Service to enlarge roadless area boundaries, closed areas to snowmobiles and off-road vehicles, and much more. There were dozens and dozens of such groups with similar

accomplishments back then. Such unpaid activists should take (not be given) a much larger role in local and state conservation groups today. Such folks are doing more for the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance, for example (they are not being organized by the staff or board). Christianne Hinks, a tile craftsperson, works only part-time so she can do more for New Mexico wilderness. Marriage partners can work out arrangements where one is the breadwinner and the other does conservation. Retirees are a splendid source of conservation workers. Now, when I talk about such citizen activists, I'm not thinking of them only volunteering to stuff envelopes (important as that is), I'm talking about them taking on staff-level responsibilities. Many such activists are just as knowledgeable and capable as paid staff—and for some tasks probably better suited. Such a resurgence of citizen conservationists within conservation organizations will require some mental readjustment among paid staff and board members, certainly. Returning to the centerpiece role of unpaid conservationists will take the pressure off organizations to raise more money to fund paid staff positions. Not only is this step key for reducing the need for money, it is also at the heart of revitalizing and healing the conservation community. It is a big piece of how Nature lovers can take back conservation.

Many, many groups like the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance pay barely adequate wages to staff. But, to be brutally blunt, many national groups and well-healed regional groups pay excessive salaries to many staff persons. The number of conservation-group staff making over \$100,000 a year is surprising. Moreover, such organizations are overstaffed. For such groups salaries should be slowly returned to reasonable levels and featherbedding by unnecessary staff should be curtailed. Such groups can go leaner in many other ways as well. The avalanche of direct mail from conservation groups is a scandal. Two or three direct-mail consulting firms handle contracts for the big groups (which is why the junk mail all looks the same).

Membership growth for the sake of membership growth neither improves the finances of groups (many of these programs actually lose money) or their clout.

Some other ways the increasing need for money could be curbed would be for some groups to merge in order to reduce overhead, and to try to make more money on sales. Conservation groups need the will and courage to reject grants if they require the group to do projects outside their core mission or if they involve too much overhead or other onerous requirements. Groups also should say no to consultants and training if there is not a real need for such services. I'm blown away by how much time small-group executive directors and other staffers are expected to spend by certain funders on redundant and unnecessary training sessions.

These are just a few ways conservationists can get off the money-go-round and spend more time on conservation. I urge conservationists from both granting and grantee sides to work together to solve the problem. A task force should be pulled together to do this.

- *Encourage intellectual inquiry and develop a strong think-tank presence within the conservation movement. The anticonservation movement is effectively backed by well-financed right-wing think tanks. The Nature conservation movement has not supported its own think tanks, even when they exist, and as a result suffers for want of an intellectual base and good strategy.*

Though I'm long gone from the conservative movement, I've continued to study it. The radical right has made masterful use of its intellectuals in creating the ideas to hack away at our public lands and conservation laws (among other things!). The role of think tanks has been crucial to their success, and the radical-right funding army has supported think tanks and prominent intellectuals very, very well. Paul Krugman writes that Irving Kristol, father of neoconservatism, in 1978 “urged corporations to make ‘philanthropic contributions to scholars and institutions who are likely to advocate

preservation of a strong private sector.”⁷ They took his advice. Cato, Heritage, and others are the fruit.

The Discovery Institute, the Seattle think tank that has so successfully muddied the waters on evolution with “intelligent design” buncombe, is a prime example of a successful radical-right think tank. They have pumped “\$3.6 million in fellowships of \$5,000 to \$60,000 per year to 50 researchers since the science center's founding in 1996.”⁸ Imagine the benefit to Nature conservation if someone was funded to do the same on our side! The radical right is expert at framing, yes, but their simplistic words are backed by deep thoughts from their think tanks. Charity Navigator, which evaluates public charities, identifies 222 policy organizations in the United States.⁹ That's a lot of think tanks. Nearly every sector in America uses them, except for the conservation movement. There are even think tanks for resourcism, alternative energy, environmental justice, urban environmentalism, and so on.

It is past time for the Environmental Grantmakers, other conservation foundations, and individual high donors to carefully study how the anticonservation right has used think tanks. Then a consortium needs to make a long-term commitment to funding conservation think tanks.

Of course, think tanks do not a movement make. But they are an essential part of an effective movement. Action must remain the heart of conservation, but we neglect the development of new ideas and a strong intellectual base at our peril. Without ideas, a movement ossifies.

Since the early 1990s, working with Michael Soulé and other top conservation biologists and thoughtful conservation leaders like David Johns and John Davis, I've tried to build a think-tank resource for the Nature conservation movement. Through

⁷ Paul Krugman, “Design for Confusion,” *The New York Times*, August 5, 2005.

⁸ Jodi Wilgoren, “Politicized Scholars Put Evolution on the Defensive,” *The New York Times*, August 21, 2005.

⁹ “The Independent Institute Awarded 4-Star Rating by Charity Navigator,” *The Independent*, Vol. XV, No. 2, 2005.

