

City Commissioner Sam Adams digs Portland but loathes invasive species.

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COOL WATER

Sam Adams is Portland's only out gay city commissioner, and he's a self-identified environmentalist. He says that he grew up without a lot of money and that his mother was frugal. "She was the only person I knew in Newport taking tops and bottoms off cans and flattening them and driving 12 miles to recycle them," he says. "She was into organics long before health food supermarkets were ever envisioned."

Adams says he spent much of his youth outdoors and enjoying nature. "I lived on the edge of a forest, so I was out in the forest all the time as a kid." He says that much of his environmental pathos comes from growing up in a small town where the distinction between the town and the natural environment was a blurred line.

Adams also credits much of his environmental concern with his work experience as a staffer for U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Ore., after which he served as chief of staff to Portland Mayor Vera Katz, who served as a mentor "in terms of my environmental policy and how to make progress," he says.

"Portland is ahead of the curve in addressing environmental issues," he says, "but we have a long way to go to reach our potential and full responsibility to the environment." Adams believes most Portlanders don't realize the extent to which we have been part of the problem in terms of degradation of the Willamette River. "Portland shares in the worldwide problem of global warming, and we need to continue to reduce our emissions. At the same time we have some problems that are unique to the Northwest that include issues around stormwater and our polluted rivers and five watersheds, which all flow to the river."

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DRIVE A FUEL-EFFICIENT CAR.
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MORE THAN 10 SECONDS.


With many people in the queer movement in Oregon spending much of their activist time securing basic rights, Adams hopes to see changes in the Legislature that will allow more free time to work on other social change issues. "Members of the queer community are natural leaders of the environmental movement because we've had to change people's minds and outlook and behavior, though on a very different topic. We've been on the receiving end of ignorance and denial. We know if there's human thought pollution we've had to overcome it, and those skills have been honed. That success can lend itself to further success in the environmental movement."

Adams also points out that the struggles are similarly furthered by humanizing the issues. "As many people are coming out as they can, breaking down facts about harmful actions. The environment is humanized by showing that impacts don't just happen in Antarctica but in folks' back yards," he says.

As the city commissioner who oversees the Bureau of Environmental Services, Adams has good advice for queers who want to do their part. If you are a homeowner, disconnect your downspouts to redirect stormwater into the water table instead of the sewer system, which overflows into the Willamette River. Even if you don't cut back on consumption, recycle or reuse everything you can. Take advantage of our great transit system—and if you can't do so for every trip, set a goal for some of your travels.

On Earth Day, as he does most Earth Days, Adams plans to pull out invasive species in the many natural areas of the city. "Ivy is my pet peeve," he says.

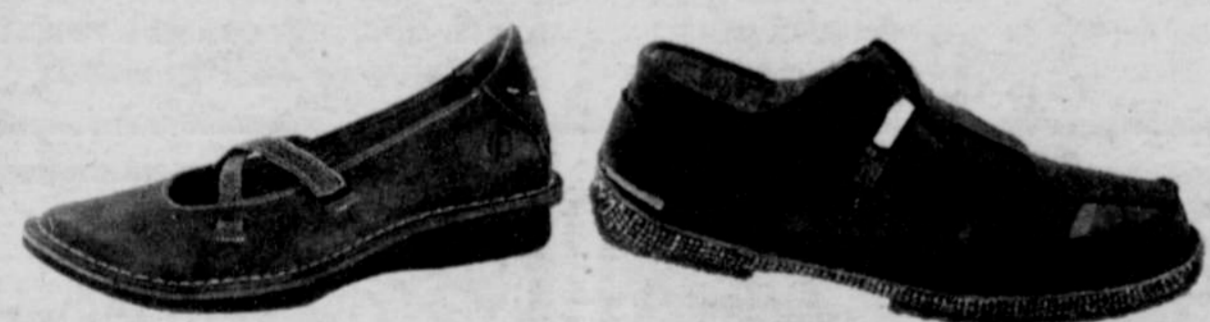
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