

SECTION V

# Communications Tips and Tools: Talking About Biodiversity, Ethics, and Faith



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## KEY POINTS

Communicating about ethics requires a thoughtful approach and an understanding of your audience's values.

Partnering with the religious community requires sensitivity and commitment.

Values-based messages should address your audience's values and concerns, explain the problem, and provide a solution.

\* The art of communicating effectively about ethics and moral choices is to avoid a debate on personal values, and instead find the common ground that leads to a wise course of action.

# The Art of Communicating about Ethics

by Jane Elder

**The ethical argument is powerful but requires a thoughtful and sensitive approach.**

Ethics, morals, and values are very personal and deeply held. They can charge a public debate like little else, because they articulate what is most important to us and why. The art of communicating effectively about ethics and moral choices involves avoiding debate on personal values, and instead finding the common ground that leads to a wise course of action. Here is some general guidance.

## Tips and Reminders

- *Most people already have a strong sense of what is right and wrong—a firm set of values.* Communication with adults is not about persuading them to have values, or to get the right values, or worse yet, accusing them of not having any values. We may not like someone else's values, but we aren't going to get very far trying to change them. Values are shaped by our cultures, our families, our peer groups, and our experiences in life. But, even in our diverse culture, we have many common values.
- *Values-based communication is not about conversion to a particular point of view.* Our job is not to persuade an individual or an audience to adopt exactly the same values and viewpoint that we do, but rather to understand what drives *their* sense of right and wrong, and to be able to frame our messages about biodiversity conservation in the context of the ethics and values that speak to them. It means connecting the dots between the values people already have and the concerns they have (or might have) about biodiversity issues, and then offering positive choices that people can act upon to address those concerns in a way that is consistent with their existing values. In order to understand what their values are, the communication needs to be a dialogue, not a diatribe. (For more tips on developing and using effective values-based messages, see the following essay, "Crafting and Using Values-Based Messages").
- *One message or one ethical argument rarely fits all people.* While people across the U.S. tend to have similar primary values, because they have different backgrounds and interests, they will apply those values in very different ways. This is what makes democracy complex and fascinating, and why messages pitched to "the general public" often fail to reach anyone in particular. This is why marketers segment their audiences into groups with similar characteristics or attitudes.
- *Our messages are competing in a world cluttered with pitches to the same values.* Because it is effective, marketers and advertisers are promoting everything from politicians to beer with values. For example, Chrysler has an ad campaign in which the tag line is "Drive = Love," and Chevy sold its Blazer with the slogan, "Security in an insecure world." Likewise, politicians offer "A better choice for your future" or "Responsible leadership, for a change." Americans live in a message-saturated culture, and many of those messages are driven by values.

To get through the clutter, we need to take advantage of time-tested techniques for communicating about ethics and moral choices. These techniques include finding and telling *compelling human anecdotes that illustrate how real people make ethical choices for the environment*, and stories with which our audience can identify. Another effective technique is using the modern equivalent of the parable—another kind of story that uses metaphors and illustrative examples to *help people connect the dots* in ways they might not have seen before.

### Keep in Mind . . .

**1. Avoid universal declarations**, such as “All Christians believe X” or “any ethical person would do Y.” Pronouncements on how other people think and believe and how they should act are invitations to be challenged (at a minimum) and hoisted on your own petard. *Instead...* Consider statements such as, “Within the Christian tradition, there are many who point out that God’s first commandment was to tend the garden—to care for Creation” or “throughout human history, most cultures have valued protecting and sustaining the natural world that sustains them.” But make sure you’ve done your homework on the assertions first, and that you can identify which cultures you are talking about as well as the basis for your argument.

**2. Avoid playing “my values are more righteous than your values”** (especially in public communications). They might be (more righteous), but no one wants to hear about it. Few things are more tiresome than the self-righteous environmentalist. “Holier than thou” has never been a popular communications tactic, and there’s no reason to think that environmental advocates will have any greater success with it than sanctimonious voices of the past. *Instead...* Artfully listen for the values that offer potential for comment or question,

Social science and public opinion research have found that the following values are those most widely and deeply held across the U.S.

#### Primary American Values

- Responsibility to care for one’s family
- Responsibility to care for oneself
- Personal liberty
- Work
- Spirituality
- Honesty/integrity
- Fairness/equality

In addition to these, there are other widely held values that are important, but not as important as the primary values.

#### Secondary Values

- Responsibility to care for others
- Personal fulfillment
- Respect for authority
- Love of country or culture

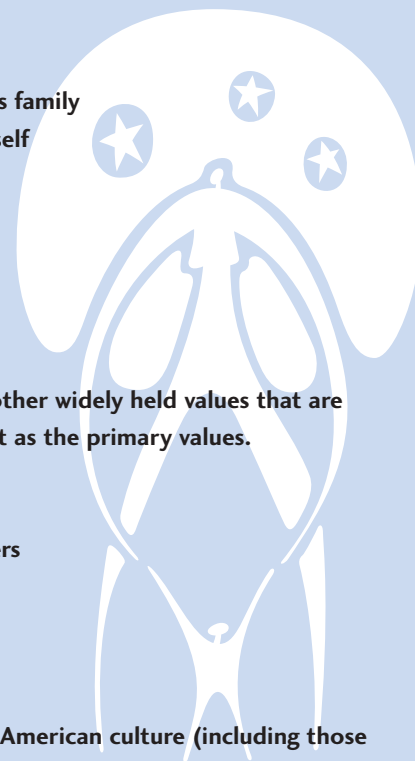
Of the broad range of values in American culture (including those above), the following are most commonly linked to environmental concerns:

- Responsibility to care for the Earth and future generations
- Responsibility to one’s family
- Responsibility to oneself
- Spirituality and sacredness of nature, respect for God’s creation
- Personal fulfillment—enjoyment and aesthetics
- Love of country or culture
- Personal liberty and fairness

Of these, those most strongly associated with the need to protect biodiversity are:

- Responsibility to care for the Earth and future generations (sometimes referred to as the stewardship value, although this term is not widely used in American conversation).
- Respect for God’s creation

Another value relevant to the protection of biodiversity is responsibility to one’s family (particularly as it relates to making sure your family enjoys a healthy, functioning environment). Also relevant, but less salient, are appreciation for the beauty of nature, national heritage, and the intrinsic value of nature.





and then re-direct the argument: “But, Mr. X, you’re a parent, too—surely you’re not arguing that the kind of world our children will inherit doesn’t matter.”

**3. Don’t debate scripture, chapter and verse, tit for tat.** This no-win strategy is a version of “my interpretation is superior to your interpretation” or “I know as many Bible passages as you do.” The thoughtful comeback to a skewed interpretation of a particular passage is one thing, but claiming to have the “right” interpretation of scripture is presumptive and sets you up for a 2,000 year-old fight that is unlikely to be settled by you. Leave this to the theologians.

**4. Don’t use the inclusive “we” and “our” when framing community and cultural values, if you are not an authentic part of the community or the culture.**

This just opens you up for “who are you calling *we*” challenges. *Instead* be more cautious, and consider statements such as, “I believe I speak for many people in the community, when I say that I think there’s something just plain wrong about destroying a wetland that the Creator entrusted to us.”

Overall, the goal is not to have a moral or ethical show-down in public communications, but rather to illustrate the ethical and moral dimensions of the debate. This places the topic at hand into a context of common values and adds a human dimension to the issue. Let’s use the

community wetlands example again. In testimony, or in talking to a group or a reporter, you might say something like this:

“Scientists tell us that these wetlands are valuable to our local ecosystem, and the ecosystem is important, but I think there’s something larger at stake here. We have the opportunity to do

what’s right for our community and for the people who will live here for generations to come. It might be cheaper in the short run to fill in these wetlands for new construction, but imagine what it will cost us in terms of the loss of beauty in our community, a child’s chance to hear the first bird of spring in our own neighborhood, the chance to just be still and witness God’s Creation right here in our town everyday. Losing these things is too high a cost—these are things that money can’t buy.

