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ECOTERRORISM: THE DANGEROUS FRINGE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

INTRODUCTION

As the twentieth anniversary of Earth Day approaches, environmental activists and private citizens alike are reflecting on the state of the earth's ecology and what policies best can make the world cleaner. One environmental matter, however, is receiving little attention. Individuals and scattered bands of environmental or ecological radicals, usually called ecoterrorists, have been sabotaging industrial facilities, logging operations, construction projects, and other economic targets around the country. They have inflicted millions of dollars in damage and have maimed innocent people.

These ecoterrorists are a tiny, fringe group. They in no way represent America's broad environmental movement. Yet, mainstream environmentalists and the press remain strangely silent about the atrocities committed by the ecoterrorists. By failing to police their own movement, and by failing to denounce loudly and openly the ecoterrorists, mainstream environmentalists risk bringing their entire movement into disrepute. It thus is time for mainstream environmental groups and their supporters in Congress to disassociate themselves from those who use violence in the name of the environment and to see that they are brought to justice.

THE ROOTS OF ECOTERRORISM

In the early 1970s a lone environmental activist, identified only as "The Fox," engaged in a sustained campaign of eco-sabotage, also termed ecotage, against Chicago-area firms. For three years he committed acts ranging from vandalizing the offices of corporations to more serious and dangerous crimes such as plugging industrial drains and smokestacks. Around the same time, a group in Minnesota called the "Bolt Weevils" and one in Arizona called the "Eco-raiders" carried out similar activities.

From Fantasy to Action. The concept of ecoterrorism gained some attention in the book *Ecotage!*, a “do-it-yourself” guide published in 1972 with the support of Environmental Action.¹ Based on the results of a contest soliciting eco-sabotage ideas, this book extolled the activities of “The Fox,” who, it argued, “deserves special credit because he has put his ideas into action, whereas for many, ecotage will remain a fantasy.” The book also praised “the Billboard Bandits in Michigan, the Eco-Commandoes in Florida,” who carried out their own disruptive activities, and contended that “if Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry and George Washington were alive today they’d be ecoteurs by night.”²

While authors Sam Love and David Obst explained that “we are not advocating that those who buy this book go out and try each one of the tactics included,” they added that “it is important for readers to become aware that such ideas do exist and that there are already groups actively involved in implementing some of them.”³

A few years later, environmental activist Edward Abbey romanticized ecotage in his novel, *The Monkey Wrench Gang*.⁴ In this story, four people roam the West wreaking havoc, destroying power poles, railroad lines, billboards, and any other sign of civilization that mar the landscape. The book concludes with the blowing up of a bridge over the Colorado River. The book’s message: those genuinely concerned about the environment are entitled to use virtually any tactic, perhaps excluding murder, to stop development. Abbey, who died last year, became the spiritual adviser and symbol for activists who turned to outlaw resistance. “If opposition is not enough, we must resist. And if resistance is not enough, then subvert,” he said.⁵

THE “EARTH FIRST!” MOVEMENT

In 1981, Dave Foreman, a former lobbyist for the Wilderness Society, founded “Earth First!” This group, Foreman admits, was formed “to inspire others to carry out activities straight from the pages of *The Monkey Wrench Gang* even though Earth First!, we agreed, would itself be ostensibly law-abiding.”⁶ Strictly speaking, Foreman calls “Earth First!” a movement rather than an organization; there are no membership lists nor officers, for instance. But

1 Sam Love and David Obst, eds., *Ecotage!* (New York: Pocket Books, 1972).

2 *Ibid.*, pp. 17, 13, 11-12.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

4 Edward Abbey, *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (New York: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1975). Gushed a review in the *National Observer*, the book would “make you want to go out and blow up a dam.” Blurb, front cover of paperback edition.

5 Quoted in Elizabeth Kaufmann, “Earth-Saving: Here Is a Gang of Real Environmental Extremists,” *Audubon*, July 1982, p. 118.

