

18.3 DAVE FOREMAN

In Time of Crisis

A relatively small but active subdivision of the environmental movement, whose members espouse a more radical biocentric egalitarianism, has emerged over the past two decades. The Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess coined the term “deep ecology” to describe the belief system of this group. Naess and Sierra College philosophy professor George Sessions have attempted to codify the basic principles subscribed to by most deep ecologists. In addition to asserting the equal intrinsic worth of all living things, the principles include a prohibition against human-initiated reduction in the diversity of life except to satisfy vital needs, the need for a significant reduction in global human population, and a change in human ideology to that of appreciating life quality rather than aspiring to a higher standard of living.

Deep ecologists reject the policies of the mainstream environmental organizations, which they see as being restricted by their commitment to work within the confines of existing political structures. They have developed a more radical, activist program to try to achieve their ends. The best known leader of this program is Dave Foreman, cofounder of the Earth First! organization, which has the motto “No compromise in defense of Mother Earth.” Earth First! activists have gained notoriety by chaining themselves to redwood trees targeted to be cut down by loggers and by sabotaging equipment to be used to develop wild areas. Foreman rejects the assertion that Earth First! is a violent organization, and he points out that members only destroy “machines or property that are used to destroy the natural world.”

The following selection is from *Confessions of an Eco-Warrior* (Harmony Books, 1991). In it, Foreman explains the goals, principles, and practices of his ecological warriors.

Key Concept: deep ecology and the campaign to implement its principles

In wildness is the preservation of the world.

—Henry David Thoreau

We are living now in the most critical moment in the three-and-a-half-billion-year history of life on Earth. For this unimaginably long time, life has

been developing, expanding, blossoming, and diversifying, filling every available niche with different manifestations of itself, intertwined in complex, globe-girdling relationships. But today this diversity of perhaps 30 million species faces radical and unprecedented change. Never before—not even during the mass extinctions of the dinosaurs at the end of the Cretaceous era, 65 million years ago—has there been such a high rate of extinction as we are now witnessing, such a drastic reduction in the planet's biological diversity.

Over the last three or four hundred years, human civilization has declared war on large mammals, leading some respected ecologists to assert that the only large mammals living twenty years from now will be those we humans choose to allow to live. Other prominent biologists, looking aghast on the wholesale devastation of tropical rain forests and temperate-zone old-growth forests, rapidly accelerating desertification, rapacious commercial fishing, and wasting of high-profile large mammals like whales, elephants, and Tigers ("charismatic megafauna") owing to habitat destruction and poaching, say that Earth could lose one-quarter to one-third of *all* species within forty years.

Not only is this blitzkrieg against the natural world destroying ecosystems and their associated species, but our activities are now beginning to have fundamental, systemic effects upon the entire life-support apparatus of the planet: upsetting the world's climate; poisoning the oceans; destroying the atmospheric ozone layer that protects us from excessive ultraviolet radiation; changing the CO₂ ratio in the atmosphere and causing the "greenhouse effect"; and spreading acid rain, radioactive fallout, pesticides, and industrial contamination throughout the biosphere. Indeed, Professor Michael Soulé, founder of the Society for Conservation Biology, recently warned that vertebrate evolution may be at an end due to the activities of industrial humans.

Clearly, in such a time of crisis, the conservation battle is not one of merely protecting outdoor recreation opportunities, or a matter of aesthetics, or "wise management and use" of natural resources. It is a battle for life itself, for the continued flow of evolution. We—this generation of humans—are at our most important juncture since we came out of the trees six million years ago. It is our decision, ours today, whether Earth continues to be a marvelously living, diverse oasis in the blackness of space, or whether the "charismatic megafauna" of the future will consist of Norway Rats and cockroaches.

How have we arrived at this state, at this threshold of biotic terror? Is it because we have forgotten our "place in nature," as the Native American activist Russell Means says?