**5. Don’t “preach” if you aren’t ordained.**

Americans expect religious viewpoints from religious leaders. They are much less comfortable when someone without religious credentials begins to make religious claims in public. Remember, when Interior Secretary Babbitt made public appearances during which he talked about God’s Creation, there was always someone next to him with a collar and a credential to embellish the observation. Babbitt expressed the view; the minister affirmed the credibility of the viewpoint. It doesn’t mean that your convictions can’t be voiced, but they need to be stated in a context that doesn’t alienate your audience. For example, when you express your beliefs, make sure to provide the context: “As someone who has been active in my church all my life, I am led by my faith to consider X when I look at issues like this.” This explains your role and your reason and allows an audience to hear you as a deeply religious individual, not a self-appointed interpreter of scripture. It creates a big difference in how you are received and what people hear.

Because ethics and moral principles are closely linked to many people’s religious beliefs, building partnerships with the faith community can provide an important bridge to people who are already deeply invested in an ethical tradition. This outreach requires a thoughtful and sensitive approach.

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## Tips for Outreach to the Faith Community

(Adapted from Suellen Lowry and Daniel Swartz, *Building Partnerships with the Faith Community: A Resource Guide for Environmental Groups* [Madison, WI: Biodiversity Project, 2001])

### Forging Relationships with Leaders in the Religious Community

There are a number of places to find religious community partners, including the following:

- Within your own environmental organization;
- In the yellow pages of the phone book;
- On the Internet (A good place to start a web search is the Web of Creation website at [www.webofcreation.org](http://www.webofcreation.org), or the National Religious Partnership for the Environment website at [www.nrpe.org](http://www.nrpe.org));
- At denominational regional offices;
- In social justice and conservation groups within denominations;
- At colleges and universities affiliated with denominations;
- In interfaith and ecumenical groups.

### The Approach

- Before making an initial call, step back and ask yourself, “What would I be thinking if I had never before considered doing anything pertaining to biodiversity issues?”
- Reach out to lay members of the religious community as well as clergy.
- Avoid strident-sounding tones.
- Do not “put down” your opponents.
- Make a connection with issues on which individuals already are working, e.g., showing the relationship between biodiversity and social justice.
- Emphasize the many reasons that biodiversity is important, including species’ inherent value and biodiversity’s importance to people.

### Partnering to Reach the Media

- Be careful when encouraging religious conservationists to do media work. By their very nature, media activities are not private, and many people want to keep their religious beliefs and practice private.
- Ask religious community members who are communicating with policy makers or the media to speak only from their own areas of expertise.
- Do not tell religious community individuals what their religious community message should contain, but share information from your own areas of expertise that may be helpful as the spiritual message is crafted.
- Ask whether you can contribute an article to the community’s newsletter. Almost all religious communities have publications, often at the regional or national levels, and these publications may accept articles.

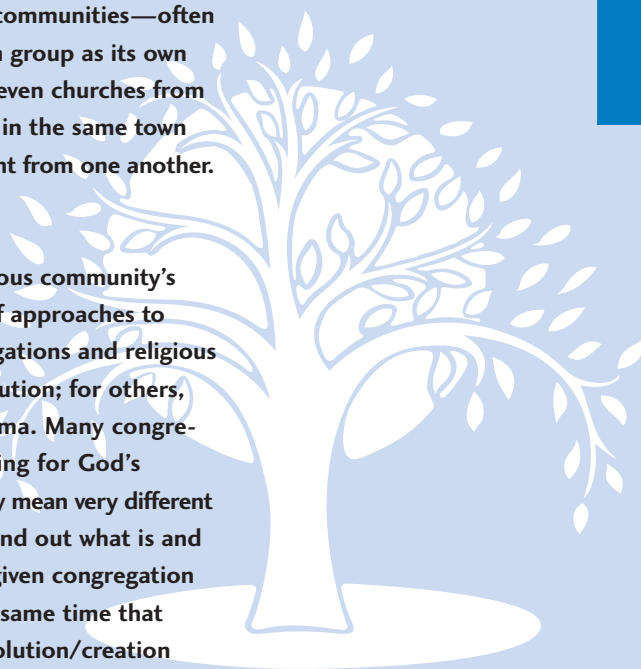
### Ten Things to Think About

#### 1. THE “religious community”

Perhaps the most basic mistake in outreach to religious groups is the assumption that such groups are all the same, all agree with each other, or all have the ability to speak for each other. Religious communities are as diverse as any other communities—often more so. Approach each group as its own entity, recognizing that even churches from the same denomination in the same town may be strikingly different from one another.

#### 2. Evolution/Creation

One aspect of the religious community’s diversity is the variety of approaches to evolution. Many congregations and religious leaders fully accept evolution; for others, the very term is anathema. Many congregations talk about “caring for God’s Creation”—but they may mean very different things by that phrase. Find out what is and is not acceptable for a given congregation—understanding at the same time that groups all across the evolution/creation



spectrum may be supportive of biodiversity, though for different reasons.

### 3. Interfaith Coalitions and New Age/Pagan Issues

Another aspect of the diversity of religious life is the broad spectrum of reactions to interfaith coalitions. Some communities—especially the Jewish community—prefer to work in interfaith coalitions. Others—especially Evangelical churches—typically prefer to work independently. It is important to respect these differences and to encourage participation that is appropriate for a given congregation or leader. Some congregations and institutions worry that environmental groups or interfaith coalitions around environmental issues might be associated with “New Age” or “pagan” religious practices; other congregations welcome dialogue with Earth-based traditions or new religions. If you are working with communities where this is a concern, groups like the Evangelical Environmental Network can supply you with materials that offer biblically based reasons for “caring for creation.” You need to make sure not to pressure religious community members to work publicly with any individuals or groups that might seem to compromise their religious beliefs.

### 4. Pro-Life Concerns

Religious groups also hold a variety of positions on abortion, birth control, and other family planning issues. While discussions of population issues and their relationship to biodiversity should not be considered off-limits, such discussions are sensitive and probably should wait until trust has begun to build in your relationships with religious leaders. In some cases, religious leaders will want to address environmental concerns as part of a broader “pro-life” agenda, an argument that can be extremely persuasive. It is important, however, for such themes to be raised by religious leaders rather than by secular environmental groups.

**5. Diversity within Environmental Groups**  
Many religious communities have long-standing commitments to diversity in their own leadership, reflecting the great diversity within their pews. Such groups are particularly sensitive to criticisms of the environmental movement as an elitist concern held by upper-class white males. Be sure to demonstrate the diversity of your leadership to religious leaders, and if your group and leaders are not diverse, you might think about asking for help from religious leaders to increase your diversity.

### 6. Tax Status/Church-State Issues

These issues, while by no means limited to environmental concerns, are often raised by religious leaders who are relatively new to social justice activism. Many denominations publish very clear guidelines on activism, tax status, and church/state concerns for their congregation. Though you should not give detailed legal advice to religious groups, you can point out that religious leaders speaking out on environmental issues in no way threatens their tax status; the only activity they must avoid is the endorsement of political candidates. Similarly, if religious leaders are concerned about crossing church/state boundaries, you can point out that, as long as they do not try to establish a current religious test for public office, speaking about how their religious values relate to current policy questions does not intrude on church/state separation.

### 7. The “Enemy”

Especially in the present political climate, it is easy to fall into habits of demonizing one’s political opponents. It is important to remember, however, that in a given congregation, one may find business leaders as well as environmental leaders, property rights activists as well as biodiversity activists. If religious leaders feel that they can’t speak about environmental issues without directly attacking members of their own congregation, they may avoid the



subject altogether. You can help by giving religious leaders the tools they need to express concern about environmental issues without ignoring legitimate questions about the consequences of environmental regulations. In some cases, once trust has been established, you may find that religious leaders can help bring other sectors to the table ready to work with you. In other cases, a trusting relationship may enable a religious leader to actively condemn practices by congregants that do need condemning.