Wild Earth magazine, The Wildlands Project, and now The Rewilding Institute, we have developed new ideas for conservation. In this we've been quite successful, especially in two related areas. First, we have pushed scientific research showing the vital role of large carnivores in maintaining ecological integrity, and have made the case that missing native carnivores need to be reintroduced in wildlands. Second, we have promoted a shift to wildlands networks instead of isolated protected areas. Wildlands networks tie core wildernesses together with wildlife movement linkages. Together, these approaches are called *rewilding*.¹⁰ In the early 1990s, both were scoffed at. Today they are widely held among conservation biologists, citizen conservationists, and professionals in land-managing agencies. At the 8th World Wilderness Congress in Anchorage, Alaska, in 2005, I heard conservationists from Europe, Latin America, Australia, North America, and elsewhere use the word “rewilding.” A centerpiece of the entire week was the launching of a new campaign to *rewild* a region in Mexico opposite Big Bend National Park on the Rio Bravo (Rio Grande). My book *Rewilding North America* goes into detail about rewilding as does The Rewilding Institute website.¹¹

¹⁰ Michael Soulé and Reed Noss, “Rewilding and Biodiversity: Complementary Goals for Continental Conservation,” *Wild Earth*, Vol. 8, No. 3, Fall 1998, 18-28.

¹¹ www.rewilding.org. The Rewilding Institute was spun off from The Wildlands Project in 2003 to concentrate on developing and promoting new ideas for conservation, in other words, to be a think tank. An impressive group of conservation biologists, conservation thinkers, and conservation movement leaders have joined The Rewilding Institute as Fellows. This book and my previous *Rewilding North America* are products of my work with The Rewilding Institute. The Rewilding Institute website is the essential source of information about the integration of traditional wildlife and wildlands conservation with conservation biology to advance landscape-scale conservation. It provides explanations of key concepts with downloadable documents and links to important papers, essential books, and many groups working on various continental-scale conservation initiatives in North America. Representing The Rewilding Institute, I give several dozen talks a year on rewilding North America. Other Fellows also give public presentations.

• *Face up to the problems of professionalism and corporatism in our groups. The increase in paid staff for conservation groups of all sizes has allowed the conservation movement to do much more. It has also, however, hampered the conservation mission in some ways, including watering-down the conservation ethic, chipping away at our boldness, and sidelining citizen conservationists. The supremacy of organizations over their missions has harmed our cause.*

I described some of the pitfalls of professionalism in Chapter 5, drawing from my earlier book, *Confessions of an Eco-Warrior*. It is important that everyone in the conservation movement—funders, board members, staff, and citizen conservationists—recognize that there are hitches and commit to wrestling with them. Many of these troubles are not unique to the conservation movement; they are rife throughout modern institutions. However, the way some problems play out within the conservation community is specific to our movement. Perhaps the most serious quandary is that some executive directors of conservation groups of all sizes are now careerists who are more in the camp of enviro-resourcism than that of conservation. This has happened partly because passionate conservation leaders do not always make good managers and fundraisers. Some groups have dealt with this problem by separating the administrative and leadership positions. Leaders of groups, whatever their titles, should be real conservationists and should lead on policy, act as spokespersons, and be inspirational. Good managers and fundraisers, who are also necessary, should have titles other than executive director, and not be in control of the organization. Several groups are exploring this approach, I'm happy to say. Mind you, I am not saying that solid conservationists cannot be good managers or vice versa. Indeed, the finance manager for the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance probably spends more nights camping a year than any other staff member except for the fellow in charge of field work. Moreover, the executive director of NMWA is a passionate, visionary, inspirational

conservationist and the associate director is a very solid organizational manager who cares deeply about wilderness.

Many conservation group staffers are largely unschooled in conservation and would be more effective if they had deeper knowledge. A surprising number have not read *A Sand County Almanac*, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, *Continental Conservation*, *The Arrogance of Humanism*, *The Enduring Wilderness*, *Rewilding North America*, *The Idea of Wilderness*...you get the picture. Staff members should be trained not only in the nuts and bolts of campaigning and organizing, but also in the history, philosophy, and science of conservation. Such training will build the intellectual muscle of the conservation movement. This is another area, by the way, in which radical-right think tanks have soared. Every year they steep dozens of young people in the intellectual side of the radical right and produce knowledgeable activists and future leaders.

Patagonia, Piragis, Four Corners Riversports, and Northwest River Supply have great credibility with their customers because their owners and employees spend many days a year testing their clothes and gear in the wilderness and on wild rivers in gruesome conditions. Eric Dinerstein of the U.S. World Wildlife Fund and George Schaller, Alan Rabinowitz, and other staffers of the Wildlife Conservation Society have credibility because they know the wild in the wilder's home—and have scars and harrowing tales to prove it.¹² Staffers of conservation groups should be required to spend two weeks a year in wilderness—and not as vacation. I first proposed this twenty-some years ago and a few groups actually practice it today. Great Old Broads for Wilderness does a stellar job of getting their folks together in the big outside—

¹² Yvon Chouinard, *Let My People Go Surfing* (The Penguin Press, New York, 2005); Eric Dinerstein, *Tigerland And Other Unintended Destinations* (Island Press, Washington, DC, 2005); and Alan Rabinowitz, *Chasing The Dragon's Tail: The Struggle to Save Thailand's Wild Cats* (Doubleday, New York, 1994).

Broadwalks. Such events should be basic for all conservation groups. This facet of organizational effectiveness is as important as any other and needs to be highlighted.

Conservationists who are fortunate enough to be paid by a conservation organization need to acknowledge that their loyalty should nonetheless be first to wild Nature, not to their job, not to their career, not to a conservation group, and not to a “pet” politician. While keeping their sanity, they need a sense of horror and urgency about the ripping apart of wild Nature.