If there is one thing upon which the nation states of the world today can agree, one thing at which the United States and the Soviet Union, Israel and Iran, South Africa and Angola, Britain and Argentina, China and India, Japan and Malaysia nod in unison, it is that human beings are the measure of all value. As Gifford Pinchot, founder of the United States Forest Service, said, there are only two things on Earth: human beings and natural resources. Humanism is the philosophy that runs the business engines of the modern world.

The picture that most humans have of the natural world is that of a smorgasbord table, continually replenished by a magic kitchen hidden somewhere in the background. While most people perceive that there are gross and immoral inequities in the sizes of the plates handed out and in the number of

times some are allowed to belly up to the bar, few of us question whether the items arrayed are there for their sole use, nor do they imagine that the table will ever become empty.

There is another way to think about man's relationship to the natural world, an insight pioneered by the nineteenth-century conservationist and mountaineer John Muir and later by the science of ecology. This is the idea that all things are connected, interrelated, that human beings are merely one of the millions of species that have been shaped by the process of evolution for three and a half billion years. According to this view, all living beings have the same right to be here. This is how I see the world.

With that understanding, we can answer the question, "Why wilderness?"

Is it because wilderness makes pretty picture postcards? Because it protects watersheds for downstream use by agriculture, industry, and homes? Because it's a good place to clean the cobwebs out of our heads after a long week in the auto factory or over the video display terminal? Because it preserves resource-extraction opportunities for future generations of humans? Because some unknown plant living in the wilds may hold a cure for cancer?

No—the answer is, because wilderness *is*. Because it is the real world, the flow of life, the process of evolution, the repository of that three and a half billion years of shared travel.

A Grizzly Bear snuffling along Pelican Creek in Yellowstone National Park with her two cubs has just as much right to life as any human has, and is far more important ecologically. All things have intrinsic value, inherent worth. Their value is not determined by what they will ring up on the cash register of the gross national product, or by whether or not they are *good*. They are good because they exist.

Even more important than the individual wild creature is the wild community—the wilderness, the stream of life unimpeded by human manipulation.

We, as human beings, as members of industrial civilization, have no divine mandate to pave, conquer, control, develop, or use every square inch of this planet. As Edward Abbey, author of *Desert Solitaire* and *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, said, we have a right to be here, yes, but not everywhere, all at once.

The preservation of wilderness is not simply a question of balancing competing special-interest groups, arriving at a proper mix of uses on our public lands, and resolving conflicts between different outdoor recreation preferences. It is an ethical and moral matter. A religious mandate. Human beings have stepped beyond the bounds; we are destroying the very process of life.

The forest ranger and wilderness proponent Aldo Leopold perhaps stated this ethic best:

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.

The crisis we now face calls for *passion*. When I worked as a conservation lobbyist in Washington, D.C., I was told to put my heart in a safe deposit box and replace my brain with a pocket calculator. I was told to be rational, not emotional, to use facts and figures, to quote economists and scientists. I would lose credibility, I was told, if I let my emotions show.

But, damn it, I am an animal. A living being of flesh and blood, storm and fury. The oceans of the Earth course through my veins, the winds of the sky fill my lungs, the very bedrock of the planet makes my bones. I am alive! I am not a machine, a mindless automaton, a cog in the industrial world, some New Age android. When a chain saw slices into the heartwood of a two-thousand-year-old Coast Redwood, it's slicing into my guts. When a bulldozer rips through the Amazon rain forest, it's ripping into my side. When a Japanese whaler fires an exploding harpoon into a great whale, my heart is blown to smithereens. I am the land, the land is me.

Why shouldn't I be emotional, angry, passionate? Madmen and madwomen are wrecking this beautiful, blue-green, living Earth. Fiends who hold nothing of value but a greasy dollar bill are tearing down the pillars of evolution a-building for nearly four thousand million years.