#### 8. Baggage

Sometimes the environmentalists approaching religious groups bring more than one agenda with them. Occasionally, in addition to environmental outreach, they want to discuss their own religious issues—anything from nagging questions about God to memories of a mean religious schoolteacher. While at least some of these conversations might be appropriate once a trusting relationship is built, they often can block the building of that relationship if they become too prominent too early on, and especially when they take on negative tones, denouncing religion as patriarchy or the like. Make sure that the person making the initial outreach connection to religious groups approaches them with an open mind and with only one item on the agenda—building a working relationship on environmental concerns.

#### 9. Coming on Strong

Religious leaders are very busy, and they may not have previously given much thought to environmental concerns, especially biodiversity. Don't overwhelm them, either with reams of background information or with huge demands on their time. Make sure your initial contacts are about a time-limited, specific project. Once you have successfully worked together, you can move on to more complicated aspects of biodiversity and/or more long-term, time-intensive projects.

#### 10. Two-Way Relationships

No one likes to be used, especially someone who already may feel overly busy and has too many demands on her/his time. Make sure the tone is not, “you’d be useful to me,” but “maybe we can partner on this to accomplish something.” Show clearly what you have to offer in this relationship—not only solid information about important subjects, but also exciting possibilities to make a difference on critical issues. And you can relate anecdotes about how environmental activities have brought new energy, excitement, and people, especially young people, to other congregations engaged in caring for creation. Finally, don't underestimate the value of helping provide interesting topics for sermons or religious school classes. The more you can offer, the more likely it is that religious leaders and groups will want to work closely with you.



## Movement Connects the Heavens with Earth

by Todd Wilkinson

*The Oregonian*, Portland, OR

December 26, 1999

On a crisp, wintry night, the Rev. Warren Murphy led parishioners on a walk beneath the glowing solstice moon. Together, they admired the cosmos with a telescope and sipped hot chocolate, and when the time came for a festive holiday carol, they sang “O Tannenbaum” with the enthusiasm of tree huggers.

The stroll is just the latest example of how Murphy, an Episcopalian priest, is persuading his flock to think “green” by paying regular tribute to the beauty of God’s creation.

It’s also part of a growing global movement involving spiritual leaders from all faiths asserting a strong connection among a healthy environment, spiritual fulfillment, and fundamental religious teachings.

From the Bible to the Talmud to the Koran, from weekend sermons to Christian rock concerts, Earth stewardship is emerging as a powerful religious force in the modern age. It is a trend, theologians say, that not only holds profound implications for religious and public policy from Capitol Hill to the Vatican, but also offers insight into how Americans view their biblical charge to care for God’s creation.

The evolving synergy of the environmental and religious movements was documented in a survey by researchers at Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass. It showed a threefold increase in the number of people worshipping at environmentally focused churches during the mid-1990s.

This growth can be attributed to the increased interest of two particular demo-

graphic groups, says the Rev. Peter Illyan, Northwest regional director of Target Earth, one of several prominent eco-religious organizations:

Young people who are active in the outdoors but raised without any firm religious teachings.

Aging baby boomers who left their churches as young adults, feeling they were no longer relevant. Many are coming back because of their connection to contemporary environmental issues and the outreach of evangelical services.

Men and women of the cloth are drawing worshippers from all segments of society.

Most prominently, Pope John Paul II has quietly cultivated a legacy as the first environmental pope. In 1979, he proclaimed St. Francis the patron saint of ecology, and he has implored Roman Catholics to reduce their level of resource consumption.

“The seriousness of ecological degradation lays bare the depth of man’s moral crisis,” the pontiff declared on New Year’s Day 10 years ago.

Religion frequently has entered environmental debates in Washington, D.C., as well. James Watt, the Interior Secretary under President Ronald Reagan and a born-again Christian, characterized environmentalists as practicing pagan idolatry for worshipping nature at the expense of the financial welfare of humans.

Watt claimed that natural-resource development has a firm rooting in Scripture—that man should have “dominion” over the land. From that assertion sprang a private-property rights movement in the West and South allied with fundamentalist Christians.

Leaders of the “green” religion movement admit they were slow to counter such assertions as they grew during the 1980s and ‘90s. But a turning point came in 1996, when Republicans in Congress wanted to amend the Endangered Species Act.



Clergy representing a spectrum of mainstream denominations protested, comparing the struggle to preserve biological diversity to Noah readying his ark. Newt Gingrich, House Speaker at the time, eventually shelved efforts to weaken the wildlife-conservation law.

### Not universal support

Still, the eco-religious movement has its detractors. In the battle for support from evangelical Christians, both sides are armed with Bible passages to reinforce their point of view, and both accuse the other of misinterpreting Scripture.

E. Calvin Beisner, who teaches interdisciplinary studies at Covenant College in Lookout Mountain, Ga., is one of the nation's foremost critics.

He says that many ecological threats are overblown and that left-leaning environmentalists are trying to co-opt mainstream religion to add legitimacy to their cause.

"They infer that nature is best when it is pristine, and they say that man has fallen into sin by wishing to develop the landscape," he says. "They seem to suggest that everything man does has been negative."

Beisner, a devout promoter of the free market, and others say natural-resource development—including logging, mining, livestock grazing, and commercial fishing—helps accomplish a universal religious imperative, which is aiding the poor by elevating their quality of life.

"The Bible does specify that we have to be good stewards," says Michael Barkey, a policy analyst with the Acton Institute, a pro-business religious think tank. "While it seems like a very simple principle, it has broad economic ramifications."

Efforts by religious groups to end logging, for example, violate the separation of church and state, Barkey says. And he accuses certain religious groups of blasphemy by promoting Deep Ecology, which places humans not above nature to exercise dominion, but as merely a part of the

ecosystem.

A lawsuit about logging in Minnesota, for example, is exploring whether the U.S. Forest Service views trees as "sacred."

But supporters of the new church activism in conservation say they're just responding to the wishes of congregations, which are both liberal and conservative.

"Our adversaries try to diminish our standing by labeling us part of the fringe," says Ann Alexander, chairwoman of the Christian Environmental Council. "Even if that were true—and it's not—it still wouldn't matter because millions of people are responding to our message because it is relevant."

Thousands of scientists, religious academics, ministers, and worshippers see no contradiction between evolution and creationism. Rather, they see a conduit between the two that closely parallels the objectives of environmentalism.

### Movement has broad base

This movement manifests itself on a number of fronts:

A five-year-old program called Rescue God's Creation annually brings 50 Christian college students to Washington, D.C., to learn about environmental issues. When they return home, they use their new political insight to educate communities and fellow students about pending legislation.

The Pennsylvania Council of Churches began an unprecedented interfaith campaign to counter global climate change, saying it did "violence to God's creation" and violated moral and religious principles of justice.

The Religious Campaign for Forest Conservation is rallying hundreds of churches to support President Clinton's proposal to protect more than 40 million acres of public forests.

An effort led by the Redwood Rabbis, an extension of the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life in the



Northwest, staged a mock trial of a powerful timber executive, accusing him of violating Jewish law by felling ancient redwoods.

“We don’t see it as a greening of religion as much as a drawing out of the inherent care of creation that has always been a part of Christianity,” says Fred Krueger from the Religious Campaign for Forest Conservation. “The fact is you can’t have a healthy economy and a severely degraded life-support system.”

As the new millennium begins, when environmental concerns have never been greater, Illyan asks: “If Jesus were to appear today, would he be more inclined to be a land developer or a conservationist?”

“Scripture doesn’t warn about worshipping nature,” he says, “but it does warn continually about worshipping material wealth.”

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*Bozeman, Montana, writer Todd Wilkinson is a western correspondent to the Christian Science Monitor, a contributor to magazines such as Audubon and National Geographic Adventure, and author of nine books, including the critically acclaimed Science Under Siege: The Politicians’ War on Nature and Truth.*



# Crafting and Using Values-Based Messages

by Jane Elder

The Biodiversity Project has promoted values-based communications as an effective way to reach out to people with a wide range of backgrounds and interests. “Values-based” doesn’t mean “value-laden.” It also doesn’t mean that we’re trying to impose a particular set of values on someone. These false assumptions leave many people wary of this powerful communications tool, and they can miss out on an opportunity to expand the dialogue for biodiversity beyond the “choir” of environmental leaders who already understand why it is important.