Everyone in the conservation movement needs to remember and recommit themselves to the prominent role of citizen conservationists. In the history of our movement, citizens have played top roles. The majority of members of boards of directors should always be citizen conservationists, not paid staff of other conservation groups. Again, Great Old Broads for Wilderness is an example of citizen conservationists continuing to lead a conservation group. REP America is another. The New Mexico Wilderness Alliance board includes some citizen conservationists, such as Bob Howard and Wes Leonard, who can match any paid conservationist in the country in experience, knowledge, and leadership. The Sierra Club's great strength is how members work at all levels within the Club. If 90 percent of the Sierra Club's paid staff vanished, the Club would carry on with its unpaid activists.

Whenever possible, big national groups should stay in the background and let local conservation groups have the limelight in press releases and media coverage. Too often, the nationals jump in and elbow locals out of the way. Likewise, staff for local and regional conservation groups should back off a bit and let their citizen leaders also be quoted in press releases and media coverage. Following these guidelines will undercut the harmful perception that the conservation movement is mostly outsiders and professionals. There are times, of course, when it is okay for national groups and paid staffers to be media spokespeople, but the face-time needs to be strategically

shared. Media outreach is a platform for selling our values and policies, not for pimping one's group for fundraising.

This is a tough topic to talk about because it gives the whiff of damning individual conservation-group staffers. This is not my wish. I have boundless admiration for many folks who work for conservation groups, including lots who happen to fit some of the profiles I do criticize. I'm not giving them the back of my hand; I'm trying to show how they and the conservation community can do better.

Conservationists need to change the way we think about our movement: it is a community of Nature lovers, not a collection of institutions.

VALUES, POLICIES, AND ACTION REFORMS

- *Proudly stand up for the basic values of Nature conservation. Conservation is fundamentally biocentric and argues that wild Nature (biodiversity) should be protected for its own sake. Causing the extinction of a species is a sin.*

For too many years the conservation movement has been drifting away from its most basic values. This drift has two currents pushing it. One, conservationists are afraid that straight talk about the intrinsic value of Nature and wild species will turn people off. Two, a growing number of conservation group leaders do not themselves believe in Nature for its own sake. David Johns writes in an email message that “some conservationists seem to be not just using anthropocentric arguments to advance rewilding goals, but are, in fact, backing off of rewilding goals in favor of sustainable development nonsense.” In this way, the soul of conservation is being sucked away and drowned. The shift to enviro-resourcism can be subtle, even unconscious. When we don't talk about Nature, it fades from our minds.

David Ehrenfeld warns, “Resource reasons for conservation can be used if honest, but must always be presented together with the non-humanistic reasons, and it

should be made clear that the latter are more important in every case.”¹³ He explains that “there is simply no way to tell whether one arbitrarily chosen part of Nature has more ‘value’ than another part, so like Noah we do not bother to make the effort.”¹⁴ He continues, “I have tried to show...the devilish intricacy and cunning of the humanists’ trap. ‘Do you love Nature?’ they ask. ‘Do you want to save it? Then tell us what it is good for.’ The only way out of this kind of trap, if there is a way, is to smash it, to reject it utterly.”¹⁵ Decades earlier, Aldo Leopold warned that “most members of the land community have no economic value.” He urged against inventing “subterfuges to give it economic importance.”¹⁶ I can offer no better advice to young conservationists than what these two wise men give. Species and other pieces of the land community deserve to exist for their own sakes. Do not rely on or exaggerate the economic values of wilddeors or wild places.

We should not be shy about saying, “I love wilderness and big cats!” Celebrating the intrinsic value of all life forms and the dazzling dance that has brought this diversity into being is the bedrock of the conservation mind. We conservationists need to reaffirm our biocentric values even if we worry that they may be a hard sell to the public, which, as I will show, is not necessarily so. If we do not stand up for Nature for its own sake, no one will. If not us, who will lead society into a new relationship with Nature? Moreover, by denying our values to ourselves and by hiding them from others, we will do immeasurable harm to our own sanity and integrity. Like Peter denying Christ thrice before the cock crew, we will become miserable, pitiful wretches.

Biologist Campbell Webb, who works in the tropical forests of Indonesia, writes in *Conservation Biology*, “Finally, perhaps the healthiest thing we can do for our peace of

¹³ David Ehrenfeld, *The Arrogance Of Humanism* (Oxford University Press, NY, 1978), 210.

¹⁴ Ehrenfeld, *The Arrogance Of Humanism*, 208.

¹⁵ Ehrenfeld, *The Arrogance Of Humanism*, 210.

¹⁶ Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac And Sketches Here and There* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1949), 210.

mind is to speak our mind....we value [natural places and species] just for being. And yet many of us have been acculturated to present only utilitarian arguments for their preservation....Perhaps the time has come to stand up and speak our minds clearly, especially because most anthropocentric, utilitarian approaches have failed to slow the destruction....”¹⁷

I am proud to see more and more field biologists standing up like Campbell and defending the intrinsic value of other species. Mike Parr, secretary of the Alliance for Zero Extinction, a new group working to save the species facing “imminent extinction,” says, “This is a one-shot deal for the human race. We have a moral obligation to act. The science is in, and we are almost out of time.”¹⁸ Many of those who work for zoos and who are funded by zoos for field research are heroic defenders of wild Nature for its own sake. You don't put your ass on the line in a vicious, cannibalistic civil war unless you care about the inherent value of the gorillas you are defending.

