

# **Earth First!: An Introduction**

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## The Problem

Today is the most critical moment in the three-and-a-half-billion-year history of life on Earth. Never before—not even during the mass extinctions of the dinosaurs at the end of the Cretaceous period, 65 million years ago—has there been such an intense period of extinction as we are now witnessing, such a drastic reduction in the biological diversity of this planet.

Over the last several hundred years, human civilization has declared war on large mammals, leading some ecologists to assert that the only large mammals to survive the near future will be those we humans choose to allow to live.

Other prominent biologists, looking aghast on the wholesale devastation of tropical rainforests and temperate old-growth forests, rapidly accelerating desertification, and destruction of “charismatic megafauna” due to habitat destruction and poaching, say that Earth could lose one quarter to one third of *all* species within a few years.

Not only is the 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 system of the planet—destroying the ozone layer which protects us from excessive ultraviolet radiation, changing the carbon dioxide ratio in the atmosphere, poisoning the oceans, and spreading acid rain, radioactive fallout, pesticides and industrial contamination throughout the biosphere.

Indeed, biologists have warned that all vertebrate evolution is coming to an end due solely to the activities of humans.

Clearly, the conservation battle is not one of merely protecting outdoor recreation opportunities, neither is it a matter of elitist aesthetics, nor “wise management and use” of natural resources. It is a battle for life itself, for the continuous 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 marvelous, living, diverse oasis in the vastness of space, or whether the charismatic megafauna and flora of the future will consist of Norway rats, cockroaches and kudzu.

## Why Earth First!?

Are you tired of namby-pamby environmental groups? Are you tired of overpaid corporate environmentalists who suck up to bureaucrats and industry? Have you become disempowered by the reductionist approach of environmental professionals and scientists?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, then Earth First! is for you. Earth First! is effective. Our frontline, direct-action approach to protecting wilderness gets results. We have succeeded in cases where other environmental groups had given up, and have drawn public attention to the crises facing the natural world.

Earth First! was founded in 1979 in response to a lethargic, compromising and increasingly corporate environmental community. Earth First! took a decidedly different tack towards environmental issues. We believe in using all the tools in the tool box—ranging from grassroots organizing and involvement in the legal process to civil disobedience and monkeywrenching.

Earth First! is not an organization, but a movement. There are no “members” of Earth First!, only Earth First!ers. It is a belief in biocentrism, or Deep Ecology, and a practice of putting our beliefs into action.

While there is broad diversity within Earth First!—from animal rights vegetarians to wilderness hunting guides, from monkeywrenchers to careful followers of Gandhi, from rowdy backwoods buckaroos to thoughtful philosophers, from misanthropes to humanists—there is agreement on one thing, the need for action!

## How Deep is Your Ecology?

*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.*

—Aldo Leopold

The central insight of the science of ecology is the realization that all things are connected, that human beings are merely one of the millions of species that have been shaped by the process of evolution for billions of years.

That understanding enables us to answer the question, “Why protect wilderness?” Is it because wilderness makes pretty picture postcards? Because it protects watersheds for downstream use by agriculture, industry and homes? Because it cleans the cobwebs out of our heads after a long week in the auto factory or at the computer? Because it preserves resource-extraction opportunities for future generations? Because some unknown plant living in the wilds may hold a cure for cancer?

No. It is because wilderness *is*. Because it is the real world, the flow of life, the process of evolution, the repository of those billions of years of shared travel.

*All natural things have intrinsic value, inherent worth.* Their value is not determined by what they will ring up on the cash register of GNP, nor by whether or not they are *good*. They are. They exist. For their own sake. Without consideration for any real or imagined value to human civilization.

Even more important than individual species is the wild interconnected community—the wilderness, coevolution, the stream of life unimpeded by industrial interference or human manipulation. These twin themes of interconnectedness and intrinsic value form the core of the ideas of such pioneer ecological thinkers as John Muir, Aldo Leopold and Rachel Carson, and are the basis for action by Earth First!ers. This biocentric world view is opposed to the anthropocentric paradigm of civilization and the reformist position of mainstream environmental groups.

Earth First! does not operate from a basis of political pragmatism or what is perceived to be “possible.” Wilderness, natural diversity, is not something that can be compromised in the political arena. We are unapologetic advocates for the natural world, for Earth.

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