Creating values-based messages simply means framing messages in a way that they speak to values that people already have, such as responsibility to future generations or a sense of fairness and honesty. By starting with values, we can speak to what people think is truly important, and thus we’re more likely to open up a conversation. This isn’t to say that the complexities of issues and the facts surrounding them aren’t important—of course they are—but people tend to weigh them against an invisible scale of deeply held beliefs mixed with concerns for daily life and the future. Values-based messages are an invitation to weigh an issue through one’s personal values. If they ring true, then you’ve really communicated.

A typical values-based message starts with a careful analysis of the intended audience and an analysis of what *they* value. The message should state what the problem, the issue, or the opportunity is and also provide a recommended solution or course of action to address the problem. But the problem and the solution need to be framed through the relevant values and concerns of the audience.

Let’s say we want to talk with suburban parents about the importance of protecting local wetland habitat from development. We could start the conversation with wetland hydrology and its benefits to the local water table, the richness of amphibian species, and other facts, OR we could start by thinking about what the parents’ values might be. Most parents care a great deal about the kind of world their children will inherit, as well as about their children’s health and well-being. How might a wetland message speak to these concerns? Here’s an example:

Like other parents who live in Smith Meadows, we want our children to grow up in a healthy and beautiful community. The wetlands in our area help keep our drinking water clean and provide our families with an opportunity to enjoy wildlife throughout the year. But developers are seeking an exemption to our wetland regulations to build a new housing tract and shopping mall. We have a responsibility to our community and to our children’s future to protect these special areas. By protecting the wetlands, we’re protecting the quality of life in Smith Meadows.

*Then*, you can mention the water table and the amphibians if you need to, but start with responsibility, family, and future generations, and address concerns about health and quality of life. Starting with the values places the issue in the realm of doing what is right for one’s community, one’s family, and the future. The data can inform the decision, but the issue is no longer limited to merely data, and whose scientist has a better wetland map; it has expanded to include what our audiences (and we, too) value, and the ethical dimension has been engaged.



## KEY POINTS

Messages that appeal to values and address concerns are the building blocks of an effective communications strategy.

Effective values-based messages are targeted and appropriate for the setting.

\* Values-based messages are an invitation to weigh an issue through one’s personal values. If it rings true, then you’ve really communicated.

**Some tips on using values-based messages:**

- **Targeting.** Values-based messages work well for targeted public communications, where the audience and its values are known. Public opinion research is one of the tools that enable communicators to identify audiences and their values. While many values are widely held throughout U.S. culture, the more specific the audience, the more incisive the message can be by speaking to the specific values that are important to your audience. If your target is the general public, you don't have a target audience.
- **We/Our.** Values-based messages tend to be most effective when they are inclusive: "We value our children's future" instead of "You value your children's future." But use inclusive language only when it is authentic.
- **Credible Messengers.** The messenger is just as important as the message (that's where that authentic "we" comes into play). The messenger needs to be authentic, credible, and persuasive to the audience you seek to reach as well as appropriate for the message itself. A neighborhood mom might work well for the wetlands message in the example above; a grandfather might be effective in talking about our connections to the land across generations; a clergyman is likely to be more effective than an environmental executive director in talking about the theological rationales for biodiversity protection.
- **Consider the Setting and the Application.** If you are participating in a technical hearing or a scientific debate, then stick to the language and terms that will communicate there. Values-based communications aren't a universal communications solution, although they work well for framing a public debate and reaching out to new audiences.

**Sensitivities.** Today educators are debating the highly charged issue of whether values belong in public education, and while values education is an entirely different kettle of fish than the communications strategies we're talking about here, it is possible to confuse the two. As a result, environmental educators need to ensure that they and their colleagues are clear about the distinctions, so the benefits of values-based communications in educational settings don't get dismissed because of concerns about values *in* education. Scientific and educational institutions, especially public institutions and agencies, are extremely sensitive to criticism that they are imposing an agenda on their visitors or students. Well-crafted messages don't do this, but communicators and educators still need to be thoughtful in the use of values-based messages and responsive to the needs of their institution. One approach is to frame questions that bring social and cultural values into play but allow readers to draw their own conclusions. Using our example above, an exhibit or brochure might ask, "How do wetlands affect your quality of life?" and offer a range of choices for the visitor to consider.





## A Message Is a Paragraph, Not a Slogan

A message is a clear, compelling, and short paragraph that does four basic things:

- Gives your audience a reason to care about your issue by appealing to values.
- Describes a threat and suggests who is responsible for the problem.
- Provides a solution.



- Describes what action will help solve the problem.

Making sure your message speaks to the way people sort through problems can strengthen a message. Does it appeal to our emotions? Does it provide us with information? Does it offer a solution? Does it give us something to do so we can respond to the threat?

A slogan and a sound bite can be easily lifted from your message. A slogan might be: "Development is forever." A sound bite might be: "We must protect our families' quality of life. If Smith marsh is destroyed, it's gone forever." These are shorthand extracts from your message that can be useful as a tag line in communications, but they are not a substitute for a thoughtful, well-constructed message paragraph.

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QUALITY OF LIFE

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### KEY POINT

Understanding the logic of anti-conservation myths can prepare you to counter the premises and conclusions of opposing arguments.

\* Although anti-conservation viewpoints are seldom presented as formal and systematic arguments, they are often built on premises and inferences that can be deconstructed and challenged.

# Busting Anti-Conservation Myths

by Michael Nelson

## Introduction

Ethical claims of various sorts are often presented as arguments. Therefore, our responses to those claims are most effective if we address them as arguments.

Biodiversity advocates are frequently confronted with a common and predictable set of arguments against taking action to prevent extinction. Although anti-conservation viewpoints are seldom presented as formal and systematic arguments, they are often built on premises and inferences that can be deconstructed and challenged. Here are some examples of common anti-conservation claims—the kind you might encounter on talk radio—and ways to refute them using logical arguments.

### I. The Naturalness Argument

#### The myth:

Extinction, climate change, soil erosion, air and water pollution, and acid rain are “natural” and normal phenomena; therefore we should not be concerned about them.

#### The responses:

##### 1. *Not everything that is natural is good:*

- Hurricanes are natural
- Cancer is natural
- Volcanic eruptions are natural
- Strychnine is natural

We are rightly concerned to protect ourselves from the first three, and we would be fools to willingly swallow the fourth.

##### 2. *While these phenomena may occur in nature, people have increased the rate, frequency, and scale of their effects:*

- The human-caused rate/degree of extinction, climate change, soil erosion, air and water pollution, and acid rain is much greater than the natural background rate.
- Occasional catastrophic natural events (meteor strikes and volcanic eruptions) have caused infrequent spikes in the scale of mass extinctions, caused acid rain, and affected Earth’s climate. But these occurrences cannot be compared to the way one species—*homo sapiens*—is altering the global environment, causing what may be irreversible changes, and threatening all species—including our own—with extinction.

TIM MCCABE PHOTO COURTESY OF USDA NRCS



## II. The Human Superiority Argument

### The myth:

Humans are superior to nature. Thus we have the right to use—or abuse—it in any way we wish or need.

### The responses:

#### 1. There are many standards by which to judge superiority:

- Not everyone agrees that humans are superior. Other species display intelligence, emotion, sensitivity to pain, complex systems of communication, the use of tools and (some researchers have argued) self-consciousness. Nonetheless, all of these capacities have at one time been described as uniquely human attributes allegedly testifying to our superiority.
- Some would say that the idea of “superiority” is an outmoded argument that has no practical meaning, given our current understanding of the complex interactions of species within the web of life.