For the last fifteen years I've been crisscrossing North America and the Atlantic Ocean from Fairbanks to Canterbury arguing for the protection and reintroduction of large carnivores because of how they exercise “top-down regulation” of prey species to the great benefit of ecosystems.¹⁹ This is what rewilding is all about, after all. However, even this is a utilitarian argument of a sort. The real reason for protecting and restoring large carnivores is for their own sakes. Scientists at the Wildlife Conservation Society just edited a book that carefully weighs how a variety of carnivores around the world actually function for the health of the ecosystem. Nonetheless, Justina Ray and her coauthors write, “We suggest that it is important to distinguish between value-based and science-based reasons for carnivore conservation—understanding that the two can be

¹⁷ Campbell O. Webb, “Engineering Hope,” *Conservation Biology*, Vol. 19, No. 1, February 2005, 277.

¹⁸ Ed Stoddard, Reuters, “Study Pinpoints Species Facing Extinction Threat,” December 13, 2005.

¹⁹ Dave Foreman, *Rewilding North America* (Island Press, Washington, DC, 2004).

integrated. Too often scientifically grounded principles to justify carnivore conservation have obscured the more fundamental aesthetic and ethical values that lie at the root of many who argue for their conservation.”²⁰ Carnivores have both intrinsic and instrumental value.

We may fear that most Americans, Mexicans, and Canadians (and other peoples) are not biocentric believers that other species have a right to exist for their own sakes. At least, most are not hard believers in a Nature-first ethic. Nonetheless, Jack Humphrey, the webmaster for The Rewilding Institute and former executive director of the Sky Island Alliance, writes in an email, “These days I am more of an outsider than the insider I used to be in the conservation community and I can tell you with 100% confidence, the conservation movement has NOTHING to lose by being bold, outspoken, and unmovable on our issues. Why? Because the movement isn't even on the radar of the average people in this country.”

From my chats with a sprawl of people and from my studies of public opinion polling and focus groups, however, I believe that many, many people are swayed by biocentric arguments or at least by the feeling that wild Nature is *good*. I also believe that emotional pleas to protect wild animals and wild places grab people. Just the other day, I ran into an average Jose on the wilderness-edge trail near my house. He knew little about conservation issues, but let me know that he loves seeing snakes on the trail and thinks they have a right to live their own lives. I consistently have such encounters with folks from all demographic groups.

At my talks before various audiences, including zoo members, biologists' conventions, universities, conservation conferences, and the general public, I rhetorically ask, “Why are you here?” And then I answer, “We are here because we

²⁰ Justina C. Ray, Kent H. Redford, Joel Berger, and Robert Steneck, “Conclusion: Is Large Carnivore Conservation Equivalent to Biodiversity Conservation and How Can We Achieve Both?” in Justina C. Ray, Kent H. Redford, Robert S. Steneck, and Joel Berger, eds., *Large Carnivores and the Conservation of Biodiversity* (Island Press, Washington, DC, 2005), 424.

love animals and Nature. We care about them for their own sakes.” The response is always overwhelmingly positive. People have calendars on their walls and photo books on their coffee tables with wild animals in their wild habitats; people watch Nature shows on television. People are gripped by wild animals; their souls glow in the shine of the wild; they like them! Remember that most public art of Nature (such as calendars) does not show people.

Too often conservationists are intimidated by the bigwigs, bullies, and blowhards in rural communities and assume that these loudmouths express the attitudes of the community. However, without exception, the public opinion polls in the West and in rural areas show strong support for wolf recovery and protection of more wilderness. Polls in imagined rural hotbeds of the anticonservation boil—the West Slope of Colorado, northern Arizona, even southwestern New Mexico—show majorities in favor of wolf recovery. Polls in western states on designating more wilderness areas show strong support and they show that most people back wilderness for high-minded reasons: protection of undeveloped ecosystems and habitats, protection of sensitive wildlife, and other biocentric values. A recent poll in Arizona shows overwhelming support for designating the Tumacacori Wilderness Area in southern Arizona. Overall, 87 percent of the public backed the wilderness, including 79 percent of Republicans and 95 percent of Hispanics.²¹

A 2001 poll found that 68 percent of Coloradoans favored wolf recovery in that state.²² The Northern Arizona Wolf Recovery poll not only found strong majorities in favor of wolves returning to northern Arizona (81 percent!), but people gave biocentric reasons for why they backed wolf recovery. Asked to say why they favored recovery,

²¹ “New Poll Shows Broad Bipartisan and Cross-Cultural Support for Wilderness in the Tumacacori Highlands,” press release from Friends of the Tumacacori Highlands, Sky Island Alliance, and National Hispanic Environmental Council, April 28, 2005.

²² Gary Gerhardt, “Wolf advocates pressing for animals’ return,” *Rocky Mountain News*, September 10, 2005.

over and over again, individuals volunteered their opinions that wolves had a right to come home, to live in their native habitat, and that they would help ecological balance. Eighty-six percent said wolves bring a natural balance to the Southwest.²³ This is ecosystem thinking. Such support for wild Nature cuts across all demographic lines: ethnic, political, rural or urban, income, education, sex....

