

WILD, WILD LIFE

If one lesbian can change the world, then a couple of lesbians can save it. The recently engaged Analisa Gunnell and Elle McKay both work at Ecotrust, a conservation organization working to strengthen communities and the environment from Alaska to California.

Gunnell is the chief cartographer and geographic information system analyst at Ecotrust. Having fallen in love with the trees and ecosystems of Portland forests, she moved here 15 years ago for its "hippie holy grail environmentalist and anti-war leftist politics." As a development coordinator, McKay uses her experience at Lewis & Clark Law School's Pacific Environmental Advocacy Center to assist Ecotrust leaders in grant research.

Both women were attracted to the work of Ecotrust's Salmon Nation because of its tenets of economy, ecology and equity. Salmon Nation refers to the community of tribes, fishermen, farmers, ranchers, loggers and urban dwellers working together to improve their neighborhoods and watersheds whose geographic boundaries include anywhere Pacific salmon have ever run.

"Historically salmon were not only important to other wildlife but also to native communities," says Gunnell. "They're a symbol of the environmental and social wealth in this region."

Gunnell and McKay are not your traditional environmentalists, often depicted as extremists who think the natural world should be left untouched.

"We're saying obviously we're part of the natural world and there are ways to interact with it that are not degrading where we can economically prosper as well," Gunnell says.

McKay adds, "You can declare yourself a Salmon Nation citizen to say, 'Hey, I live here and I'm a part of this and I'm a conscious citizen that lives in a beautiful place that's rich on a variety of levels that needs to be valued.'"

For this couple, caring for the earth and being queer are not mutually exclusive traits. "I grew up sensitive to the harms that exist to the environment, people and animals," says McKay. "I feel they're all interconnected because they're all being oppressed. Being part of the solution makes me a happier person and helps me sleep at night."

Gunnell says she believes people have an obligation to themselves and others to treat the earth with respect. "I feel that there will be a time for equality and acceptance when people will look back and say, 'Wow, we changed our Constitution because we were full of fear and hate.' We will think back and not believe we dumped waste in a river we drink from."

Though McKay says everyone should be concerned about the environment because everyone is affected, she believes the sexual minorities community is much more familiar with being disempowered and should more readily identify when other entities face degradation, such as wildlife or the air we breathe and food we eat. "For me, the environmental movement and queer rights



Analisa Gunnell (left), Elle McKay and their dog, Kaia, flank one of Ecotrust's informative maps.

movement are so much about changing people's attitudes and our own perspectives," she says.

She and Gunnell say you don't have to work for an environmental agency to make a difference. They suggest people read *The Ecology of Commerce*, *Natural Capitalism* and *From Cradle to Grave* and really think about how we make things. Locally, the couple refer to the Redirect Guide, Portland green maps, Free Geek, the Rebuilding Center and Ecotrust's calendar of green events (www.ecotrust.org) as good sources for compassionate queers.

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