#### 2. People must act responsibly toward the rest of creation:

- If you are basing your conclusion of human superiority on religious teachings (e.g., the Bible), we will not argue with you about your religious beliefs concerning human primacy. But in our view the scriptures also teach that humans have a responsibility to be wise and careful stewards of nature.

#### 3. Superiority does not grant the moral right to use and abuse others.

- With superiority comes a responsibility to care for those less privileged.

## III. The “Conservation is Anti-Progress, Anti-People, and Unpatriotic” Argument

### The myth:

Conservation is anti-progress, or anti-people, or unpatriotic.

### The response:

#### 1. What do you mean by “anti-progress”, or “anti-people”, or “unpatriotic”?

- Anti-progress: If by “progress” you mean *growth*, then our answer is that growth does not necessarily equal progress, just as change does not always equal progress. We question growth that will cause damage to essential parts or functions of the ecosystem.
- If by “progress” you mean *economic development*, conservation is certainly not anti-economic. The long-term economic security of our country relies on the availability of resources. Conservationists are very concerned about this and advocate policies that promote a sustainable way of life and renewability of resources. True progress means that we can live on this planet in a sustainable way, with resources being renewed rather than depleted.
  - Anti-people: Conservationists are trying to ensure the long-term health of our planet—and that is definitely good for people.
  - Unpatriotic: Questioning the status quo or “the way things have always been done” is not seditious. Questioning the way things are is one way to make things better. It is what democracy and free speech are all about. Conservationists question and oppose policies that will degrade the biosphere’s life support systems and endanger many species, including our own.

\* Conservationists are trying to ensure the long-term health of our planet—and that is definitely good for people.

## IV. The Scientific Uncertainty Argument

### The myth:

Science can’t provide definitive answers to many questions (e.g., Are we causing global warming?), because not all scientists agree on the answers. Therefore, (a) it is wrong to assume that we’re taking the cor-





\* I can make a difference as an individual, and even though I am an individual, I am not alone. There are many others who agree with me...and together we can make a big difference.

rect action, or (b) we should do nothing until we have a scientific consensus.

**The response:**

*1. Science rarely produces one hundred percent certainty.*

- Scientists are almost never in total agreement over particular issues or questions. Scientific knowledge advances by constant questioning and testing—that is the way science works. True science does not assume absolute knowledge or certainty.
- When there is a critical mass of agreement among scientists that something is probably true, then we would be foolish not to act based on that body of knowledge.
- Most of our actions are based on the probability of a particular outcome and not on an absolute certainty. If *nine* doctors say that you will die if you don't take a certain medication, and *one* says that she disagrees, the wiser course is probably to take the medication.

## V. The Hopelessness Argument

**The myth (version 1):**

The environment is doomed, and we can't do anything about it, so there is no point trying.

**The response:**

*1. Although it's true that many species have become extinct, that doesn't mean the entire cosmos is doomed.*

- Human actions are causing the major threats to biodiversity. Because we are responsible for the problem, we can fix much of it. What is more, we have a moral obligation to try.

**The myth (version 2):**

Individuals cannot make a difference, so anyone who tries to make a difference is just wasting time and effort.

**The response:**

*1. People can make a difference, individually and collectively:*

- Dedicated individuals have made a huge difference throughout history. Look at Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi, and Mother Teresa—or someone who is making a difference in your community. Throughout history, change has occurred because of individuals.
- I can make a small difference as an individual, and moreover, I am not alone. There are many others who agree with me, and together we can make a big difference.



# Talking about Biodiversity

by Jane Elder

A concept as majestic and complex as biodiversity is challenging to teach. Most Americans are not reminded of biodiversity by their daily routines. Yet they are aware of—and concerned about—species loss and understand that humans are largely responsible for causing it. To expand on this awareness and concern and translate it into action, we will need to educate people more fully about the concept of biodiversity and the importance of its conservation. We will also need to inspire people to believe that they can make a difference, that they know what to do and how to do it, and that they can succeed.

## Define It

If you use the word biodiversity, explain what it means. Otherwise, talk about the web of life, nature, the natural world, ecosystems, habitats, etc.

## Make It Real, Not Conceptual or Abstract

Talk about biodiversity in the context of real places, real ecosystems, real species, and real issues. Ground the abstract concept of “diversity of gene pools, species, and habitats” in real places and experiences. Illustrate with forests, river systems, deserts, coastlines, wetlands, etc. and the variety of life that depends on them, instead of statistics about global species loss.

## Localize Whenever Possible; Emphasize Place

Use local examples and experiences—a real place or problem that people can identify with—to provide context and meaning, e.g., loss of local songbirds, loss of the region’s sugar maple trees, destruction of a local marsh, invasions from zebra mussels or kudzu, etc. Eschew the exotic

(Biodiversity: it’s not just for rainforests anymore!) when the local example is available. As long as species loss is occurring in far away places, it remains an abstract concept.

## Make the Human Connection: Health and Human Services

Thanks to nature, life itself is possible: Illustrate and explain how healthy ecosystems sustain human life, from fresh air and clean water to food, fiber, and fun.

- Healthy natural systems keep us healthy: Balanced ecosystems promote human health, from supplying clean water to protecting us from exotic viruses, exploding insect populations, and toxic pollution. Among Americans, health is the primary motivator for protecting the envi-

CHARLIE RAHM PHOTO COURTESY OF USDA NRCS



ronment; fear of toxics is the #1 concern.

- **Nature's pharmacy:** The potential loss of future sources of medicines interests some audiences (e.g., younger adults) and not others. But don't just talk about medicines that might come someday from exotic places. Instead explain common medicines that have already come from nature (cortisone, for example, from South African plant roots, or digitalis, from foxgloves) to illustrate how important natural sources of medicines already are. Start with the familiar; bridge to the possible.

#### **Find Common Ground with Common Values; Lead with Values, Follow with Facts**

Most Americans believe that we have a responsibility to maintain a clean and healthy environment for our families and for the future generations that will inherit the world we leave behind. This sense of "stewardship" provides common ground for starting conversations, after which the facts can be introduced.

#### **If the Value Fits, Use It**

Not everyone looks at the natural world the same way. Some think we should protect it because it is the responsible thing to do for the next generation, others, because it is God's creation, others, because it is beautiful, others because they believe in the intrinsic value of nature, etc. Know which values your audience embraces before you invoke a particular value in your argument. When in doubt, retreat to stewardship.

#### **Emphasize Responsibility and Opportunity; Offer Hope!**

Explain how humans are responsible for loss of species and natural areas, but also explain how humans can help reverse this trend. There's nothing like the imminent collapse of planetary life support systems to really turn off an audience. Don't sugar-coat the bad news, but always offer hope,

alternatives, options: "there's another way of doing things."

#### **Connect the Dots... Make the Relationships and Interdependence of Nature Clear**

Talk about species or particular habitats in terms of relationships, and explain the links to human well being whenever possible. (E.g., we need spiders because they eat insects and thus keep the insect population in balance, which in turn protects humans from out-of-control insect populations.) People understand that nature is an interdependent system, but they don't know much about the specific relationships.

#### **Take Advantage of a Basic Appreciation of the Balance of Nature to Expand Ecological Literacy**

Most people appreciate the concept of nature as a balanced system, but many don't know what it takes for nature to stay balanced. Explain basic concepts, such as "diversity provides resilience/ lack of diversity makes systems vulnerable"; explain the value of predators, scavengers, and other "undesirable" species in terms of the whole system. Explain, explain, explain.

- Speak in Plain English (or plain Spanish, etc.)
- Avoid scientific, technical, and other jargon.

#### **Resources**

Belden & Russonello, R/S/M, Inc. *Human Values and Nature's Future: Americans' Attitudes on Biological Diversity, An Analysis of Findings from a National Survey*. Washington, D.C.: Belden & Russonello (for the Communications Consortium Media Center), October 1996.

Biodiversity Project. Briefings/Workshops/Working Groups 1996 and 1997: A Summary Report. Madison, WI: Biodiversity Project, 1998.



