

Are Some Environmentalists More Equal Than Others? **By Clinton Whitehurst, Ph.D.**

Who are America's environmentalists? What do they do and what is their agenda? Argued here is that most Americans are, in fact, environmentalists. And if this is so, environmentalists are hardly an exclusive group.

By far the largest number of environmentalists are the men, women, and children of every ethnic, religious persuasion and represent every social-economic group. They willingly separate their household trash into recyclable categories such as glass, plastics, aluminum, paper, and motor oil; pay for higher priced insecticides that pose less risk to water tables; pay without protest the extra charges to have their auto tires and batteries disposed of safely; join roadside, lake and stream cleanup efforts; teach their children not to litter and to be considerate of animals. They obey laws regulating hunting and fishing on public lands, and they are conscious of the devastation caused by forest fires. They support animal shelters, often volunteering time as well as money. Their taxes pay for the preservation and maintenance of state and national parks and forests. And while the above is not an exhaustive list of environmental activities that most Americans participate in, it does fairly define this group as "environmentalists" in every sense of the word.

A second group of environmentalists is more active and dedicated to environmental causes. They are the organizers of environmental awareness events; give a high priority to public funding for a variety of beautification projects; support zoning laws that regulate billboard use along roadways and requirements to set aside green spaces in new housing developments. They are against "urban sprawl" but usually are unable to give precise meaning to the term. They accept without question that the long-term effect of global warming will be catastrophic and dismiss, or are ignorant of, studies that come to different conclusions. They actively support with their time and money candidates for political office whom they consider to be environment friendly. An important defining characteristic of this group is that *they respect the law and have no problem living and working with those with whom they may disagree.*

A third group which claim the environmental movement as exclusively theirs are easily recognized. As a general proposition they crave the recognition and attention that they would not otherwise get in the work-a-day world. Unfortunately, their activities, in fact, do get the lion's share of media attention. As a group they reject out of hand data that does not support their agenda. With respect to air purity, they are quick to cite the amount of pollution caused by relatively large vehicles but neglect to point out that while light vehicles pollute less, they are demonstrably less safe when involved in a traffic accident. The cost in lives and fortune in such accidents is conveniently ignored. They champion the use of wind and solar power but fail to note that in most instances where tried, it was either a failure or exorbitantly expensive. Coal-fired generating plants are pictured as emitting tons of pollutants into the air, cause acid rain which devastates forests

and are a major contributor to smog, but ignore the fact that scrubbers in smoke stacks reduce pollutants to negligible levels. Also overlooked is that the United States has the world's largest coal reserves, a comforting fact in a world ever more dependent on oil. Nuclear power is, of course, beyond the pale even though not a single death is attributable to its existence. Criticism of those who oppose their agenda is often vituperate, going well beyond accepted norms. Any political figure that supports offshore drilling for oil or exploratory drilling in government-owned land is an enemy of the environment and, if an elected officeholder, must be humiliated and defeated at any cost.

The older set in this group conveniently forget the predicted ecological disaster they argued would occur if the Alaska pipeline was built. The believe pictures of elk and caribou warming their backsides against portions of the pipeline are either doctored or fakes. And God help the woman who wears a fur coat in public even though she may have scrimped and saved for years to acquire it.

The flight from reality by this group of environmentalists could be tolerated but for one reason. It is the ease with which they have been infiltrated by environmental and other terrorists groups who have no respect for the rule of law; who consider rioting an acceptable means to an end, and being handcuffed and carted off to jail a badge of honor. Burning unoccupied homes to save our forests; spiking trees in recognized and legal lumber tracts; vandalizing laboratories that use animals for medical research; insisting that an "endangered" specie, whether endangered or not, will always take precedence over humans in cases where their interests conflict, are but several examples of environmental terrorism.

It is past time that the majority of environmentalists, that is, most Americans, take back the term environmentalist and a cause which has been hijacked not only by a radical and lawless group but by well meaning clubs, organizations, and associations who, to be charitable, mistakenly believe that some environmentalists are more equal than others.

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