Willis Kempton and his colleagues have done perhaps the most authoritative study of Americans' attitudes to Nature. They read this statement to their subjects, "If there is no economic, aesthetic, or other human use for a species, for example, some lichen out in the desert, then there is no reason to worry much about it becoming extinct." Only 13 percent of the public agreed (interestingly, 15 percent of Sierra Club members agreed.) Fifty-two percent of sawmill workers agreed, but think about it: almost half of sawmill workers disagreed with the anthropocentric view.²⁴ For the statement, "Other species have as much right to be on this earth as we do. Just because we are smarter than other animals doesn't make us better," an astonishing 83 percent of the public agreed, 78 percent of Sierra Club members agreed, and even 56 percent of sawmill workers agreed.²⁵ In discussing the implications of their findings, Kempton and company write, "Surprisingly, biocentric values—valuing nature for its own sake—are also important for many."²⁶

Given this, why are many conservation leaders so afraid of standing up for Nature? Why do our media consultants water down our values and tell us not to talk about endangered species? While biocentric values may run shallow in America, they run wide, and they do so even without forthright leadership from the conservation

²³ "Grand Canyon State Poll—Spring 2005: Grand Canyon Wolf Restoration Project," Northern Arizona University Social Research Laboratory, March 2005.

²⁴ Willis Kempton, James S. Boster, and Jennifer A. Hartley, *Environmental Values in American Culture* (The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996), 111.

²⁵ Kempton, Boster, and Hartley, *Environmental Values*, 113.

²⁶ Kempton, Boster, and Hartley, *Environmental Values*, 214.

community (of course, there are exceptions!). The public is ripe to hear diverse, believable, likable conservationists talk about protecting wildlife for its own sake, to talk about our responsibility to keep Nature whole. Conservationists are irresponsible if they are not straightforward in talking about wild Nature to the public. The people need leadership, they need inspiration, they need to be challenged to have an ethic for Nature. Moreover, I think they see through conservation spokespersons who talk only about the economic values of wilderness protection or who claim that some rare species may have a cure for cancer as the reason for protecting it. When this happens, they lose trust and suspect a con job. I ask my audiences, “Do we have the generosity of spirit, the greatness of heart, to share this Earth with other species, including wolves?” This moral, emotional challenge strikes them in their deepest being.

I am not arguing here that love of Nature rules most people's thinking or that vague biocentric values prevent people from harming wild Nature. I am merely arguing that conservationists do not drive people away when we talk about biocentric values.

Without being clear about our values, we are prey to the watering down of our message through badgering from resourcists. By standing up for the intrinsic, deep-rooted values of wild Nature, we fortify our groups and our community from infiltration and takeover by enviro-resourcists.

• *Defend strictly protected areas as “the most valuable weapon in our conservation arsenal.” Conservation activists and conservation biologists have long seen protected areas, the stricter the better, as the centerpiece of conservation.*

The job of conservation is to establish, restore, and safeguard protected areas, including national parks, wilderness areas, wildlife refuges, and so on. We must endlessly and steadily defend both the idea of protected areas and the reality of protected areas on the ground from their foes. Throughout *The Myth(s) of the Environmental Movement*, I have named the foes of protected areas. They come from

all over the political, geographic, economic, and cultural map. We must not let ourselves be cowed by their economic or intellectual power, or by their morally bullying victimhood. We must always be ready to hit back at misinformation about protected areas and to show how supposed alternatives to protected areas are license for looting. All conservation groups must boldly renew their commitment to designating new wilderness areas, national parks, and other protected areas around the globe.

• *Carefully frame the message of Nature conservation. “Framing” is all the rage now in progressive circles, including the “Environmental Movement.” However, framing is nothing more than selling flavored sugar water unless you have solid values, standards, principles, and strategies, as well as a vision. Before you can frame your ideas and vision, you must have ideas and a vision. Conservationists must know what they stand for and to whom they want to talk before framing their message.*

Some Democratic Party leaders, progressives, and leaders of “The Environmental Movement” have seized onto college professor George Lakoff and his subject of “framing” like a life raft on a stormy sea. Although framing one's public words is a necessary part of a winning case, too many have made a superficial mush of Lakoff's message.²⁷ The poor, pitiful Democrats, adrift upon a leaderless gyre of incompetence and dismay, need to understand that you first need ideas before you can frame them.²⁸ Jim Wallis, editor of *Sojourners* magazine, worries about the Democrats' take on framing, “How to tell the story has become more important than the story itself.” He gives this sound, wise advice: “Find the vision first, and the language will follow.”²⁹ It would be tragic if environmentalists and conservationists made the same mistake of downplaying values with syrupy words vetted before focus groups and massaged by

²⁷ Matt Bai, “The Framing Wars,” *The New York Times Magazine*, July 17, 2005.

²⁸ As I write this in June 2006, the Democrats are showing some spine. I hope this trend continues.

²⁹ Jim Wallis, “The Message Thing,” *The New York Times*, August 4, 2005.

media “experts.” We cannot allow our movement to become a 2004 John Kerry, shackled and buffaloes by spinning media “experts.”