In this world ruled by MBAs, we are taught to use only a fraction of our minds: the left hemisphere of the brain, the rational, calculating part. That portion of our brain is valuable and necessary, but it is not the sole seat of our consciousness. We must get back in touch with the emotional, intuitive right hemisphere of our brain, with our reptilian cortex, with our entire body. Then we must go beyond that to think with the whole Earth. David Brower, onetime executive director of the Sierra Club, has pointed out that you cannot imprison a California Condor in the San Diego Zoo and still have a condor. The being of a condor does not end at the tips of the black feathers on its wings. The condor is *place* as well; it is the thermals rising over the Coast Range, the outcroppings on which it lays its eggs, the carrion on which it feeds.

Society has lobotomized us. Our social environment today can work as a drug, like *soma* in *Brave New World*, to keep us in line, to sedate us, to remove our capacity for passion. Robots do not ask questions. Free men and women do. Wild animals cannot be ruled; they can be domesticated, yes, they can be broken, but then they are no longer free, no longer wild.

We must break out of society's freeze on our passions, we must become animals again. We must feel the tug of the full moon, hear goose music overhead. We must love Earth and rage against her destroyers. We must open ourselves to relationships with one another, with the land; we must dare to love, to feel for something—*someone*—else. And when that final kiss of life—death—comes, we mustn't hide, but rather go *joyously* into that good night. When I die, I don't want to be pickled and put away in a lead box. Place me out in the wilderness, let me revel at rejoining the food chain, at being recycled into weasel, vulture, worm, and mold.

Breaking free from the gilded chains of civilized banality is not easy. One cannot achieve a state of wilderness grace through books, through intellectualization, through rational argument. Our passion comes from our connection to the Earth and it is only through direct interaction with the wilderness that we can unite our minds and our bodies with the land, realizing that there is no separation.

Along with passion, we need *vision*. Why should we content ourselves with the world the way it is handed to us by Louisiana-Pacific, Mitsubishi, the Penta-

gon, and Exxon? Why should we be constrained by the narrow alternatives presented us by Congress and the Forest Service in discussing protection of the land?

We are told that the Gray Wolf and Grizzly Bear are gone from most of the West and can never be restored, that the Elk and Bison and Panther are but shades in the East and will not come back, that Glen Canyon and Hetch Hetchy are beneath dead reservoir water and we shall never see them again, that the Tall Grass Prairie and Eastern Deciduous Forest are only memories and that we can never have big wilderness east of the Rockies again.

Bunk! Why should we be bound by past mistakes? It is up to us to challenge the government and the people with a vision of Big Wilderness, a vision of humans living modestly in a community that also includes bears and rattlesnakes and salmon and oaks and sage-brush and mosquitoes and algae and streams and rocks and clouds.

We should demand that roads be closed and clearcuts rehabilitated, that dams be torn down, that wolves, Grizzlies, Cougars, River Otters, Bison, Elk, Pronghorn, Bighorn Sheep, Caribou, and other extirpated species be reintroduced to their native habitats. We must envision and propose the restoration of biological wildernesses of several million acres in all of America's ecosystems, with corridors between them for the transmission of genetic variability. Wilderness is the arena for evolution, and there must be enough of it for natural forces to have free rein.

John Seed, the Australian founder of the Rainforest Information Centre, tells of a meeting he had with a group of Australian Aborigines in Sydney. After the meeting, they stepped outside into the night air. The great city spread out before them. One of the Abos asked, "What do you see? What do you see out *there*?"

John looked at the pulsating freeways, towers of anodized glass and steel, ships in the harbor, and replied, "I see a city. Lights, pavement, skyscrapers . . ."

The Abo said quietly, "We still see the land. Beneath the concrete we know where the forest grows, where the kangaroos graze. We see where the Platypus digs her den, where the streams flow. That city there . . . it's just a scab. The land remains alive beneath it."

So it is in North America. In the scrub forests of New England, the spirits of 220-foot-tall White Pines still stand. In the feedlots and cornfields of the Great Plains, ghost hooves of Bison and howls of wolves echo back from a century ago. On San Francisco shores, phantom Grizzlies feed on the beached carcasses of whales.