DAVID HALIUS FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

# Getting the Ethical Message Out to the Public

by Jane Elder and Erin Oliver

How do we get the ethical message out to a broader audience? Media and community outreach are two basic tools that will spread the word. There are many excellent guidebooks on media outreach and community organizing, and we won't make an effort to condense all their strategies and tips here. Instead, we have compiled a brief summary of special considerations and opportunities linked to communicating about ethics. We encourage you to take advantage of resources such as the Biodiversity Project's communications handbook, *Life. Nature. The Public. Making the Connection*, the Jossey-Bass handbook, *Guide to Strategic Communications for Nonprofits* (published by the Communications Consortium Media Center), and the Sierra Club's *Grassroots Organizing Training Manual* for a deeper look at the general topics of media and community outreach.

## Environmental Ethics and the News Media

Ethical considerations about biodiversity protection do have potential for coverage in the news media, but the things that make an item newsworthy (its news value) will shape how a story is framed. The news media look for ...

- Controversy—is there a disagreement or a struggle; is there conflict between two sides; are there heroes or villains?
- Immediacy—is something important happening right now?
- Compelling human interest—is there something engaging?
- Novelty, surprise, or the unusual—is there something that will capture attention?

- Celebrity—is someone famous or powerful involved?
- Scandal—are we shocked?
- Proximity—is there a local connection?
- Catastrophe and tragedy—has something awful happened?
- Trend—is this the beginning of something new?

As a result, a news story can often polarize a debate by emphasizing disagreement instead of common ground, or by focusing on immediate events instead of long-term solutions. Personality may take priority over substance, or a story might highlight the oddity of environmental concerns being raised by religious leaders, for example, as opposed to shedding light on the concerns themselves. Knowing what the established practices in the news media are and how reporters, editors and producers tend to package and present stories enables a savvy communicator to avoid being boxed in or misrepresented in the news. In order to use the news media effectively:

- Determine when the news is the right place to pitch a story, and
- Anticipate the needs of the news media, and develop stories that match those needs when appropriate.

Often, the complexity and nuance in ethical perspectives aren't easily compressed into a sound bite or a headline or even the news section of the daily paper. (The exception to this is the editorial and opinion page.) Feature articles or series provide opportunities to add some depth and dimension that a short news story can't provide. For example, profiles on people who demonstrate ethical courage in our times have news value—both novelty and compelling human interest. But consider where you come across these types of stories. Often, they appear as feature articles



## KEY POINTS

Be aware of what makes something “newsworthy” when talking to the media about environmental ethics.

Features and Op-ed pieces provides an ideal forum for reaching out to audiences on ethics.

Look for venues where you can develop an ongoing dialogue to include the ethical considerations of biodiversity.

\* By closely observing the media, you can identify where ethical issues about the environment are getting covered.

in the “lifestyle” or “communities” section of a newspaper where the focus is more on how we live than what shocking thing happened today. Other places where stories on the ethics of biodiversity protection might appear are the religion section of newspapers, features, the regular columns focusing on “observations about life,” the food and garden sections, holiday features (Thanksgiving is a natural), and even the business section. For environmental writers, the emerging trend of ethical and religious activism in environmental debates is another angle to pursue.

RON NICHOLS PHOTO COURTESY OF USDA NRCS



\* Given the sensitivity associated with raising ethical and moral questions in public settings, look for venues where these larger questions may already be part of the dialogue.

Local television news is more of a challenge, since every minute is designed to compete for ratings. But “Live at Five” or “Good Morning” type programs are often crying out for content and are more accessible than the prime time news slots tend to be. An interview on one of these types of programs

presents an opportunity to showcase compelling people and their stories, as long as the subject isn’t too weighty. In radio, local NPR affiliates and community radio programs—those with talk shows or regular environmental features—present opportunities to develop stories with more depth than most radio news allows.

By closely observing the media, you can identify where ethical issues about the environment are getting covered, and you can cultivate relationships with writers, reporters, producers, and editors who have an interest in covering these stories. Below are additional suggestions for cultivating coverage in media.

**More than News, and Alternative Media** (adapted and revised from Dave Dempsey, *Life. Nature. The Public. Making the Connection* [Madison, WI: Biodiversity Project, 1999].)

- Local TV is increasingly entertainment-focused, even within news broadcasts. **Informational features** within regular news programming—“Spotlight on Health” or “the Weekly Garden Tip” segments—can be a good place to introduce biodiversity topics from a variety of angles, such as lifestyle concerns or consumer interests.
- Most newspapers have **weekly sections** on health and fitness, home and garden, religion, science, and other topics. For example, health section editors may be interested in a story about the way our increased dependence on the automobile can lead to health problems, and what this means for children growing up in an auto-dependent culture.
- Many cities have **alternative weekly newspapers**, such as the *Village Voice*, that cover issues of local interest. Many of these papers are free and thus are read by a large portion of urban dwellers. In addition to feature news articles, alternative weeklies often have sections offering brief updates on current issues.
- From the local to the national level, **magazines** are multiplying, providing new outlets for information. Commercial publications are increasingly aimed at “niche” audiences, ranging from outdoor recreationists to parents to community gardeners. Magazines know their audiences well and are a great tool for figuring out who, in our culture, is interested in what. Magazines also have “shelf-life” in a way that newspapers and electronic media don’t. People often keep them and refer back to them, or they clip and save articles.
- **Electronic mail and websites** are now indispensable sources of information. (See the wealth of web sites on ethics, environment, theology, etc. in our reference section.) We can make good use



of electronic communications to expand the dialogue on biodiversity ethics, posting everything from bite-size factoids to in-depth analyses to tips on how to get involved in a local preservation effort.

- “**Talk radio**” has exploded in recent years. Although many of these shows have a conservative bent, you can use this forum to your advantage to counter stereotypes that the hosts and audience may bring to the discussion. Many public radio stations also host call-in or talk shows and are worth pursuing for coverage of local development issues.

**Community Outreach** (Adapted in part from recommendations in the Ecological Society of America’s Communicating Ecosystem Services Toolkit. For a copy of the toolkit, contact ESA at [www.esa.sdsc.edu/ecoservices](http://www.esa.sdsc.edu/ecoservices) )

Within any community there are people and organizations that care about the community’s future and quality of life. Many of them may never have considered the role that biodiversity plays in shaping these things. Likewise, many communities have local environmental groups, nature centers, lake or park associations, etc., but these groups may not have explored the ethical issues at play in the community or in larger spheres. Given the sensitivity associated with raising ethical and moral questions in public settings, it is important to look for venues where these larger questions may already be part of the dialogue, such as:

- Community planning or “visioning” sessions that examine what we want our community to look like in 20 or 50 years;
- Interfaith groups that take on community problems or specific issues;
- Church study groups that explore a particular issue (such as environmental concerns) through their spiritual study;
- Community service projects or organizations that are designed to improve quality of life, clean-up rivers, protect important habitat, promote public transportation, etc. and,
- Neighborhood associations that are looking at quality of life issues, such as access to green space, community gardens, parks preservation, healthy lawns, etc.

Other opportunities to consider:

- Guest lecture in a college class.
- Look for relevant lecture series and offer to prepare a session or presentation.
- Build partnerships with interested leaders and congregations in the faith community (see the Biodiversity Project’s *Building Partnerships with the Faith Community* for how to make contacts).
- Design a biodiversity service project that helps a local Boy/Girl Scout earn an environment or community service merit badge, or look for relevant projects with other youth organizations or 4-H clubs.
- Make a connection with horticulture and botany clubs, community garden groups, and plant/garden shops. Consider offering presentations, leading discussion groups, or creating exhibits/displays that educate about ways we value biodiversity.
- Connect with educational programs at museums, zoos, aquaria, botanical gardens, and nature and visitor centers.
- Scout the speaking opportunities and promote relevant service projects of chambers of commerce and service clubs.
- Reach out to outdoor recreation groups (fishing clubs, hiking clubs).
- Don’t overlook the obvious—make the connection with local environmental organizations.