I do think some leaders of “The Environmental Movement” have botched framing our messages. Conservationists now need to be very thoughtful about how we set forth our proposals and issues—and it's not by softening our values. Although I have not used the term “framing” before, I've long encouraged conservationists to watch their language. I've also called for a brutally realistic approach in how we see our fellow humans. Let me call this “conservation as if the real world mattered” or “conservation as if human nature mattered.” A crucial insight of Lakoff's backs this: his argument that people are not “rational actors who make their decisions based on facts.”³⁰ The radical right has drawn from the genius of commercial advertisers (who may understand better than anyone else how humans think) in spinning their scams. Despite all of their blather about the good common sense of Everyman and -woman, these right-wingers assume that people are largely simpletons. Progressives, who want to believe in the goodness and perfectibility of people, are generally unable to accept that realism. Not only do people often behave as simpletons, they make decisions emotionally. Moreover, Americans—including college graduates—are shockingly illiterate. For example, according to the National Assessment of Adult Literacy, only 13 percent of American adults are at the “proficient” level of literacy—*able to compare “viewpoints in two different editorials.”*³¹ Think about the implications of that figure! My gosh! How do you have a rational debate? Even outdoors folks are woefully ignorant about the public lands. Scott Stouder, the western field coordinator for Trout Unlimited (TU), points out that a TU poll revealed “35 percent of anglers didn't realize they could fish in wilderness areas, and 34 percent of hunters didn't realize they could hunt in them.”³²

³⁰ Bai, “The Framing Wars.”

³¹ Ben Feller, Associated Press, “Study: 1 in 20 U.S. Adults Can't Read English,” *Albuquerque Journal*, December 16, 2005.

³² John O'Connell, “Social issues may trump science in debate over roadless areas,” *Idaho State Journal*, August 17, 2005.

Bart Semcer argues, “The messages that win people over to the idea that species should be conserved are not the rational ones, they're the emotional. This is true for people with opinions across the political spectrum.” David Johns writes that environmentalists and conservationists

believe that language, reason, and the mental are overwhelmingly determinative. Meanwhile our conservative opponents are successfully manipulating powerful emotions. Why do conservationists and so many of our allies have this block about operating on emotion and deep psychic structure? Madison Avenue is developing messaging using MRI machines. They want ads that go right to the limbic system—never mind all this higher cortical bullshit. As a movement that claims to understand Darwin, I still see enormous resistance to grasping the reality that we are animals, that we are more than our reason and opposable thumbs.

Any kind of framing of the conservation message has to take these bothersome facts to heart if it is to work.

Let me now turn to a few of my pet peeves in language that show how framing is more than clever sloganeering. At the 2005 Sierra Club Summit in San Francisco, the person who introduced George Lakoff for his talk said that we needed to “reframe how we talk about the environment.” I believe that the first step in doing so is to stop talking about “the environment” and to start talking about Nature.

Environment is one of those god-awful abstract words bandied about by bureaucrats or assistant professors of sociology. How do you love an *environment*? Can you even see an *environment*? Can you get lost in an *environment*?

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

Environment to Nature is like *relationship to love*.

My problem with the word *environment* is not merely a matter of taste or devotion to Strunk & White. Words have power, and when we label Nature with an abstract and murky word like *environment*, it is easier to hold Nature at a distance; it is easier to make it a mere commodity. It is easier to destroy it. Using a word like *environment* helps create a dualism between humans and Nature. There is a wealth of sturdy, to-the-point words that can replace this weak, wimpy word. Before allowing *environment* to trickle out over your lips, try *Nature*, *land*, or *ecosystem*. You might even try *creation*. Instead of *environmentally*, try *ecologically*. Rigorously following my own advice, I've found that the replacements not only work in most cases, they work much better. Ponder how I've written this book without using *environment* to describe the natural world (except when I'm quoting someone).

Conservationists should perhaps generally replace *environment* with *land*. By doing so, we link our movement firmly to Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic:

*The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land....In short, a land ethic changes the role of Homo sapiens from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such.*³³

*A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.*³⁴

“A Land Ethic” has a heck of a lot more punch to it than does “An Environmental Ethic.”

³³ Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1987), 204 (originally published in 1949).

³⁴ Leopold, *Sand County Almanac*, 224-225.

Let these words roll around on your tongue; let them dance in your heart. Go outside, in the wind, in the storm, far from the maddening city. Ask the griz. Ask a saguaro. Are they part of an *environment*? Or are they part of *the land*?

The most odious form of *environment* is *enviro* as a moniker for conservationists and environmentalists. This slimy pejorative is even used by conservationists, who should know better, to describe themselves. Never, never, never call yourself an “enviro.”

Other words have problems similar to environment.

Green. “Greenies,” “green groups,” and other variations are used as synonyms for “The Environmental Movement.” This usage unfortunately links conservation and environmentalism to the so-called Green political movement and Green parties. As we've seen, Green parties in the United States, at least, have little to do with conservation.

ANWR. The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is often referred to as “Anwahr.” This is a self-defeating mistake because it abstracts the name of the place and the place itself—America's flagship wilderness. Arctic. National. Wildlife. Refuge. Each of these four words has magic, power, and meaning. Anwahr is soulless. It is far easier to open Anwahr for industrial devastation than it is to trash the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. If we must abbreviate, use Arctic, just as we say Bosque del Apache or just Bosque for the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge instead of “Banwahr.” We use the “_nwahr” acronym for no other national wildlife refuge. Why do we use it for the flagship refuge? There are many like examples where conservationists fall into sloppy shorthand language without thinking about what they are giving up in power. Lavish use of acronyms sullies our cause.