6 Dave Foreman, “Earth First!” *The Progressive*, October 1981, p. 41.

the group, with about 10,000 people receiving its newsletter, provides a focal point for those interested in destructive and violent forms of protest. "Earth First! as an organization does not support or condone illegal or violent activities" runs a disclaimer in the newsletter. However, it adds: "what an individual does autonomously is his or her own business."⁷

Details for Destruction. Yet Foreman joined environmental activist Bill Haywood to write *Ecodefense: A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching*, a book that has sold more than 10,000 copies.⁸ While purporting to be for "entertainment purposes only," its 311 pages offer detailed advice on how, illegally and violently, to sabotage attempts to develop land and other resources. It describes how to drive spikes into trees to shatter chainsaws and saw mill blades when these cut the trees and logs. This "tree spiking" can injure lumberjacks and mill workers severely. Road spikes are recommended to flatten tires. Methods for destroying roads, disabling construction equipment, and cutting down power lines are discussed. In one chapter, the authors explains that power lines "are highly vulnerable to monkeywrenching from individuals or small groups."

During an Earth First! demonstration at the Arches National Park in mid-1981, power lines in nearby Moab, Utah were cut. Foreman said that Earth First! was not directly responsible for such acts, but he added that "Other people in Earth First! have *done* things, not as Earth First! though...Earth First!, a group, is not going to do any monkey-wrenching. But if people who get the Earth First! newsletter do that, that's fine."⁹

In a later interview he went even further, arguing that monkeywrenching "is morally *required* as self-defense on the part of the Earth."¹⁰

"DEEP ECOLOGY"

Underlying the activities of many members of Earth First! and probably most eco-terrorists is the ideology of "Deep Ecology," which places the protection of nature above the promotion of humankind. The principles of Deep Ecology were first enunciated in 1972 by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess. California sociologist Bill Devall and philosopher George Sessions of Sierra College in California are among the more prominent American Deep Ecologists. Naess

7 *Ibid.*

8 Dave Foreman and Bill Haywood, eds., *Ecodefense: A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching*, 2nd ed. (Tucson, Arizona: Ned Ludd Books, 1987), p. 4. Foreman alone authored the first edition.

9 Quoted in Plowboy Interview, "Dave Foreman: No Compromise in Defense of Mother Earth," *The Mother Earth News*, January/February 1985, p. 21.

10 Kaufmann, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

advocates "a long range, humane reduction [in the world's population] through mild but tenacious political and economic measures. This will make possible, as a result of increased habitat, population growth for thousands of species which are now constrained by human pressures."¹¹ According to environmentalist Alston Chase, a newspaper columnist and chairman of the Yellowstone National Park Library and Museum Association, who does not support Naess's views, "poets, philosophers, economists, and physicists joined the ecologists in a search for a new beginning." Through what Chase describes as a "swirl of chaotic, primeval theorizing, patterns began to form, and themes resonated," particularly the notions that nature is sacred and everything within the universe is interconnected.¹²

Sacred Wilderness. Though Deep Ecology may be a bit jumbled, it has influenced a number of environmental activists. In one interview Foreman attacked the "anthropocentric" or "human-centered" philosophy of the Western world, explaining that "wilderness has a right to exist for its *own* sake, and for the sake of the diversity of life forms it shelters; we shouldn't have to justify the existence of a wilderness area by saying, 'Well, it protects the watershed, and it's a nice place to backpack and hunt, and it's pretty.'"¹³

In his view not only is the wilderness sacred, but ecotage is a necessary element of Deep Ecology. Monkeywrenching is "a form of worship toward the earth. It's really a very spiritual thing to go out and do."¹⁴

The mindset of the most extreme of these ecoterrorists is evident from a letter to the editor in *Earth First!* newsletter.

The only way to stop all the destruction of our home is to decrease the birth rate or increase the death rate of people....It does no good to kill a few selected folks. That is a retail operation. What we need is a wholesale operation...The simple expedient: biological warfare! Think about it. It fits. It is species specific. Bacteria are, and viruses tend to be, deadly to only one species. Only a very few of human pathogens are shared by other partners on our planet. Biological warfare will have no impact on other creatures, big or small, if we design it carefully.¹⁵

11 Quoted in Peter Borrelli, "The Ecophilosophers," *The Amicus Journal*, Spring 1988, p. 33.

12 Alston Chase, *Playing God in Yellowstone: The Destruction of America's First National Park* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986), p. 347. For a response to Chase, see Doug Foreman, Doug Peacock, and George Sessions, "Who's Playing God in Yellowstone?" A Tripartite Review of the Alston Chase/Yellowstone National Park Controversy," *Earth First!*, December 21, 1986, pp. 18-21.