The genocide against these wilderness nations waged around the world by civilized humans has been going on for only an instant in evolutionary time. Some species are gone forever, some ecosystems are hopelessly muddled, but in most cases the land, the wild land, is still alive beneath the scab of concrete. Do we have the sight to see?

Passion and vision are essential, but without *action* they are empty. It is easy to be immobilized by the sheer magnitude of the problems facing Earth, by tasks calling for Hercules when we know we are puny mortals. We feel daunted

about demanding changes when we know that our lives are not pure, that we share the lifestyle that is ravaging the planet. We feel powerless in confronting the vast, immobile gray bureaucracy of government and industry.

"It's too much," we whimper, and surrender. "Better not to fight than to be defeated. Besides, where does one person start? I'm not an expert or a leader. Why don't *they* do something?"

We are frozen because the problems are too big. It's easier to turn on the TV, to plunge into the modern game (whoever dies with the most toys, wins!), to dull our expectations and our passions with drink or with lines of white powder.

The Earth is crying. Do we hear? Martin Luther King, Jr., once said that if one has nothing worth dying for, one has nothing worth living for.

It is a time for courage.

There are many forms of courage. It takes courage to not allow your children to become addicted to television. It takes courage to tell the conservation group to which you belong, *No more compromise!* It takes courage to say no more growth in your community. It takes courage to say that the wild is more important than jobs. It takes courage to write letters to your local newspaper. It takes courage to stand up at a public hearing and speak. It takes courage to live a lower-impact life.

And it takes courage to put your body between the machine and the wilderness, to stand before the chain saw or the bulldozer.

In 1848, Henry David Thoreau went to jail for refusing, as a protest against the Mexican War, to pay his poll tax. When Ralph Waldo Emerson came to bail him out, Emerson said, "Henry, what are you doing in there?"

Thoreau quietly replied, "Ralph, what are you doing out there?"

In this insane world where short-term greed rules over long-term life, those of us with a land ethic, with vision and passion, must face the mad machine. We must stand before it as 19-year-old Oregon Earth First! activist Valerie Wade did when she climbed eighty feet up into an ancient Douglas-fir to keep it from being cut down; as Wyoming guide and outfitter and Earth First! founder Howie Wolke did when he pulled up survey stakes along a proposed gas-exploration road in prime Elk habitat. Both put their lives in jeopardy, both went to jail. Both were proud of what they did. Both are heroes of the Earth, as are hundreds of others who have demonstrated courage in defense of the wild.

This defense is not an arrogant defense, an attitude of Lord Man protecting something less than himself. Rather, it is a humble joining with Earth, becoming the rain forest, the desert, the mountain, the wilderness in defense of yourself. It is through becoming part of the wild that we find courage far greater than ourselves, a union that gives us boldness to stand against hostile humanism, against the machine, against the dollar, against jail, against extinction for what is sacred and right: the Great Dance of Life.

Eighty years ago, Aldo Leopold graduated from the Yale School of Forestry and went to work for the newly-created United States Forest Service in the territories of Arizona and New Mexico. He was put to work inventorying potential timber resources in the high, wild White Mountains of eastern Arizona, which were a great roadless area then. One day Leopold stopped for

lunch with his crew on a rimrock overlooking a turbulent stream. As they ate, they saw a large animal ford the *rillito*. They thought at first it was a doe, but as a rolling bunch of pups came out of the willows to greet their mother, they realized it was a wolf. In those days, a wolf you saw was a wolf you shot. Leopold and his men hurriedly pulled their .30-30s from the scabbards on their horses and began to blast away. The wolf dropped, a pup dragged a shattered leg into the rocks, and Leopold rode down to finish the job. He later wrote:

We reached the old wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then, and have known ever since, that there was something new to me in those eyes—something known only to her and to the mountain. I was young then, and full of trigger itch; I thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunters' paradise. But after seeing the green fire die, I sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view.

Green fire. We need it in the eyes of the wolf. We need it in the land. And we need it in our own eyes.