Another pet peeve of mine is “developing nations.” This framing of poor, overpopulated countries uncovers the underlying worldview of anthropocentric

arrogance: the notion that the “developed” condition now enjoyed by wealthy nations in North America, Europe, and Far East Asia is the historically determined state of humankind and that all will eventually achieve it. This assumption is cruel tommyrot. Very few of the basket-case countries will improve their lot, and “developed” nations will soon begin to unravel. Similarly, never use the word “production” in regards to oil and other energy resources. We do not produce them; we extract them. Millions of years of geology have done the producing.

We need to watch our language.

In this discussion of framing, I have gone to a more basic level than is usually pondered—to the biological structure and operation of the brain. I did it not just to spotlight some pet peeves, but to show how deep we must think in framing our values and proposals. To Lakoff, framing goes much deeper than mere word or concept selection for clever advertising. He approaches it at the level of brain physiology. Rewilding Fellow and retired physician Bob Howard points out that a frame is a collection of neural circuits and chemistry and that a new concept is formed at this level. If the concept is right, then words will come easily. This underlying biology of the mind is why it is so important to reframe our concepts.

- *Recognize that the outstanding problem is the human-caused Sixth Great Extinction, and its driver is the exploding population of human beings married to rising affluence and technology revved up by globalization. Being honest about the huge problems we face does not clash with offering a hopeful vision and an inspiring call to action.*

It seems that many leaders of “The Environmental Movement” are falling over each other in the rush to announce that they are not doom-and-gloomers. Recently, a couple of employees of big international conservation groups editorialized in

Conservation Biology that it is time to retire Cassandra.³⁵ One needs to be positive and to offer hope. People are turned off by bad news. I will discuss later the high value of a hopeful vision. But this mad dash to slap smiley faces on conservation is fundamentally dishonest and cowardly. Imagine that because we want to sell homes in New Orleans we don't tell people about hurricanes or the possibility that levees will fail. How different is this from wanting to attract new members to our happy-go-lucky conservation group so we don't tell them about mass extinction and we conveniently ignore the population explosion, including population growth in the United States due to immigration?³⁶

We face big problems. Flashing our chemically whitened teeth will not make them go away. A worrywart can be a tiresome neighbor, yes, but an optimist causes the flooding of New Orleans. Optimists have allowed the greenhouse effect to worsen to the point that we can no longer prevent catastrophic climate change of some sort. The vital understanding in Greek mythology was not that Cassandra was wrong, but that she was *right* and people would not believe her. The Cassandra myth was not about Cassandra; it was instead an insight that people are foolish, shortsighted, and pathologically optimistic. It is the role of true leaders to tell painful truths, to get ready for the worst. Grand old Hugh Iltis of the University of Wisconsin herbarium is the kind of craggy truth-teller conservationists still need. As was Senator Gaylord Nelson. As was Garrett Hardin, who quoted Dan Luten that “the optimists hope their forecasts are self-fulfilling. The pessimists hope their forecasts are self-defeating.”³⁷ We conservationists must hammer home this point when we talk about gloomy reality. We

³⁵ Kent Redford and M. A. Sanjayan, “Editorial: Retiring Cassandra,” *Conservation Biology*, Vol. 17. No. 6, December 2003, 1473-1474. This essay was disappointing in part because both authors have often been stouthearted.

³⁶ In fairness, I must point out that one of the retire-Cassandra editorialists, my friend Sanjayan, who is Sri Lankan, has been a solid truth-speaker on the problem of immigration.

³⁷ Garrett Hardin, “Cassandra's Role in the Population Wrangle,” in Paul R. Ehrlich and John P. Holdren, editors, *The Cassandra Conference: Resources And The Human Predicament* (Texas A&M University Press, College Station, 1988), 6.

are describing likely gruesome outcomes in the hope that people will change course. *We want to be wrong!* Consistently and clearly making this point is the best antidote to criticism of doom-and-gloom from the skipping, singing Pollyannas in their polka-dotted pajamas.

However, we must be clever in how we warn about disasters ahead. Eileen Crist's dissection of the errors in how limits-to-growth has been presented to the public leads the way. I can't underscore this enough. In my public sermons, I first give the bad news in a credible yet emotional way. We are causing a mass extinction. I try to make people sad. Then, using humor and story telling, I describe what some solutions are. And finally, I play ruthlessly to their emotions again with a hopeful vision for the future. As a southern evangelist, I scare 'em with hell, point out the path to salvation, and lift them on up to heaven.

In *Rewilding North America* I laid out in painful detail the way growing populations of human beings are causing mass extinction and warned that many, many more species will vanish unless we act boldly and quickly. My warning was nothing new. Hugh Iltis said the same on the first Earth Day in 1970: We are “pushing, prematurely, tens of thousands of species of plants and animals toward the abysmal finality of *extinction....*”³⁸ On October 20, 1979, Tom Lovejoy of the World Wildlife Fund said, “The reduction in the biological diversity of the planet is the most basic issue of our time.”³⁹ For over twenty years, E. O. Wilson, today's most famous biologist, has been saying the same thing, as has Richard Leakey, the most famous fossil hunter ever. But how many conservation groups say forthrightly that we are in a mass extinction and it is the leading problem? Even many who work on endangered species shy from mentioning the Big

³⁸ The talk was later reprinted in Hugh H. Iltis, “Technology Versus Wild Nature: What Are Man's Biological Needs?” *Northwest Conifer* (Pacific Northwest Chapter of the Sierra Club newsletter), May 22, 1971.