13 Plowboy Interview, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

14 Quoted in Jim Robbins, "Hurling Sand into Society's Gears," *High Country News*, December 21, 1987, p. 14.

15 Anonymous, untitled letter, *Earth First!*, November 1, 1984, p. 3.

ECOTERRORISM: A PRESENT DANGER?

Foreman claims that “the fact is, there’s *already* an awful lot of monkeywrenching going on...The Forest Service tries to keep it quiet, industry tries to keep it quiet, and I think there has even been an effort in the media to downplay the extent and effectiveness of monkeywrenching in America today” since reporting such activities “would only encourage similar acts by many more of the millions of Americans who are strongly against the rape of what’s left of our wilderness.”¹⁶

Destruction of Property

Foreman himself was arrested last year for allegedly conspiring to sabotage a tower carrying electrical power lines to pumping stations of the Central Arizona water project. Three others were caught trying to topple one of the towers; they also are charged with conspiring to wreak similar sabotage of power lines to two different nuclear plants and a nuclear weapons production facility.

The sabotage of construction equipment in logging operations has become common in Washington State. Damage in the millions of dollars has been inflicted by breaking equipment, smashing gauges, stealing batteries, and destroying radiators. While in the past ecoterrorists left obvious signs of their activities, allowing firms to clean the equipment before using it, the new attacks are increasingly undetected.

Example: In February 1989 the Janicki Logging Co. of Sedro Woolley, Washington, lost five pieces of equipment, including a log loader; the ecoteurs poured fine sand and salt water into the fuel, hydraulic, and water compartments and removed engine filters. The cost of this attack was \$187,000.

Example: Ecoteurs burned a log loader and a log carrier owned by the Swiss Skyline Logging Co. of Ellensburg, Washington, and damaged another piece, for \$240,000 worth of destruction.

Example: Vandals burned a road grader owned by the Gary Will Logging Co., of Okanogan County, Washington, which caused \$200,000 in damage.

Example: Ecoteurs burned down a National Forest warehouse, destroying three trucks, costing \$900,000.

Example: The Oeser Co. of Bellingham, Washington, suffered \$7,000 in damage from vandalism of two bulldozers.

The Trillium Corporation, also of Bellingham, meanwhile, has been placed on Earth First!’s national hit list. The firm’s signs have been vandalized, shrubbery uprooted, windows broken, door locks jammed, graffiti painted on skylights, and toilets clogged. Other firms have suffered thousands of dollars in

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

damage from caltrops, or road spikes, which flatten tires. Ecoterrorists also have dropped caltrops on trails in national forests in an attempt to halt off-road vehicles and along the course of the Sarstow to Las Vegas motorcycle race. On occasion saboteurs have cut the brake lines of logging crew buses and dynamited equipment. Such incidents have occurred in Arizona, California, Montana, and Oregon.

Death Threats For Ranchers. It is not just timberland that ecoteurs attempt to "protect." Construction firms developing urban shopping centers and building roads in Colorado, Utah, and Washington have lost equipment to sabotage. The FBI reports that ranchers in Arizona, California, and Nevada increasingly have become targets of ecoterrorism. Saboteurs have castrated cattle, vandalized farm equipment, freed farm animals, and made death threats; last year the Dickson Livestock Auction Yard in Dickson, Tennessee, was torched. Members of both the Animal Liberation Front and Earth First! are thought to be involved. Lynn Jacobs of the latter group says some of its adherents may be involved, though she does not know of any specific attacks; "I don't advocate that anyone break the law unless they feel it's the right thing to do."¹⁷

Ecoteurs routinely pull up survey stakes, slowing road construction and other operations, thus making them more expensive. Ecoteurs also cut down billboards. In 1986 protestors uprooted potato plants to forestall a University of California biogenetic project. Two years later the telescope at an Arizona observatory was vandalized. Seismic equipment has been damaged at a number of sites.

A helicopter used by an Oregon firm to apply herbicide on a commercial tree plantation was firebombed. Ecoteurs destroyed a utility company bridge, isolating a Montana wilderness and recreation area from motor vehicles.

Power generating facilities are a favorite ecoterrorist target. In 1979 and 1980 Colorado power line supports were cut down. The following year a Utah transmission line was felled. In 1986 saboteurs knocked out three electrical transmission lines in Arizona. The following two years ski lift pylons at the Fairfield Snowbowl in Flagstaff were cut, allegedly by the same people arrested along with Foreman last year.