## Christians Tackle Climate Change Through International Conference

by Gordon Govier  
*The Capital Times*, Madison, WI  
 July 9, 2002

A political football and a scientific dilemma will become a spiritual challenge at a conference in Oxford, England, this summer.

The Madison-based Au Sable Institute of Environmental Studies is teaming up with the United Kingdom's John Ray Initiative to sponsor an international forum on global climate change. It begins Sunday. The Au Sable Institute was founded by University of Wisconsin-Madison environmental studies professor Calvin DeWitt more than two decades ago, out of his belief in honoring God by honoring what God created.

In Sir John Houghton, chairman of the board of the John Ray Initiative, he has found a partner to help spread the gospel of environmental stewardship.

"We both are evangelical Christians who believe not only that we have to deal with the science of this, but that we also have to deal with the ethical implications for this, and for our work as Christians," says DeWitt.

Houghton is the former head of the United Kingdom's National Meteorology Office. That makes him one of the world's top weathermen. He's also co-chair of England's Scientific Assessment Working Group of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

He and other scientists founded the John Ray Initiative three years ago, invoking the name of the pioneer botanist who first started classifying plants and animals three

centuries ago. "We invited Cal DeWitt to come over and speak to us," he says, recalling the start of their collaboration. "One thing that seemed important to us was the whole idea of climate change, which many of us in the U.K.—but rather few in the U.S.—are very concerned about," Houghton says.

That begat this summer's conference.

Houghton hopes the leading scientists, economists, industrialists, theologians, and ethicists who convene will get the attention of people who have not been taking climate change seriously. "We want to look into ways to help," he says, "and get Christians to become better stewards of the environment and the resources we've been given."

"It's not immediately apparent what we should do" about global warming, says DeWitt. "We have to think through what our responsibilities are during these times. We have to deal with science as well as ethical implications."

**Stories that can be linked to dramatic events, such as natural disasters and catastrophes, may be more likely to appear in the news media.** ↓

The ethical implications that concern DeWitt include the impacts on populations, such as those that would be flooded out by rising ocean levels caused by global warming. Some South Pacific islands could be obliterated, and the Netherlands faces incredible expense to expand the dikes that hold back the ocean.

"This is all God's creation," DeWitt says. "It's richly beautiful. It's highly diverse, with a tremendous fabric of many kinds of living things. And whenever it is through our activities that this world is affected, we have to be concerned about our own behavior."

While the proofs of global warming are not always easy to pin down, DeWitt offers Lake Mendota as strong evidence. One of the most famous and most studied

Stories that can be linked to an upcoming or recent event are more likely to get press coverage. ➡

Note the local angle, which adds relevance and appeal for local readers. ➡



lakes in the world, where limnology actually began, it was recently projected to go a whole winter without freezing over by the year 2050.

But DeWitt says the lake failed to freeze this year, “at least as seen by satellite.” He says one test indicated that only 60 percent of Lake Mendota froze.

That prompts him to observe that “this global warming trend is evident in the freeze and thaw dates for our lakes.”

DeWitt’s convictions are rooted deeply in a lifetime of passion for both scripture and nature. “We must not diminish this great second book which, along with God’s first book—the Bible—are the two major means by which God makes himself known to us,” he says.

To DeWitt, living an environmentally sensitive life is another way of worshipping God. He’s encouraged by the thought that the teachings of the Gospels were not expounded in synagogues or temples, for the most part, but in God’s great cathedral of the outdoors.

“In one sense Jesus almost always taught on field trips, like a biologist or ecologist would act today,” he observes.

DeWitt realizes it will take more than one conference for people to embrace the concept of environmental stewardship. But he believes churches and denominations will inevitably have to address the issue.

“God’s creation is not something we bow down to, but something we are entrusted with,” he says. “The best way we can honor our creator is to honor the works of his hands, including ourselves.”

## Evangelicals not warm to ecology

by *Gordon Govier*

Many American Christians are wary of environmental issues like global warming because they associate environmentalism with New Age religious ideas like earth goddess worship, says recent University of Chicago divinity school graduate David Larson.

Larson did his Ph.D. thesis on the Au Sable Institute.

He remembers well a conversation with his adviser, the distinguished Lutheran theologian Martin Marty, a decade ago.

“I had been raised as an evangelical. And in my entire life I had never heard of a sermon on an environmental theme,” Larson recalls.

“I didn’t know of any organizations that were promoting environmental issues from an evangelical perspective. He didn’t know of any either but he said, ‘why don’t you look and see if you can find something?’”

Soon afterward, Larson stumbled across Au Sable Institute. But the uniqueness of its role was reinforced by other experiences.

“I went to a Christian bookstore at one point in the late ‘90s, when I was doing my research, and I asked if they had any books on the environment. The response of the attendant was, ‘Do you realize you’re in a Christian bookstore?’”

Although he has never met Calvin DeWitt, Larson has high praise for DeWitt’s work through Au Sable Institute.

“They have been instrumental in crafting a theology that is distinctively evangelical, focusing on how Christians can better care for the environment.”

**Conflict: the media will almost invariably look for conflict—a basic device for holding the reader’s interest.**



**The media are likely to look for personal stories that illustrate and humanize the article’s subject. Personal stories help make an article about ideas more concrete, dramatic, and accessible. If you can, gather some personal stories in advance, before talking to the media, and have the people they focus unprepared to speak to reporters.**



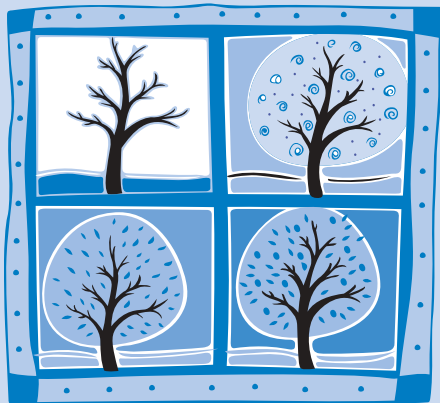
*Reprinted by permission of Gordon Govier.*

# Seize the Days, Weeks, and Months: A calendar of events and opportunities

In addition to community groups, keep in mind that making biodiversity real and localized whenever possible will help people make the connection between biodiversity and their own lives. Some events that may serve as opportunities to celebrate and educate are:

- Riverfront festivals
- Lake festivals
- Flower festivals
- Fruit Festivals
- Bird Counts
- Nature Walks
- Park Clean-ups
- Prairie Burns
- Farmers Markets

Holidays and commemorative days, weeks, or months are good opportunities to write a letter or sponsor a talk. Here's a quick overview of a year's worth of opportunities. Please note that some dates, such as Easter and Passover, change each year.



**January**

- World Reverence for Life Awareness Month
- Wild Bird Feeding Month
- 15th Day of Shvat, Tu B'shvat— Festival of Trees (Jewish)

**January 1-7**

- Celebration of Life Week

**January 1**

- Day of Meditation

**January 1**

- National Environmental Policy Act anniversary

**January 5**

- National Bird Day

**January 6**

- Feast of Epiphany, Epiphany season begins and lasts until Ash Wednesday

**February**

**February 1**

- Imbolc—Celebration to Welcome Spring (Pagan)

**February 2**

- Groundhog Day

**February 2**

- World Wetland Day

**February 3**

- Endangered Species Act anniversary

**March**

- Ethics Awareness Month
- National Agriculture Week
- Ash Wednesday-actual date depends on the date of Easter