³⁹ Thomas E. Lovejoy, “Foreword” in Michael E. Soulé and Bruce A. Wilcox, editors, *Conservation Biology: An Evolutionary-Ecological Perspective* (Sinauer Associates, Sunderland, Massachusetts, 1980), ix.

Truth. Were a poll taken of members of the Sierra Club, The Wilderness Society, Nature Conservancy, and the other big conservation groups, how many would identify the Sixth Great Extinction as the top problem? How many would even know we were in a mass extinction? I'm not talking about the public, or the "opinion-makers," or the "deciders," I'm talking about our conservation family. How many staff members of conservation groups would pick mass extinction as the underlying threat? How many are driven by the urgency of this horror? I'm afraid that I don't want to know the answer.

Part of the reason for this ignorance and lackadaisical attitude is that those who run big groups are afraid to be forthright about extinction because it is such a monstrous thing to behold. They worry that they will turn off members and potential members (and donors!). In America today, optimism has become a moral virtue, while pessimism is sneered at as if it were some kind of ugly skin disease. Many leaders of "The Environmental Movement" are cowed by this burly, surly Pollyannaism. Being uncovered as a Cassandra is as shameful as getting caught surfing porno sites on the web, it seems.

I've previously set out the sad history of how "The Environmental Movement" has run, tail tucked between its legs, from honesty on human population growth in the last twenty-five years. It is for the same reasons that we don't boldly face up to mass extinction. Shying from straight talk on population is not only disgraceful, it is surrender. Mind you, I do not want every conservationist and every conservation group to drop their urgent, in-the-trenches campaigns to work only on mass extinction caused by the human population explosion, nor do I want them to constantly harp on the horror. What we do every day filing lawsuits to protect endangered species, getting wilderness areas designated, returning wolves to their homes, stopping timber sales...is how we save wild Nature and its bounty of life. But our movement must be steadfast in showcasing the truth, and all of us must be aware of what is going on and why it is going on without

politically correct, or economically selfish, or patriotically correct blinders. The Big Extinction is the context for all of our other work.⁴⁰

• *Proclaim and work for a vision that is bold, practically achievable, scientifically credible, and hopeful. Rewilding our continent with the North American Wildlands Network by restoring real wilderness with recovered populations of native species, including large carnivores, is such a vision of hope.*

Since 1992, The Wildlands Project (TWP) has worked to put together a vision for conservation on a continental scale. Beginning with the Sky Islands Wildlands Network in 2000, several detailed conservation visions—based on linked systems of protected areas and recovered populations of large carnivores and other keystone species—have been published for the greater southwestern United States by TWP and cooperating regional groups.⁴¹ In 2004, Island Press published my book, *Rewilding North America*, in which I set out a vision for a North American Wildlands Network along Four Continental MegaLinkages. Many local and regional conservation groups are working to bring this vision into being on the ground, especially groups in the Rocky Mountains Spine under the leadership of The Wildlands Project and Southern Rockies Ecosystem Project.⁴² Conservationists outside the MegaLinkages need to put together sweeping protected-area and species-recovery visions for their areas.

In response to the biodiversity crisis of our own making in which we find ourselves, Nature-loving conservationists are putting into words and action a new vision for North America, one in which true wilderness and the wildeor can live with a diverse,

⁴⁰ The Rewilding Institute website www.rewilding.org identifies the groups who are forthright on mass extinction and provides click-on links to their websites.

⁴¹ Dave Foreman, Kathy Daly, Barbara Dugelby, Roseann Hanson, Robert E. Howard, Jack Humphrey, Leanne Klyza Linck, Rurik List, and Kim Vacariu, *Sky Islands Wildlands Network Conservation Plan* (The Wildlands Project, Tucson, Arizona, 2000). See www.rewilding.org for additional wildlands network visions.

⁴² See The Rewilding Institute website www.rewilding.org for details and how to become involved.

vibrant human civilization. This vision is bold, scientifically credible, practically achievable, and *hopeful*. I emphasize hopefulness because I have found that all kinds of folks in the United States and Canada respond wholeheartedly to the hope underlying the North American Wildlands Network. I believe that this vision, as the centerpiece of a conservation strategy for North America, tied to the other recommendations in this chapter, not only can take back and breathe new life into the conservation movement, but can inspire North Americans to come together as responsible citizens of the land community and try to do things right.

Once again, I find myself at the end of a book, where I'm expected to start singing "Zippity do daw, zippity day, my oh my what a wonderful day!" And, once again, I can't do it. We face deep, dark troubles ahead. There are no magic answers. No extraterrestrial park rangers in flying saucers are going to come zooming in to hand out tickets to humankind and make us follow the rules for a healthy Earth Galactic Park. But I can say this: If the defenders of Nature will stand up, take back the conservation movement, face the looming horror forthrightly, and work like hell for a *hopeful* vision of real wilderness coexisting with a respectful civilization, then the long-term prospects for the dancing diversity and abundance of all life and the evolutionary potential of all branches of life will be much, much better than if we fail to stand in this desperate hour.

Will the defenders of Nature please rise?