Personal Injury

While most of the actions of ecoteurs to date mainly have destroyed property, injury of innocent people is now becoming part of the ecoterrorist record. Spiking trees with metal or ceramic spikes, the latter of which are not detected by metal detectors, is common in the western U.S. Incidents have also occurred in Canada and Australia. In May 1987, a young California sawmill operator was

¹⁷ "Range Wars of Past are Passe; Now it's 'Ecological Terrorism'," *The Washington Times*, December 18, 1989. p. A7.

severely injured when a spike shattered a band saw. A local Earth First! official blamed the sawmill for jeopardizing its workers' lives. Earth First! leader Foreman said workers fearing injury could quit and that to him, "the old-growth forest in North Idaho is a hell of a lot more important than Joe Six-pack."¹⁸ Loggers in California and Oregon since have been injured.

Stepped-Up Efforts. Northwest Forestry Association spokesman Mike Sullivan of Portland, Oregon, says that spiking incidents have been reported throughout the Northwest. After the injury of the California mill worker, the Forest Service said it planned to step up efforts to prevent spiking, but argued that the practice was "not a great epidemic." Though spiking has increased during the mid-1980s, explains Forest Service spokesman Jay Humphries, "there is still less than 100 incidents a year. Most of the illegal activity and threats to Forest Service land are related to marijuana growing, not environmental ecotage."¹⁹

Many loggers remained unconvinced. In 1988, one Washington lumber mill lost \$20,000 worth of blades from cutting spiked trees.

In another incident involving personal injury, demonstrators, some armed with knives and clubs, attacked Forest Service personnel involved in herbicide spraying in the Siskiyou National Forest.

REACTIONS TO ECOTERRORISM

Increased enforcement has been the traditional response to ecoterrorism. Companies are more vigilant in protecting their equipment; the Forest Service tries to watch more closely for saboteurs of trees, roads, and equipment. In 1988, Congress passed a bill offered by Senator James McClure, the Idaho Republican, making tree spiking a federal offense. Last year, Representative Charles (Chip) Pashayan, the California Republican, introduced legislation to stiffen penalties and create a reward program for informers against tree spikers.

Last year, too, the Washington Contract Loggers Association created a Field Intelligence Report to track the activities of ecoteurs and has established a reward program for information leading to the apprehension of such criminals. Similarly, the Mountain States Legal Foundation, based in Denver, Colorado, established an ecotage hotline last year. In the first two months of hotline operation, Foundation President William Perry Pendley received reports of ecotage from California, Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington.²⁰ Mountain States also established a clearinghouse to file civil damage actions against saboteurs and to assist the government in prosecuting violators.

18 Quoted in Dean Miller, "McClure Wants Federal Law Against Tree-Spiking," *Spokane Review*, August 1, 1987, p. 1.

19 Robbins, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

20 Deborah Frazier, "Ecotage Hotline Wins Praise," *Rocky Mountain News*, August 21, 1989, p. 6.

THE ENVIRONMENTALISTS' RESPONSE

Adequate penalties are a necessary part of any effort to combat ecoterrorism. Yet western forestland and deserts are too sparsely populated to be patrolled and defended effectively against the determined ecoterrorists. The best defense against ecotage is for mainstream environmentalist community and political leaders and for businessmen to speak out frequently on the issue.

Aiding Extremists. The message should be twofold: 1) violence is not justified as a response to perceived wrongs to the environment, and 2) the protection of human life remains society's paramount responsibility.

Particularly important is the role of the major environmental groups. Though none of them endorse ecotage, few have shown much enthusiasm for publicly criticizing the practice. Some even aid violent ecoteurs. David Brower, past executive director of the Sierra Club and current chairman of Friends of the Earth, gives Earth First! office space and has defended the organization's activities. "I think the environmental movement has room for lots of different views broadcasting on many channels," said Brower. "I'm certainly not going to be against civil disobedience."²¹

Brower has said that "Earth First! makes Friends of the Earth look reasonable. What we need now is an outfit to make Earth First! look reasonable." When challenged to disavow ecoterrorists in 1983, the Sierra Club's then-executive director and now chairman Michael McCloskey responded that "we no more have an obligation to run around denouncing extremists using the environmental movement than Republicans and Democrats have an obligation to go around spending most of their time condemning the views of left or right wing extremists."²²

Rejecting Violence. McCloskey ignores the fact the Republicans and Democrats have done just that. They overwhelmingly reject the use of violence to achieve their goals. They never have supported the use of tactics that may maim and even kill. And when such cases occur, these political movements have acted to disassociate themselves with the culprits. In the 1950s the American labor movement purged itself of most communist members and influence. In 1989, George Bush and Republican Party Chairman Lee Atwater denounced the election of former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke as a Republican to the Louisiana State Legislature and expelled him from the national party.