**March 21**

- Spring Equinox— Celebration of New Life

**March 21**

- First Day of Spring
- National Agriculture Day

**March 21**

- First Day of Spring
- National Flower Day

**March 22**

- International Day of the Seal

**March 22**

- United Nation's World Day for Water

**April**

- Animal Cruelty Prevention Month
- National Keep America Beautiful Month

- National Lawn and Garden Month

- World Habitat Awareness Month

- National Garden Week

- Grange Week

- Week of Earth Day,

- National Park Week

- Week of Earth Day,

- National Wildlife Week

- Annually one week in April,

- National Week of the Ocean

- Sixth week of the Easter season,

- Soil Stewardship Week

- Last Friday in the month of April

- National Arbor Day

**April 13**

- Silent Spring* publication anniversary

**April 14**

- National Dolphin Day

**April 21**

- John Muir's birthday

**April 22**

- Earth Day

**April 26**

- John James Audubon's birthday

**May**

- Ascension Day,

- 40 days after Easter

- Biodiversity Month

- Clean Air Month

- Flower Month

- First full week in May,

- National Wildflower Week



Second week in May,  
National Historic Preservation  
Week

Second week in May,  
National Week of the Ocean

Third week in May,  
National Bike to Work Week

Seven weeks after Passover ,  
Shavuot or Yom Habikkurim—  
Day of the First Fruits (Jewish)

**May 1**

May Day—Celebration of Flowers

**May 1**

Plant a Flower Day

**May 1**

Save the Rhino Day

**Second Saturday in May**

Migratory Bird Day

**May 22**

United Nation's International Day  
for Biological Diversity

**May 23**

World Turtle Day

**May 28**

Whale Day

**June**

National Rivers Month

National Fishing Week,

First week in June

National Garden Week,

First Sunday in June

United Nation's Environmental  
Sabbath/Earth Rest Summer

**June 1**

National Trails Day

**June 5**

United Nation's World Environment  
Day

**June 8**

World Oceans Day

**June 20**

National Bald Eagle Day

**June 21**

Summer Solstice—Celebration of  
Growth

**June 21**

Midsummer's Night

**July**

National Parks and Recreation  
Month

**August**

**August 1**

Lammas—Celebration of First  
Harvest (Pagan)

**September**

National Organic Harvest Month

Third full week in September,

National Farm Animals

Awareness Week

**September 19-23**

Constitution Week

**First Saturday after Labor Day**

Federal Lands Clean Up Day

**September 12**

National Wildlife Ecology Day

**September 16**

United Nation's International Day

for Preservation of Ozone Layer

**September 17**

Citizenship Day

**Third Saturday in September**

International Coastal Clean-Up Day

**September 21**

Fall Equinox—Celebration of Harvest

**September 28**

National Public Lands Day

**Fourth Saturday in September**

National Hunting and Fishing Day

**October**

Week of the third Sunday in October,

National Forest Products Week

Third week in October,

National Wolf Awareness Week

**October 21-29**

World Rainforest Week

**First Monday in October**

United Nation's World Habitat Day

**October 2**

World Farm Animals Day  
(also birthday of Mahatma Gandhi)

**October 4**

Feast of St. Francis—Blessing of the  
Animals (Christian)

**October 16**

United Nation's World Food Day

**October 18**

Water Pollution Control Act/Clean  
Water Act anniversary

**October 21**

Marine Mammal Protection Act  
anniversary

**October 31**

Samhain—Celebration of Death and  
Ancestors (Pagan)

**November**

Week ending with Thanksgiving,

National Farm-City Week

**November 1**

Day of the Dead

**November 2**

World Ecology Day

**November 13**

World Kindness Day

**November 15**

America Recycles Day

**Fourth Thursday in November,**

Thanksgiving (U.S.)

**November 19**

National Community Education Day

**December**

End of November  
through December 25,  
Advent (Christian)

**December 3**

World Conservation Day

**December 17**

Clean Air Act anniversary

**December 21**

Winter Solstice

—Celebration of Rest and Renewal

**December 21**

World Peace Day

**December 25**

Christmas (Christian)

**December 31**

World Peace Meditation

## ETHICS IN THE MEDIA

*Editor's Note: Here's how Massachusetts' Executive Office of Environmental Affairs capitalized on Biodiversity Month to draw attention to biodiversity protection on Cape Cod.*

## Nature Needs Saving on South Shore

by Bob Durand  
*The Patriot Ledger*, Quincy, MA  
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If you're heading down Route 3 toward the Cape, the signs of development are unmistakable. But what you might miss, if you are in a hurry, is the enormous variety of plant and animal life that inhabits what ecologists call the Southern New England Coastal Plains and Hills.

Although nearly half built out, the region is home to a surprising number of uncommon species and distinct natural communities. Black-crowned night herons nest out on the Harbor Islands, and the rare Blanding's turtle may be discovered in local bogs and wetlands.

May is national Biodiversity Month. This is the season to take stock in ourselves and the infinitely complex set of relationships that ensure our place on the planet. It is a time to recognize our reliance on this web of life. One of the greatest students of the natural world, Dr. Edward O. Wilson, calls that web "biodiversity." To draw on inspiration from Dr. Wilson's new book, "The Future of Life," the urgent quest to save Earth's flora and fauna, ourselves included, starts with ethics.

Here on the South Shore, the diversity of life is under constant assault. As the human footprint bears down on thousands of other living things with whom we share the

region's ecosystems, we forfeit a circle of open space six miles in diameter—and a little bit of our future—every year. But that needn't be so.

In the past year, the commonwealth has taken strides to protect the state's rich biological heritage. The Executive Office of Environmental Affairs dedicated more than \$50 million to open-space acquisition, and last summer met the goal of conserving more than 100,000 additional acres—three years ahead of schedule.

On the South Shore, the Neponset River Watershed Association has been managing Walpole's Willett Pond and its surroundings since acquiring this wetland not long ago.

NepRWA also advocated for the Metropolitan District Commission's purchase of the former Canton airport site, which, after remediation, will become another valuable addition to our precious open space. And the MDC itself is protecting nearly 5,000 acres in this most urban of watersheds, 816 of that in the past decade. Statewide, acting Gov. Jane Swift filed a comprehensive, \$750 million environmental bond bill—the largest ever—that is now working its way through the Legislature. If enacted, the bond bill will help to ensure that these programs continue well into the future.

But we cannot move forward without a keen sense that preservation of habitat—and the commonwealth's more than 15,000 visible species—is the right thing to do. Without instilling a lasting environmental ethic in people, all the conservation programs in the world won't be enough to ensure that future generations will be able to enjoy nature's bounty.

Investment in our environment - and in the understanding that the wealth of life matters - is grounded in Biodiversity Days, a four-day festival of exploration and inquiry for all of the people of Massachusetts. This year's celebration is set for May 31-June 3, and nearly every city and town will participate. Most will offer programs in schools and field nature

walks for both the curious among us and the dedicated expert.

In Quincy, for example, the Neponset River Watershed Association is partnering with the city's park department and the Environmental Treasurers of Quincy to organize a field trip on June 2 called "Life in the Salt Marsh." In Canton, Carl Lavin, a local naturalist and head of the Canton River Watershed Watchdogs, will lead a walk through open lands recently purchased by the town, accompanied by Canton High School's award-winning team of Problem Solvers. And in Milton, high school science teacher Barbara Plonski is planning walks on May 31 involving students in her biology class and local elementary schools. NepRWA also is working with the Blue Hills Observatory on a presentation the same day, "Measuring Biodiversity and the Weather." Still more events are planned.

This brings us to one of the great features of Biodiversity Days. You can decide what type of adventure you're up for, enter your requirements onto the web (see [www.state.ma.us/envir/biodiversity.htm](http://www.state.ma.us/envir/biodiversity.htm)), and then generate a list of activities that suit your interests in your own community.

Biodiversity Days 2002 promises to be the largest event of its type ever held. Last year's celebration drew more than 30,000 participants. This year, we're expecting twice that many.

But our goal is not just numbers. It is a new environmental ethic. Species and ecosystems can't advocate for themselves. Biodiversity is protected only to the extent we want it to be. The state's biodiversity initiative is a critical step in preserving our natural systems for future generations. Without a broad constituency, we face the risk that this objective will be ignored until it's too late.

That's where the South Shore comes into the picture. And so do the citizens of Quincy and surrounding communities. Now is the time to explore the wonders of the natural world that we're all a part of. On Biodiversity Days, I hope you'll step outside and come take a walk with all of us.

*Reprinted by permission of the Patriot Ledger. Bob Durand is the Secretary of the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs.*



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