The political organizations closest to the terrorist group's ideological views should separate themselves from its activities and to help mold a broad social consensus against its activities. The Sierra Club and other organizations, be-

21 Quote in Kaufmann, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

22 Quoted in Arnold, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

cause they are committed to many of the goals of Earth First!, have a special duty to discourage violence committed in the name of the environment.

PEACEFUL CHANGES IN GOVERNMENT POLICY

The renewed interest in the environment generated by the twentieth anniversary of Earth Day is indeed welcome. It offers an opportunity to examine how best to balance the need for economic development and individual liberty with legitimate concerns about destruction of the earth's ecosystem and about wilderness preservation.

In many instances, the federal government makes no attempt to find the economically efficient and environmentally sound mix of different activities and actually promotes environmental damage for no economically defensible reason. For instance, fees for federal rangeland are usually between one-fifth and one-tenth of market rates, and thus encourage overgrazing of lands best used in other ways. The federal government even has cleared trees to create more grazing land, a highly destructive and costly process that would not occur without federal subsidies.

Wasteful Investment. Even more wasteful is the Department of Agriculture's management of the nation's forestland. An estimated \$100 million is spent annually to promote logging in forests that otherwise would not be economical to harvest. In fact, federal road construction not only encourages logging operations on public lands, it also opens up private forests that would not be economically worthwhile were it not for the government roads. Logging in Alaska has proved to be particularly wasteful, returning just \$32 million on an investment of \$386 million since 1982.²³

Similarly, federal water projects such as irrigation systems, dams, and canals often have been created to satisfy special interest groups, not to meet genuine public needs. North Dakota's \$1.2 billion Garrison Diversion project was designed to serve less than one percent of the state's agricultural land while destroying in excess of 70,000 acres of wetlands.

No Public Good. Environmental destruction underwritten by the federal government certainly should be the target of reformers. But this does not justify extremist tactics, civil disobedience, and violence. Nor does this justify ignoring the balance that must be struck between ecological concerns and economic development. It is neither humane nor does it serve the public good to shut businesses needlessly, to restrict the supply of housing by prohibiting construction of new homes, or to drive up the costs of energy by reducing electrical generating capacity. There are ways to protect the environment without paying

²³ As a result, the U.S. House of Representatives voted, 356 to 60, in July 1989 to end federally mandated timber sales. Said Representative Steve Bartlett, the Texas Republican: The timber program is "a classic case of corporate welfare. It is not capitalism. It is a taxpayer-subsidized jobs program." John Lancaster, "House Votes to Limit Logging in Vast Alaskan Tract," *The Washington Post*, July 14, 1989, p. A6.

those prices. Some of these ways include privatization and ending federal of development subsidies. Environmental policies must be designed around natural markets forces which would deliver more ecological amenities at lower cost.

CONCLUSION

Americans want to preserve a clean world – to conserve their environment. Americans too want an economy that offers them increasing economic opportunities. How to balance these two goals all too often splits Washington between myopic conservationists and equally myopic developers. Out of this split comes the ecoterrorists, who believe that anything short of complete victory for “the environment” is a moral as well as a practical disaster.

Their extremist philosophy is leading to a guerrilla movement that is destroying property and injuring the innocent and one day will kill innocent workers or park employees.

Special Responsibility. To prevent this, policy makers and particularly establishment environmental groups, must respond to the ecoterrorists by rebuilding the moral consensus against the use of violence. The environmental movement has a special responsibility. It must no longer tolerate, let alone encourage, the ecoteurs. In particular, environmental groups should publicize the fact that the ecoteurs’ violence sabotages legitimate environmental groups. These mainstream groups thus should speak out forcefully to encourage their members to distance themselves from violent and destructive activities.

If Deep Ecology is not challenged at the philosophical level, the number of environmentalists committed to ecotage is likely to grow. And as more people put the “rights” of nature before those of humans, the more likely it is that innocent people are going to be killed.

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